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CHIMENTE, ANTHONY,MICHAEL

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# **From Republics of Armies to Kata'ibs of Militia, Sheikhs, and Warlords: Civil-Military Relations in Iraq and Yemen**

## **Abstract**

This thesis examines civil-military relations in two fragmented states of the Middle East, Iraq and Yemen. In the study of civil-military relations, scholars have historically viewed the 'state' as a given referent object of analysis when examining militaries in the region, the legacy of a predominantly Western-centric approach to understanding and explaining the centrality of the military to state identity. Yet, the Arab Spring witnessed the emergence of powerful non-state actors and the decline of the ideal Weberian state in favour of communalised military power along sectarian, tribal and ethnic lines. Strong national armies have been replaced by communally driven actors competing for power and influence.

Post-Arab Spring models of civil-military relations have failed to address the relationship between weak, often-fragmented states and the impact of politically aligned-militia and sub-state coercive forces who can both complement but also challenge the central authority of the state. By using three frames to explain the communalisation of violence - tribalism and sectarianism, patrimonial economy, and the role of external actors – this thesis develops a new model of civil-military relations that has come to shape the nexus between the state and various armed groups. This moves our understanding of civil-military relations and its core construct beyond normative Western-centric frameworks advanced by Huntington and Janowitz, and further developed by other scholars.

By using these three frames, this thesis argues that civil-military relations in fragmented states has become communalised, along ethnic, tribal and sectarian lines. This has in turn led many Arab states to face a crisis of legitimacy that stems from the inability of weak central authorities to fully control the monopoly of violence. Therefore, the state can no longer be considered the sole referent point in the study of civil-military relations as it applies to much of the contemporary Middle East.

**From Republics of Armies to Kata'ibs of Militia, Sheikhs, and Warlords:  
Civil-Military Relations in Iraq and Yemen.**

**By**

**Anthony Chimento**

**Ustinov College**

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of  
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**School of Government and International Affairs**

**Durham University**

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## List of Abbreviations

1AD	1 <sup>st</sup> Armoured Division
AQAP	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
AQI	Al-Qaeda in Iraq
Brig. General	Brigadier General
CPT.	Captain
CENTCOM	United States Central Command
CERP	Commander's Emergency Relief Program
CMATT	Coalition Military Assistance Training Team
CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority
CT	Counter-Terrorism
DCM	Deputy Chief of Mission
DDR	Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration
Gen.	General
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GPC	General People's Congress
GRU	The Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces
GWOT	Global War on Terror
IA	Iraqi Army
IRCG-QF	Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corp-Quds Force
IRGC	Iranian Revolutionary Guards
IRI	Islamic Republic of Iran
ISCI	Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
ISI	Islamic State in Iraq
JIC	Joint Intelligence Community (UK)
KDP	Kurdish Democratic Party
KRG	Kurdish Regional Government
KGB	Committee for State Security
Lt. Col.	Lieutenant Colonel

Lt. Gen.	Lieutenant General
Maj.	Major
Maj. General	Major General
MECO	Military Economical Corporation
MNF-I	Multi-National Forces-Iraq
MNSTC-I	Multi-National Security Transition Command – Iraq
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
OCINC	Office of the Commander in Chief
Peshmerga	Military of Iraqi Kurdistan
PC's	Popular Committees
PDF	People's Defence Forces
PDRY	People's Democratic Republic of Yemen
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
RCC	Revolutionary Command Council (Iraq)
RG	Republican Guard
SCIRI	Supreme Council for the Islamic Republic of Iran
SOI	Sons of Iraq
SRG	Special Republican Guard
TSC	Tribal Support Councils
YA	Yemeni Army
YECO	Yemen Economical Corporation
YSP	Yemeni Socialist Party

## Statement of Copyright

*“The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.”*

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## Introduction and Methodology

### Research Background

Studies of civil-military relations are empirically and theoretically informed through both an understanding of the 'Weberian' state construct, and the idealised civil-military relationship first developed by Samuel Huntington and further advanced by Western scholars. Importantly, the 'civil' component in the relationship presupposes a coherent central authority, with a legitimate monopoly of violence over the coercive institutions of the state. The thesis understands the Weberian state as one to be "a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory" (Weber 1919, 4). Both the literature review and conceptual model within Chapter 1 will explain in more detail what is meant by the collapse of the Weberian state.

Historically, the military has played a fundamental role in the development and trajectory of the modern Arab state and occupied a unique relationship with civilian leadership and society (Sassoon 2015, 73). As the nascent state system struggled to mature, iron-willed members of the officer class grasped the political rudder and steered the stagnant development of their respective communities towards what they regarded as modernization and social progression. During the 1970s, these 'officers-turned-politicians' bulwarked the machinery of the state using the to establish a degree of stability and strong institutions for over a quarter of a century, until the uprisings of the Arab Spring. Indeed, the tumultuous events have called into question the fundamental notions of state coherency in the region and has led to the collapse of the central authority and military fragmentation in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya. This in turn precipitated the sub-communalisation of violence. To be sure, four military-dominated regimes no longer uphold a monopoly over the legitimate use of violence within their given territories, an integral aspect of statehood.

Accordingly, the Arab Spring ruptured long standing norms of civil-military relations; armies fragmented, and state cohesion suffered immeasurably, unfolding the dispensation of power into a political field uncharacteristic of the Weberian state construct, conventionally understood as the 'civil' component in the military nexus. In this regard, Arab militaries are increasingly fragmented, and power notionally set within the Weberian state is dissipating around sub-state actors. Indeed, the current nature of warfare reflects this change as well and is ultimately referred to as 'war amongst the peoples' (Smith 2000, 3).

Thus, warfare has come to be seen as conflict waged amongst the civilian polity for political control, as opposed to conventional warfare between the armed forces of two states. Within the confines of nascent warfare, identity-driven communal (tribal, religious or ethnic) considerations are the motivation for actors vying to capture components and resources conventionally under the domain of the state. The 'state', as with 'new' warfare, is characterised by the devolution of state capabilities and institutional strength.

This nascent environment centralises the prominence of sub-state actors, thereby calling into question the primacy of the state as a referent object of analysis. While this notion of 'war amongst the people' predated the work of Rupert Smith, it is important to note that this interpretation of warfare has become more pronounced in cases within the Middle East, where the power of the central authority is fragmenting. This development is particularly evident in fragmented states where the central authority has dissipated and the dispensation of power centring around sub-state solidarities and non-state actors. Indeed, a fragmented state is characterised by the lack of cohesion and the dissipation of political and military power away from the central authority into the periphery. Similarly, a fragmented society is demonstrated by the absence of unifying influences and ideologies able to surpass and supplant primordial loyalties and sub-state solidarities. Thus, a fragmented society is not a nationally consolidated entity. To be sure, the lack of societal cohesion diminishes state power and longevity. As Joseph Kostiner

argues “solidarity is one of the primary characteristics of statehood” and indeed “a basic necessity for the long-term viability of the state” (Susser 2008, 21).

Equally, state legitimacy is another important concept to define, and the research will incorporate Arthur Stinchcombe’s understanding of legitimacy as advanced by Charles Tilly. For both scholars the use of force and monopolies of violence are inextricably linked to the notion of legitimacy and the process of state formation. Concerning legitimacy, Stinchcombe argues the: “person over whom power is exercised is not usually as important as other power-holders” (Stinchcombe 1968, 150). Stinchcombe acknowledges the centrality of force in establishing legitimacy over other power-holders. In turn, Tilly interprets legitimacy as “the probability that other authorities will act to confirm the decisions of a given authority” (Tilly 1985, 171). Thus, the preservation of force and the consistent monopoly of violence establish and prolong legitimacy. This understanding will allow the research to demonstrate the inherent connection between state legitimacy and the monopolies of violence.

In fragmented states, the sub-communalisation of violence has resulted in sectarian, tribal, and communally motivated non-state actors vying to gain dominance over the political landscape. In other words, the ‘state’ and fragmented societies in the Middle East no longer enjoy a coherent central authority following the Arab-Spring, which in turn negates the applicability of Western notions of civil-military relations and state-centric analyses. Therefore, the Arab Spring necessitated the requirement to re-conceptualise the nature of this civil-military relationship currently observed in fragmented states across the Middle East.

The prime aim of this research is to examine the dynamics informing the nature of military and state cohesion, the dispensation of power within fragmented states, and the civil-military relationships in the post-Arab Spring order. Specifically, this thesis aims to answer the question concerning how the ‘state’ component in the military nexus can be conceptualised, given the

commensurate fragmentation of a cohesive state power and military institutions triggering the sub-communalisation of violence and solidarities. By engaging with this line of research, the thesis aims to provide a deeper understanding of the following points in the context of civil-military relations within fragmented states:

- The Collapse of the Weberian notion of the state as it relates to civil-military relations.
- How military loyalty is understood in fragmented states
- The role of the military with regards to notions of state power and cohesion.

To answer this question and provide an understanding of civil-military relations in fragmented states, the model of the tribal-sectarian nexus (as a hypothesis) is developed in chapter 2, and assisted by the three frames:

1. Sub-state solidarities (Sectarianism, Communalism, and Tribalism)
2. Patrimonial Economy
3. External actors

Through the model of the tribal-sectarian nexus, a more holistic understanding of military fragmentation and the dispensation power will be developed, motivated by an examination surrounding the collapse of the Weberian state into the tribal-sectarian nexus. This phenomenon directly challenged the core assumptions of the state, regarding cohesion, power, and legitimacy in conjunction with parallel systems of governance and loyalty. Furthermore, chapter 1 will outline how the model of the tribal-sectarian nexus can elucidate the state degradation and formation in accordance with Charles Tilly's model of state formation in his 1985 work, *War Making and State Making as Organized Crime*.

### Methodology

To further interrogate the research question and gain a deeper understanding of civil-military relations in fragmented states, this study will examine civil-military relations in the Republic of Iraq from 2003 and the onset of Operation Iraqi Freedom to 2014, while civil-military



relations in the Republic of Yemen will be examined from around 2009 up until the Houthi takeover and seizure of the government in 2015.

Louis Murray and Brenda Lawrence note a research methodology “to be inclusive of research design, theoretical frameworks, the selection and analysis of literature relevant to the nominated topic, and justified preferences for particular types of data gathering activities” (Murray and Lawrence 2000, 218). In other words, the methodology is the battle plan: it provides the parameters of how information will be collected, and thereafter analysed. It therefore requires a suitable approach to solve the problem and answer the questions postulated by the researcher. Qualitative and quantitative approaches are two options to consider when designing and engaging with a research project. A quantitative approach was ruled out for this study because the research is interested in civil-military relations and features an analysis of data obtained from interviews and documentation. Moreover, the framework is designed to assess qualitative as opposed to quantitative data, and a qualitative approach was therefore likely to yield a far more robust and conceptually rigorous understanding of the research questions as opposed to statistics or quantifiable variables.

Therefore, the research is qualitative in nature, and the methodology a comparative one with regards to a structured comparative case study and in terms of the themes that are consistent across the case studies at the same time. A case study in this instance is beneficial because according to R.K. Yin, ‘why’, and pertinent to this study, ‘how’ questions are best explored through case studies as such questions “deal with operational links needing to be traced over time, rather than mere frequencies or incidence” (Yin 2009, 9). The cases are determined based on the relevance to data collection and the research objectives. The study of the cases and nature of civil-military relations in Iraq and Yemen offers an excellent opportunity to further interrogate and test the constructs within the hypothesis of the tribal-sectarian nexus and arrive at a deeper understanding of civil-military relations in fragmented states. It will also be a chance to frame an

understanding of the 'state' component of the relationship and applicability of the tribal-sectarian nexus\_ in understanding civil-military relations in fragmented states.

### Justification

The Republics of Iraq and Yemen present a unique opportunity to test the validity of the tribal-sectarian nexus , based on the cases conformity with the researchers understanding of fragmented states. Both states lack a cohesive central authority and have thus come to be characterised by the pronounced role and influence of sub-state solidarities. Moreover, the sub-communalisation of violence in both cases results in either state upholding a legitimate monopoly of violence, which has now coalesced around armed, non-state actors.

Furthermore, a systematic examination of civil-military relations comparing the cases under consideration has yet to be conducted; nor have the three frames been independently applied and analysed within the cases of Iraq and Yemen, according to a review of the literature. Importantly, two other notable instances of fragmented states worth mentioning are those of Syria and Libya, which experienced the Arab Spring, as well as the sub-communalisation of violence or dissolution of state and military capabilities to varying degrees. In Syria, however, the decentralization of state and military structures into the tribal field remains at the time of this research, relatively insignificant in comparison to the case studies under consideration.

While the Syrian Arab Army experienced initial defections from the officer class and the non-commissioned officer corps, the actual fragmentation and collapse of the armed forces has yet to manifest in a manner analogous to the cases of Iraq and Yemen. In Syria, the fragmentation of the army, revolved around defections of lower rank officers and more prominent among non-commissioned officers, as opposed to wholesale collapse or defections of military formations. This stands in contrast to the cases of Yemen and Iraq, where entire divisions and high-ranking officers defected.

In a report for the Carnegie Middle East Centre project on Civil-Military Relations in the Arab States, Khaddour (2016, npn) argues that paradoxically, entrenched patrimonialism and, therefore, corruption, resulted in the resilient nature of the Syrian Army, somewhat surprising considering the protracted conflict against both a rebellion and terrorist front. The longstanding predominance of an Alawite officer corps has remained unchanged since the Arab Spring took hold in Syria, and in fact, the officer corps is increasingly Alawite in nature. Since the onset of conflict in 2011, all twelve of the Syrian Arab Army's divisions remain operational and have yet to fragment or collapse. Even so, despite its relative cohesiveness, the Syrian Army is increasingly reliant on non-state actors to augment infantry units, yet the coordination and subordination of the militia are significant. In this regard, militia can complement state sanctioned institutions of violence. For example, the largest contingent, the National Defence Force, is under the command of an Alawite, Saqir Rustum. Further, all militia are either linked to the Syrian security establishment or the Republican Guard. Furthermore, the Iraqi Popular Mobilisation Forces proved instrumental in protecting Baghdad from Daesh and ultimately assisted the Iraqi Security Forces in dislodging the terrorist organisation from Iraqi land.

While the case of Syria is less conducive with the research parameters of this study, the uprisings in Libya and resultant nature of civil-military relations could potentially constitute a case study in line with this research's objective. To be sure, Libya has witnessed the decentralization of the state and fragmentation of the military into tribes and militia. In testimony presented to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Libya subject matter expert Frederic Wehrey stated "[w]hat struck me most is that [of] Libya's fragmentation and the devolution of power...to armed militias, tribes, and towns", further adding that the Libyan National Army under the command of General Khalifa Haftar in Benghazi "are not uniformed army troops but irregular neighbourhood and tribal militias" (Wehrey 2016, 1). The case of Libya clearly illustrates an example of the collapse

of the 'Weberian' state construct, fragmentation of the military, and sub-communalisation of violence. Based on this understanding, Libya represents a potential case study.

However, time constraints as well as issues related to access meant that the project could not reasonably encompass more than two case studies. Notwithstanding, there exists the possibility that future research would allow for a wider analysis by examining other prominent fragmented states, including Libya, and Syria and even Afghanistan or Somalia. Moreover, a holistic approach to patterns of fragmentation of militaries during the Arab Spring and nature of the 'state' in the tribal-sectarian nexus remains under explored across academic community, and the case studies of Iraq and Yemen at least allow for the formation a typology of civil-military relations in fragmented states.

As qualitative methods inform the parameters of the research, primary data will be collected from semi-structured interviews with pertinent personalities and subject matter experts with an understanding of the nuances within the cases. Semi-structured interviews are more flexible in contrast to structured interviews, allowing for more flexibility and understanding of the interviewee's perspective on the matter (Daymon & Holloway 2002, 167). Importantly, semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to refocus or define the questions as well as prompt for more information. This is particularly important if informative information emerges during an interview. Unstructured interviews, on the other hand, do not impose any predefined answer categories (Fontana & Frey 1994, 366). Additionally, the interview questions will be developed from the conceptual framework to answer the research question and thereby test the validity of the tribal-sectarian nexus as a hypothesis. The research will also rely on the sampling strategy of snowballing to provide the researcher with additional respondents from interviewees.

Respondents in the research will encompass a broad array of individuals who possess collective knowledge and subject expertise regarding the inner-workings of the militaries in Iraq

and Yemen. The respondents are drawn from a broad knowledge base that includes Iraqi and Yemeni nationals, diplomats, analysts and military officers. The questions posed will be developed around the three frames comprising the conceptual approach as to prompt a more granular understanding of civil-military relations in the ‘tribal-sectarian’ field.

Furthermore, the research will exploit the rich data and unique insight afforded from the cache of US State Department Diplomatic Cables available from Wikileaks. Despite the ethical implications of merging ‘stolen’ or ‘classified’ government information in the research, the fact of the matter is that the cables are open source, and the research would be remiss to brush aside a cache of invaluable documentation.

Lastly, the research will be underpinned by reference to an array of secondary literature comprised of academic books, peer-reviewed journals, and policy papers published and authored by leading academics as well as policy analysts. The Harvard Referencing system was used for in-text citation and the bibliography for all sources of information, aside from the US Diplomatic Cables obtained from Wikileaks and data derived from the researcher’s interviews, which were acknowledged in-text using footnotes and referenced in the bibliography using the Harvard referencing guidelines.

### Limitations

This thesis acknowledges its limitations. Aside from the cache of Wikileaks cables, the research design has relied much on interviews with Western officials who possess an intimate knowledge of the militaries under consideration. Information derived from both sources can be bias and inherently subjective in nature, particularly given that State Department Cables are crafted with an intended audience in mind. However, the use triangulation satisfied this conundrum because it is a “method of cross-checking data from multiple sources to search for regularities in the research data” (O’Donoghue & Punch 2003, 78). By employing triangulation, the research merged multiple sources of secondary research with interview notes and WikiLeaks

Cable's to establish the validity of the primary data collected. In this process, obvious bias generated from elite interviews or information from Wikileaks Cables can be disregarded to control the verisimilitude of the data collected.

Furthermore, the individuals interviewed encompass diplomats, military attachés, government officials, military officers, and analysts. Based on their positions and exposure, these individuals have an intimate knowledge of the militaries themselves and the nature of civil-military relations taking place in Iraq and Yemen. For practical reasons and issues of access, conducting field work in both Iraq and Yemen proved extremely difficult based on the ongoing nature of the conflict within both and the sensitivity of the security issues under discussion. It is a very difficult subject to collect primary data on, given the degree of violence and instability taking hold of the cases under consideration. Furthermore, the very nature of security sector reform in the Arab World is a rather sensitive issue and therefore speaking with active duty military personnel would have proven difficult. Furthermore, junior officers would not have had the granular knowledge of civil-military relations and security sector governance given their ranks.

Additionally, despite the shortcomings regarding the collection of data, the respondents represented an immense knowledge base and possessed a robust understanding of civil-military relations and security sector reform in Iraq and Yemen. While not local nationals, the interviewees were better placed to evaluate the merits of security sector governance and reform based upon their role of implementing it within both cases and based upon their all-encompassing view of the process. The respondents understood the nature of civil-military relations more broadly and the practical difficulties of engaging with security sector reform in both Iraq and Yemen more narrowly. Given their interface with both decision makers and active duty soldiers, the respondents were best situated to judge the merits of reform and therefore are appropriate choices for the assessment of the nature of civil-military relations and state-society relations within the cases.

The framework itself mitigated certain concerns of orientalism because the conceptual approach of the tribal-sectarian nexus explicitly challenged the fundamental notions of Western literature on civil-military relations and the ideal type as posited by Huntington. Mainly, the research design moved away from the long-standing notion of the primacy of the state and placed greater emphasis on the role and impact of sub-state actors. Therefore, the conceptual approach constituted the first model to assert that the state is not fundamental. It examines the notions of state fragmentation alongside tribalism and sectarianism and is thus an attempt to develop a prism in which to understand the relationship between armed actors and a fragmented central authority, often based upon tribal and sectarian affiliations which is not covered in the broader literature.

#### Structure of the Thesis

The research is divided into 11 chapters, and the three frames will be applied to the cases of Iraq and Yemen in six separate chapters to evaluate the hypothesis of the tribal-sectarian nexus. Chapter one consists of the introduction, which provides an overview of the research and outlines the issues under consideration to include the research question, objectives and structure of the research. Chapter two provides a review of the relevant literature from previous studies relating to the notions of civil-military relations. This chapter is broken down into three segments: The emergence of Western understandings of civil-military relations, the dissimilar nature of civil-military relations in the Arab World, and the changing nature of the nexus amid the Arab Spring. The chapter will highlight the 'gap' in the literature, primarily the application of the state as a given referent object of analysis in the study of civil-military relations, and the dearth of literature regarding the role of militia and sub-state actors in the civil-military relationship. In turn, the notion of the 'tribal-sectarian' field as a conceptual approach will be introduced, alongside the three frames underpinning the framework.

Chapter three undertakes a historical assessment surrounding the conventional understanding of civil-military relations within Iraq (1921-2003), which will examine the trajectory of the Iraqi Army from the Mandate era up until the eve of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The subsections will discuss the politicization of the officer class, subordination under Baathist rule, the Army in combat, and lastly, the impact of economic sanctions on the cohesion of the state and military, and the initial emergence of sub-state solidarities. Ultimately, the chapter will highlight that while tribal and sectarian affiliations remained dormant under the edifice of Baathism, the severity of economic sanctions reinvigorated sub-communal identities, and thereby the contours, of the officer corps.

Similarly, chapter four explores the historical development of civil-military relations in the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) and the Old People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), through the War of Unification in 1994 and the consolidation of power under President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Attention will be paid to the emergence of tribal-military relations, noting the elongation of the relationship into the tribal-military-commercial during the 1980s. While the tribal periphery of the YAR wielded considerable power in relation to the central authority and symbolised the edifice of the officer corps, the military of the old South exhibited a measurable degree of politicization under the Marxist Yemeni Socialist Party and Soviet involvement in determining the structures of the military. Despite the perverseness of a socialist disposition within the state and the military, tribal solidarities persisted, albeit more in terms of force, numerical composition as opposed to exerting influence and transmuting the institution into a 'tribal army'. In this regard, the ideological fervour of socialism succeeded in displacing tribal preferences. The impact of the Houthi Rebellion, the emergence of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and a durable secessionist movement will be considered in relationship to the military and the institution's relationship within the state and society.



Chapter five is the first empirical chapter and examines the role and impact of religious sectarianism, along with tribal solidarity on military cohesion and the dispensation of power in Iraq. The role of the Sunni tribes will be examined, in relation to the central authority in Baghdad, the American military forces and the Sunni insurgency. Importantly, the sectarianization of the Iraqi political landscape will be illustrated, alongside the rise of communal militia and sectarianization of the officer class under the rule of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. Notably, the chapter will explore how, during the period under consideration, coercive capabilities devolved around tribal, sectarian and ethnic lines. For example, the Kurdish polity remained wedded with the Peshmerga, the tribal forces and insurgencies coalesced denoted the Sunni militant element, while the Shia aimed and captured the 'state', alongside the 'army'.

Ultimately, communalism- driven by ethnic and sectarian considerations -as opposed to tribal considerations, proved integral in undermining the cohesion of the military and defined the nature of those individuals who came to dominate the officer corps. Sub-state solidarities also informed the loyalties of those personalities who emerged as key commanders over the militia. The Iraqi military was heavily influenced by non-state solidarities and the sub-communalisation of violence. In this regard, the state collapsed along ethno-sectarian lines in the wake of the ISI advance during the summer of 2014. The Peshmerga remained beholden to the Kurdish community, while the Shia polity dominated not only the officer class, but additionally comprised the bulk of the non-state actors gaining influence in the aftermath of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Lastly, the Iraqi Sunni-Arab landscape remained beholden to armed tribal groupings and the manpower fuelling the insurgency. In the end, as the Islamic State challenged the territorial integrity of Iraq, military formations fragmented as the sub-communalisation of violence plagued society.

Chapter six provides a similar assessment regarding the role and impact of the tribes and religious sectarianism to the case of Yemen. It will be shown that Yemen differs from Iraq, in that

the dispensation of power ultimately resides with the tribes and elite-military relations. While the Houthi Rebellion was construed as being motivated by religious considerations, regional actors aided in the assessment of the Houthi Rebellion as a sectarian movement. Suffice to say, the tribal groupings remained at the centre of power in the 'tribal-republic'. The section will additionally initiate the process of deconstructing the notion that an 'Army' existed in Yemen, when in fact tribal battalions with multifaceted loyalties underpinned the backbone of what the central authority (and innumerable Western observer's) held to be a military institution. Ultimately, loyalty to the regime rested on a mix of tribal solidarities and the nature of patron-client relations, which are an integral aspect of a tribal society.

Chapter seven will examine the role and impact of patrimonial economy, with a focus on endemic corruption and criminality on the Iraqi military. While certain militaries in the region have engaged in economic enterprises and amassed considerable portfolios spanning industry and commerce, historically the Iraqi Army remained detached from the wider modes of production. Yet, in the aftermath of Operation Iraqi Freedom, corruption remerged as an undeniable impairment to unit cohesion. In many instances, corruption and criminality morphed the Iraqi military into a hollow Army and eroded the institution's overall force posture. However, the government of Nouri al-Maliki and prominent officers as well as Defence officials tacitly allowed corruption and criminality to pervade to secure the loyalty of the armed forces.

In contrast, chapter eight will underscore the substantial role and impact of patrimonial economy surrounding the cohesion and durability of the Yemeni officer class. The Yemeni military, under President Saleh, emerged as a bulwark for patronage, and became entrenched within the civilian economy through the Military Economic Corporation and thereafter, the Yemen Economical Corporation. Both institutions witnessed privileged members of the military-tribal-complex enjoy preferential access to business ventures and illicit streams of income. Moreover,

the inherent nature of patron-client relationships in Yemen proved very important in terms of discerning and understanding the nature of the military's loyalty to the regime.

Chapter nine evaluates the role and impact of external actors regarding military cohesion and the dispensation of power in Iraq, while chapter ten engages in a similar assessment of the role and impact of external actors within the case of Yemen. The cases of Iraq and Yemen provide differing trajectories with regards to the role of foreign powers in discerning the 'state' component in the military nexus. In Iraq, the United States invasion shattered the structures of governance President Saddam Hussein had erected over his nearly quarter of a century rule and caused the first fragmentation of the state and army. Thereafter, the US engaged in a haphazard attempt at security sector reform, which witnessed the foundation of the political-military structures firmly entrenched along communal lines. The environment enabled the Islamic Republic of Iran to infiltrate the weak state structures and succeed by some measure in garnering influence across the security landscape. In conjunction, other external actors aided in the fragmentation of the Iraqi Army in the wake of the Islamic State territorial acquisition in Iraq, with Iran ultimately mobilizing the Shia-dominated Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) and enjoying a large force disposition in that non-state actor.

In the case of Yemen, chapter ten demonstrates how external actors perpetuated the patronage network President Saleh had created and controlled to ensure the loyalty of the military-security apparatuses. More pointedly, counter-terrorism aid ensured the president enjoyed paramount control over most component military formations in Yemen. This occurred alongside the decline in oil revenues: the long-standing lubricant of the patronage system. Following the period of transition, the wider international community sought to tame the networks of patronage and multiplicity of power centres entrenched within the military through a program of security sector reform. Vice President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi (1994-2012) emerged as Ali Abdullah Saleh's successor in 2012, following an uncontested, 'rubber-stamped'

election. However, the incumbent President Hadi proved too weak, and the networks too strong for effective and genuine reform to take hold. Lastly, chapter eleven provides a conclusion for the thesis.

## Chapter 1: Literature Review and Conceptual Approach

### Western Structuring of the Civil-Military Relationship

The conceptual norms of civil-military relations are empirically and theoretically anchored in Western political thought, which focuses on the question of who exercises the legitimate dispensation of power over the coercive institutions of the state, and the idealised structuring surrounding that relationship. Our comprehension of civil-military relations, dominated by Western constructs, has nonetheless gone through several waves (Dresch 1999, 2). These several waves of understanding civil-military relations are reflected by the wider historical dynamics taking hold in the world. This section will provide an understanding of civil-military relations in the Western world, and how the ideal type of relations has manifested theoretically and empirically.

Theories concerning the ideal configuration of the civil-military relationship are derived from the works of Samuel Huntington and his theory on military professionalism and subjective versus objective civilian control, and the research conducted by Morris Janowitz, which developed the theory of a citizen soldier-based constabulary force. These works have long informed the academic study of civil-military relations, not least in relation to the wider developing world.

In his seminal work *The Soldier and the State*, Samuel Huntington developed a specific understanding of military professionalism as a bulwark against the politicization of the armed forces (Huntington 1957, 7-8). He argued that in democracies, civil-military relations are characterised by a professional army that is subordinate to civilian control, which is achieved through objective means (Huntington 1957, 80-5). Objective civilian control is the ideal form of civil-military relations predicated on the “distribution of political power between the military and civilian groups which is most conducive to the emergence of professional attitudes and behaviours among members of the officer’s corps” (Huntington 1957, 83).

Objective control stresses a division of labour between the armed forces and society, with civil-authority mandating the armed forces' capability and flexibility to perform their duties within a separate sphere. This type of control aims to depoliticise the military, rendering it politically neutral as an institution. The focus of this concept is the link between professionalism and voluntary subordination, as "a highly professional officer corps stands ready to carry out the wishes of any civilian group which secures the legitimate authority within the state" (Huntington 1957, 83-4). Objective control ensures the effectiveness or the capability of the military, while simultaneously ensuring its subordination to civil control. Through objective control, the armed forces will come to view itself and, more importantly, be viewed by society, as the embodiment of the state as opposed to a regime or political party. In contrast, subjective control denotes the political ascendancy of a civilian group, or multiple groups, over the armed forces (Huntington 1957, 80). While subjective civilian control 'civilianises' the military to attain its ends, objective civilian control achieves its ends by politicizing the military, subordinating it as a tool of the state (Huntington 1957, 83).

By contrast, Morris Janowitz conducted research on the American military in his work, *'The Professional Soldier, a Social and Political Portrait'*. In this study, Janowitz subscribes to Huntington's doctrine of relying on the professional military ethic as the fundamental means for ensuring control (Feaver 1996, 166). However, Janowitz first observed that the technical knowledge, and power combined with a sense of prestige, can result in the institution's encroachment upon spheres that are traditionally "preserved for civilian and professional politicians" (Janowitz 1960, 12). Such a reality will discharge "tremendous stress on the traditional assumptions about the effectiveness of the democratic model for regulating political-military relations" (ibid). The increasing political role of the military resulted from the "blurring of the distinction between the civilian and military" due to technological innovations (Janowitz 1960, 31-32). While an apolitical corps is necessary, the military will inevitably come to resemble a political

pressure group, unproblematic so long as its actions are “responsible, circumscribed, and responsive to civilian authority” (Janowitz 1960, 343).

Notably, as a sociologist, Janowitz held the military and society as inextricably linked, for even though the military is separate in certain respects, such as rules and rituals, aspects of society will eventually permeate or cross over into the military. Janowitz formulated the argument that, when structuring the military in a similar manner to a constabulary force and fusing it with society, civil-military relations will be far more effective. This relationship is predicated on the notion that the military will be “amenable to civilian political control because he (the officer) recognises that civilians appreciate and understand the tasks and responsibilities of the constabulary force” (Janowitz 1960, 420). Importantly, Janowitz came to understand civilian control in terms of social control as opposed to institutional or state control. He therefore disagreed with Huntington’s “objective” control, favouring instead ‘subjective’ control, or the ‘civilianizing’ of the military. Within the constabulary force, he identifies three types of military leaders fighting for the dispensation of power; the “military manager”, the “heroic soldier” and, importantly, the “technical specialist” (Janowitz 1960, 21-2).

The works of Samuel Huntington and Morris Janowitz spawned further studies of civil-military relations that have both challenged and developed their original contributions. A substantial portion of these studies sought to understand the nature of civil-military relations in developing countries through an institutionally oriented analysis and focused on the political role of the armed forces during a historical period of widespread coups in Latin America and the Middle East.

Samuel Finer's *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics* examines the political role of the military within developing countries. He isolates the factors that precipitate a military coup during a historical period of military invention across the developing world and

determines the primary factors as the following: institutional self-interest, national interests, sectional or communal interests, and individual interests within the officer corps (Finer 1962, 61-71). However, Finer qualified that a domestic socio-political situation must arise for the military to justify political intervention. Regardless of these socio-political circumstances, however, the officer corps often justified political intervention through the evocation of national interests, even when intervention is motivated by the self-interests of the officer corps (Finer 1962, 61-71). Moreover, there is a clear distinction between states that are developed, and states lacking a strong central authority and equally durable institutions. In this regard, feeble and incoherent institutions are synonymous with developing polities, which are more vulnerable to collapse. In these environments, the military constitutes the only state appendage with the ability to fill this political vacuum, due in part to the institution's superior organizational capabilities and its arms possession (Finer 1962, 5).

In addition to his landmark book *The Soldier and the State*, Huntington authored *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968), advancing an argument concerning the political intervention of the military. Huntington asserted that focusing on the internal structure, or cohesion of the military and social background of the officer class, intervening in politics alone would fail to shed light on the factors that cause military coups (Huntington 1968, 193). In particular, he noted that "military explanations do not explain military interventions", because the political involvement of the officer class is an indication of a larger problem within underdeveloped societies: a praetorian society, one characterised by the politicization of all societal forces and institutions (Huntington 1968, 194). As an extension of this, all societal forces and institutions, including the armed forces, are inherently politicise in such a praetorian society. In line with Finer, Huntington argued that the military represented the only societal force possessing the organizational capacity and institutional coherency to capture political power. This would result in the ability to rectify political decay through advancing the process of modernization. Huntington held the military in



high regard and professed a positive view of the institution's ability to drive modernization within society.

In contrast, Amos Perlmutter argued the military was only concerned with self-interest and thus unlikely to relinquish executive control of the state to civilian authorities after gaining power. This notion of a praetorian state was developed from an analysis of the military in Egyptian politics, in which the officer class exhibited a tendency to intervene in politics and dominate the core institutions of the state (Perlmutter 1969, 383). He further distinguishes two types of armies: the arbitrator army, which wields power behind the scenes, and the ruler army, which remains the dominant political actor for a prolonged period. The praetorian army is inherently suspicious of civilian rule, and ultimately prioritises the preservation of the military's corporate interests.

Perlmutter provided an additional study on corporatism within the military in 1977. His findings showed that the military will intervene in politics, based on corporatism and their role as bureaucratic managers, when political institutions are weak and unable to fulfil the core functions of the state. Specifically, the political intervention of the officer class is likely to occur when both the central authority has collapsed and if "the military is the most cohesive and politically the best organised group at a given time in a given political system" (Perlmutter 1977, 100). Perlmutter ultimately concluded that political conditions are what determine the civil-military relationship, and that "the military is motivated to intervene only when its corporate or bureaucratic roles seem threatened" (Perlmutter 1977, 281).

Eric Nordlinger conducted a study, one that resembles Perlmutter's, regarding military intervention and the nature of military regime types following the officer corps' ascension to power. Specifically, Nordlinger distinguishes between moderator, guardian and ruler regimes. While the research examines the role and impact of class and communal affiliations and the political orientations of the officer class, Nordlinger places greater emphasis on the military's

corporate interests as the key factor motivating both intervention in and disengagement from the political arena and thus advances earlier contributions by Finer. However, Nordlinger viewed the military as negatively impacting the development and modernization process within the state, specifically in terms of facilitating economic change (Nordlinger 1977, 176).

In *Military Role and Rule: Perspectives on Civil-Military Relations*, Claude Welch and Arthur Smith examined the cases of France, Peru, Thailand, Nigeria and Egypt to understand the factors leading to the withdrawal of the military from politics. The authors note that the political role of the military is informed by factors specific to each state (Welch & Smith 1974, 3). Like Huntington and other authors who researched the political role of the armed forces, Welch and Smith found that military intervention is the most pronounced when political strength and legitimacy of civilian authority declines (Welch & Smith 1974, 4). Importantly, durable civilian control over the armed forces is a precipitous process that depends on the historical context of the state and reaches its apex when the officer corps voluntarily submits to civilian rule (ibid). In terms of military disengagement from the political arena, Welch and Smith advance five events that will likely witness the officer class resigning themselves to civilian control; when military involvement in the political affairs of the state has become a point of contention within the officer class, when the armed forces are assigned an agreeable role in the protection of the nation, when disengagement from politics might assist in avoiding a civil-war or internal conflict, when aspects of modernization to include economic growth have been achieved, and lastly, when the officer elites developed a high degree of confidence with the political leadership.

Relatively recent literature on civil-military relations has attempted to address the perceived shortcomings of the classical theories contributed by Huntington and Janowitz (Duman & Tsarouhas 2006, 406). This criticism was compelled by a new wave of understanding civil-military relations, spurred by the end of the Cold War. James Burk argues their assumptions are flawed, “as judged by our normative standard that militaries must sustain and protect democratic

value and practices”, yet both Huntington and Janowitz fail to address how to protect democratic values and principles (Burk 2002, 12). However, Burk is concerned with the nature of democratic civil-military relations, as opposed to those cases that lack democratic forms of governance and a feeble central authority.

Elliot Cohen examined the relationship exercised between soldiers and statesmen, and critiques Huntington’s assertion of a distinct division of labour between the civilian authority and professional soldiers by examining Abraham Lincoln, Georges Clémenceau, Winston Churchill and David Ben-Gurion. In doing so, Cohen phrases Huntington’s theory of objective control as the “normal” theory of civil-military relations and proposes a relationship of ‘unequal dialogue’ within the relationship. In this regard, while Cohen acknowledges the importance of objective civilian control and the professional nature of the officer corps, he argues this objective control fails to address the change in dialogue and thereby nature of the relationship between military and civilian officials during times of war. The theory of unequalled dialogue incorporates the concept of objective control and applies it to times of war, differing from the “normal” theory in that dialogue between the civilian leader and the military is unequal because “both sides expressed their views bluntly ... and not once but repeatedly” (Cohen 2002, 209).

Importantly, policy makers must ‘master’ the nuances and conduct of warfare in a manner analogous to gaining an appreciation of domestic politics. This proficiency will provide an equal dialogue between the statesmen and soldiers (Cohen 2002, 206). Consequently, distinguishing civilian and military affairs is an “arbitrary line separating the civil from the military in national security decision making; rather, the line is vacillating depending on the situation” (Herspring 2005, 11). Cohen thus disputes the clear institutional distinction between the ‘civil’ and ‘military’ spheres purported in Huntington’s landmark study.

Peter Feaver (2003) provides a more robust critique of Huntington's theoretical assumptions in his book, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations*. Feaver, as a political scientist and former staffer on the National Security Council, sought to reformulate the theoretical understanding of civil-military relations by applying the concept of agency theory within the confines of a strategic interaction between the civilian authorities and military elites. Feaver outlines civil-military relations as the product of a deliberative and ongoing interplay between civilian 'principles' who task the military 'agents' with executing security policy (Feaver 2003).

Feaver believed that Huntington's theory failed to accord with the realities of the Cold War. For example, he argued that during the Cold War, the US military became more politicise while civilian politicians became more involved in military affairs (Feaver 2003, 37). While Feaver acknowledges the importance of objective civilian control and a professional military as an ideal type, he has developed a set of conditions which dictate the degree of authority policy makers entrust to the military and the degree to which policy makers intrude into the military sphere to monitor the armed forces. Feaver argues that military 'agents' exercise the prerogative to accept civilian guidance, or 'shirk' the mission set forth by civilians, based on the level of intrusion imposed by policy makers along with possible impact of such monitoring as calculated by the military and the repercussions of failing to comply with civilian dictate (Feaver 2003, 129). Shirking, as set forth by Feaver, entails anything short of wholly obeying the mandates advanced by civilian policymakers.

This agency theory provided by Feaver is one of the most robust critiques of and alternatives to the seminal relationship developed by Huntington (Burk 2004, 485). While Feaver's theory was well-received within policy and military communities, his study focused solely on the political and military spheres in the United States and under democratic systems of

governance, during the Cold War. This brings into question as to whether the insights are applicable to non-democratic settings in other regions.

Rebecca Schiff's concordance theory provides another alternative for conceptualizing civil-military relations and invites speculation regarding the circumstances under which a military will intervene in its own country's politics. By moving away from an institutional analysis, and placing greater importance on the nation's culture, Schiff argues that "three partners — the military, the political elites, and the citizenry — should aim for a cooperative relationship that may or may not involve separation but does not require it" (Schiff 1995, 7). This assessment moves away from the conventional literature on civil-military relations, and specifically Samuel Huntington, who maintains that it is preferable for the military to remain institutionally and ideologically separate from the political sphere. Indeed, concordance theory detracts from the long-standing norms of civil-military relations in that it does not require the separation of the civilian and military in distinct spheres, and therefore, places less importance on the institution by focusing instead on the nation's cultural tendencies as evidenced by historical examples (Schiff 1995,8).

Rather, Schiff provides four factors that facilitate dialogue and cooperation between the military, civilian authorities, and citizenry to establish an amicable relationship. Specifically, the four indicators over which this triumvirate must agree upon are; the social composition of the officer corps, the political decision-making process, recruitment method, and military style (Schiff 1995, 8). Concordance theory characterises the institutional and cultural conditions affecting the relations among the military, political elites, and citizenry. When the partners agree on the four indicators, and concordance takes hold, the military is less likely to intervene in domestic matters leading to civilian control (Schiff 1995, 12).

#### Security Sector Form and Civil-Military Relations

The last wave of literature concerning civil-military relations from a Western viewpoint resulted from a normative shift of civilian to democratic control over the security structures of the state. This paradigm was developed and informed by the desire to establish democratic control of the security sector and further the efficiency and effectiveness of the security institutions (Hendrickson 2003, 243). Security sector reform entails the process of implementing effective and democratic governance of the security sector by institutionalizing democratic principles and practices, such as transparency and accountability to civilian authority (Barak 2010, 814).

Security sector reform gained credence in the Western world following the end of the Cold War, and the dissolution of the Soviet Empire, because it was viewed as an essential element of a framework to facilitate democracy and a gateway “for states that aspire to move along the continuum to democracy” (Laipson 2007, 100). To this end, a strong, durable democratic state is the preferred outcome of security sector reform and an accordant civil-military relationship. An issue, however, arises from the notion of security being given the role of military and intelligence services in the Middle East, as a form of regime bulwark, and the organization’s demonstrated loyalty to the political elite. In this sense, reform is a political calculation and will not succeed unless powerful domestic actors are the driving force (Sayigh 2007, 14).

From a Western perspective, we have come to understand civil-military relations as the debate surrounding entities exercising the dispensation of power over the coercive state institutions, with the military subordinated to institutionalised civilian control. More importantly, democracy implicitly presumes primacy of civilian political authority over the command of the military, any situation short of this is an incomplete democracy (Luttwak 1999, 99). Thus, a central aspect of democratic governments is civilian control over the military, contrasting with authoritarian regimes characterised by military influence over civilian institutions.

To be sure, Western understandings of civil-military relations occur in cases with state coherence. However, the ideal type has never fully equated to our understanding of civil-military relations in the Middle East, except during periods of state coherence. As it will be shown, state power is diminishing within the Middle East, and the ideal nature of civil-military relations is equally impotent to conceptualise these new relationships.

#### The Military as the Strongest State Institution

In contrast to the wider-Western experience, the emergence of the civil-military relationship in the Middle East occurred under a very different set of circumstances and conditions according to Fuad Khuri, because the “distinction between civil and military structures varies with the cultural background, bureaucratic organization, historical experiences, and the technological order of society” (Khuri 1982, 12). As Oren Barak observes, “the pattern of civil-military relations in these [Arab] states has generally not conformed to the Western model” (Barak 2011, 406). Notably, the separation between military and civilian rule never manifested itself as customary practice (Halpern 1962, 277). Moreover, the modern Arab army has been an important aspect of the historical trajectory of the contemporary state, serving as the most momentous political actor in the Arab World (Ben-Dor 1975, 317). The proliferation of *coups d'état* in the nascent Arab states ushered in an epoch of ‘officer turned politicians’ and the military entering the corridors of power (Be’eri 1982, 69). Indeed, military interference in the political machinery of the state developed into the accepted form of political transformation from 1936 to the late 1960s (Hurewitz 1974, 150).

Praetorianism came to describe the infringement of the armed forces into the political affairs of the state, as the weakness of the emergent state-institutions, clearly becoming symptomatic of modernizing societies. Amos Perlmutter asserted that praetorianism manifests “when the civilian government comes to a standstill in its pursuit of nationalist and modernist goals (modernization, urbanization, order, unification, and so forth)” (Perlmutter 1969, 385).

Edward Shils also noted the political ascendancy of the military as “a response to the difficulties which the new states have encountered in their efforts to establish itself as modern sovereignties” (1962, 8), while Hurewitz added that the military intervened in politics “for the sole purpose of setting public affairs in order” (Shils 1974, 112). Despite the impetus, it’s important to acknowledge that in political environments plagued with ‘decaying institutions’, the military exhibited a pronounced degree of ‘national’ consciousness and the supremacy to execute change, in contrast to other elites and institutions, contributing to the institution's involvement in politics (Janowitz 1964, 63-4). The Arab military, in some respects, was the only coherent entity capable of state-building and projects of modernization. This in turn reflects that the legitimacy of the state and its pursuit towards modernity was linked to the institutional strength and cohesion of the military.

The political dominance of the military resulted in the emergence of scholarly debate pertaining to the role of the military as a vehicle for change and modernization. Scholars generally observed Arab militaries as the only institutions cable of nation building and mass mobilization (Rubin 2000, 1). The military’s ability to enter the political arena and establish stable governance is a result of the institution’s internal social cohesion (Janowitz 1977, 105), whilst the officer class represented a crucial component of an emergent middle class which could lead the development and modernization of the burgeoning states (Halpern 1963, 279). Huntington agreed with Halpern, arguing that the military will “introduce into the society highly middle-class ideas of efficiency, honesty, and national loyalty” (Huntington 1968, 203). Additionally, the military and officer class afforded the citizenry an avenue of upward social mobility in the Republican states. By 1962, military officers governed Pakistan, Iraq, Sudan, Syria and Egypt, while providing crucial support to the government in Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Yemen, Turkey, Afghanistan, Iraq and Algeria (Halpern 1963, 250).



Thus, within the Arab world, the officer corps and the military as an institution was well suited as an agent of change because it is imbued with a sense of mission, organizational capacity, and nationalist sentiment (Huntington 245, 1968). Khuri characterised the military mindset as upholding a “commitment to grand-scale processes of change, as well as the standardization and uniformity of actions, attitudes, outlooks, and behaviours” (Khuri 1982, 18). In this light, the Arab officer corps held itself as superior to society and other state appendages due to its technological and organizational capabilities that embraced a nationalist narrative (ibid, 22-23). To be sure, men of military bearing outweighed civilians in the corridors of power amongst the Arab Republics (Sassoon 2016, 74-6). Therefore, the military often constituted the strongest institution of the state machinery and the only appendage capable of liberating and elevating their respective countries and societies. For example, with regards to the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, Gamal Nasser believed the army did not desire a political role but was forced to act for the benefit of the nation, he famously wrote, “If the Army does not move-who else will?” (Gaub 2014, 10).

The involvement of the military in projects of modernization coincided with the emergence of the technocratic nature of the institution. Whilst engaging in projects of modernization, the military adopted technocratic and scientific outlooks to aid in the political development and advancement of the state. As Perlmutter highlighted, “[c]oncentration on technology and science lessens the threat to military dictatorship that might result from the formation of civilian organizations” (Perlmutter 1969, 403-4). More importantly, as opposed to developing and enacting change through political institutions, the military acted through bureaucratic means, overseeing reform in a managerial fashion. In this context, the military implemented technocratic solutions, as opposed to political solutions, to address the challenges of modernization and development. Again, in the case of Egypt, the military developed extensive infrastructure in addition to large bureaucracies linked to their economic enterprises, which would serve to placate demands and calls for more pluralist forms of governance to emerge. The driving ideological

narrative underpinning projects of modernization comprised an amalgamation of an organizational and scientific outlook, best illustrated through the notions of Nasserism and Arab Socialism (Perlmutter 1969, 404).

#### A Return to the Barracks

While the military denoted the most important institutional actor during the emergence of the modern Arab state; by the 1970s coups became less frequent. Regimes which gained political ascendancy through the military were increasingly viewed as examples of repressive police states and authoritarian regimes. A 'civilianization' of regimes occurred, whereby leaders shed their uniforms for titles such as President or Prime Minister (Nordlinger 1978, 3). Robert Springborg further notes through an analysis of the Egyptian political elite that the military faded from the corridors of power, illustrated by the reduction of officers amongst the political establishment (Springborg 1998, 1). The institutionalization of the military into authoritarian regimes was heightened through decades of despotic rule that concentrated executive power into compartmented patrimonial networks of family members, officials from the bureaucracy, politicians, economic allies, and military officers linked to the ruler (Droz-Vincent 2011b, 3). Overall, while the tendency for Arab armies to launch coups and seize power remains a possibility, coup-proofing techniques have effectively ensured the military and the officer corps are unable to establish political power through force (Rubin 2000, 20).

The decline of military rule and the waning of coups in this vein, is a consequence of what James Quinlivan advanced as 'Coups-proofing': preventative actions to curb or stem the influence of the military. Such measures included the formation of parallel military forces apart from the regular army, multiple and overlapping intelligence organs, provoking expertness within the military, and the overall financing of the coup-proofing methods (Quinlivan 1999, 133).

In addition, regimes can increase support to non-military entities such as social, economic and religious clusters, provide patronage to high ranking officers, appoint minorities into positions of prestige within the military, and rotate officers to deny a formation of a base of support (Brooks 1998, 19-20). Such strategies serve to bind or root the loyalty of the military to the regime, not to the state, nor any conception of the nation (Rubin 2000, 12). Despite the implementation of such measures, the defection of certain militaries during the Arab Spring called into question the efficacy of such strategies, because while methods of coup-proofing subordinate the military and the officer to the incumbent ruler, such measures fail to ensure pervasive loyalty during periods of discernible socio-political upheaval or unrest (Albrecht 2015, 659). This assessment is illustrated by the different responses and reactions of Arab militaries during the Arab Spring.

A notable effort to 'typify' civil-military relations across the region emanated from a study by Mehran Kamrava. He classified four interactions between the state and military in the Middle East. In the case of Israel and Turkey, the state predominates, but allows the military to play a significant role in domestic politics. In inclusionary states that embraced Iraq, Iran, and Libya, the political aspirations of the regular military are counterbalanced or neutralised by highly ideological volunteer militias. Algeria, Egypt, Syria, Sudan, Tunisia, and Yemen were classified as exclusionary whereby once-ideological officers civilianised themselves along with much of the machinery of the state. Lastly, the monarchies or dynastic regimes with their limited geographic space and demographic scope results in a reliance on foreign contractors as seen with Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, while in Jordan, Morocco, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, or one or more devoted tribal contingents are used to counterbalance the influence and potential autonomy of the regular military (Kamrava 2000, 68).

However, the typologies are limited in explaining civil-military relations in the Middle East due to, among other issues, the failure to take into consideration the circumstances or situations in which states are competing with armed militias, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, or the case of

Iraq following the fall of Saddam Hussein. This situation highlights where the monopoly of state-sanctioned violence is no longer the reality. More substantially, Kamrava developed his four typologies with the inherent assumption that the 'state' in the cases under consideration are in fact, cohesive and accord with the civil-military relationship as proffered by Samuel Huntington. This situation may have captured civil-military relations in the Arab World when first published in 2000. However, the Arab Spring exposed the weakness of state coherency and the institutional durability of the armed forces in several Arab states and challenged the utility of the model.

#### Arab Armies and the Arab Spring

Ostensibly, the events of the Arab Spring shifted conventional and long-standing norms of civil-military relations in the Middle East and the Arab World, because the military as an institution is "intricately tied to the composition, internal balances and distribution of capital within their states and societies" (Sayigh 2014, npn). The events of the Arab Spring ruptured long-standing systems of political and social control, altering the nature of civil-military relations in many cases.

During the popular uprisings, the involvement of the Arab militaries sets forth a simple question: will the military remain loyal to the regime? In this vein, the response of the Arab militaries to societal dissidence was not even. As Gregory Gause (2011) and Robert Springborg (142, 2014) point out, academics failed to predict the reactions of the militaries during the Arab Spring simply because scholars lost interest in studying the militaries in that region. Therefore, the literature was ill-equipped to comprehend and forecast the actions of the militaries. Consequently, a new body of research emerged following these events, one that sought to examine the conditions under which the military will engage against the protesters or withdraw support to the regime in an environment analogous to the Arab Spring. Specifically, the literature sought to provide a deeper understanding of the responses of the military across the Arab World.

Eva Bellin argued that the level of institutionalization and patrimonial nature of the military determined its response to society's call for democratic change. Militaries that exhibit a high

degree of institutionalization are more willing to cede power and allow for political reform, while a lower degree of institutionalization will result in a lack of willingness to cede power and allow political reform (Bellin 2004, 145). Institutionalization in this sense is not akin to its Huntington construct, which is closely linked to professionalism, but rather the distinction set forth by Weber when differentiating bureaucracies from patrimonial organizations. Gause agrees that the level of institutionalization is an important piece in this puzzle, in addition to the professional nature of the military, while underscoring the importance of the institution's societal composition (Gause 2011, npn). In this regard, the Egyptian and Tunisian militaries were homogenous, with a majority Sunni composition, and relatively professional or institutionalised by Western standards. In contrast, less institutional and more patrimonial militaries include either side with the regime or experienced the dissolution of certain units and divisions.

While much of the literature evaluated the impact of a patrimonial vs. institutionalised military and the role of a professional force as opposed to a conscript military, Zoltan Barany asserted that four factors are important to evaluate the future responses of Arab militaries when confronted by popular uprisings. Specifically, military, state, societal and external factors must be considered to understand the direction the military will take in the face of popular revolutions (Barany 2013, 2-4). Militarily, the internal cohesion of the institution is extraordinarily important, because a unified and cohesive military will be able to act in unison. Among the more crucial factors impacting cohesion are, ethno-religious divisions, socio-political splits, divides between elite and regular formations and a conscript vs. professional military (Barany 2013, 4-8). State factors pertain to the regime's treatment of the institution and the officer corps, in addition to officer class' view of the regime and ruling elite (ibid 9-11). The military's response to popular uprisings will also be determined by the society from which the institution originates. The size, nature and societal composition of the protests will inform the decisions of the officer class, while

the institution's track record with society and the general popularity of the uprisings are also important (ibid 11-13).

Lastly, Barany emphasises the significance of external variables, something the pertinent literature failed to address at the time of his publication. The potential for foreign involvement, and with whom the foreign actors will side with in the protest, is a key factor shaping the perception of the officer class and reactions to the uprisings (Barany 2013, 14-15). This has been witnessed in Syria, in which sections of the officer corps defected under the assumption that Western intervention would take place in Syria. This is very similar to what occurred in Libya. The foreign exposure of the officer corps can shape their respective perceptions of the uprisings, specifically if the officers have been exposed to democratic notions of civil-military relations. Overall, Barany provided a holistic and systematic framework to implement when attempting to understand the factors precipitating the military's response to revolutions.

David Lutterbeck applied the observations set forth by the aforementioned scholars and provided further insight by examining the military's relationship with the populous at large, something Bellin failed to address (Lutterbeck 2013). If the military exercises a strong link to society, then the organization will be less willing to repress protests, which is found within the more centralised republics. In this regard, the Tunisian and Egyptian militaries exhibited a high degree of cohesiveness and institutionalization with allegiance to the state, not the regime. Additionally, both militaries held strong links to society through mass-conscription and, importantly, with the Egyptian military holding values like those in society (Frisch 2001, 1). Moreover, the Egyptian military placed greater concern on ensuring the continuity of their economic enterprises.

Conversely, patrimonial militaries, reliant upon foreign mercenaries or communal affiliations, are more likely to repress protestors. For example, the Libyan military was highly

patrimonial, based on tribal and familial ties to the regime, with Colonel Muammar Qaddafi establishing a people's militia with the purpose of countering the power of the regular army. As a result, the Libyan Army was never "allowed to develop a professional ethic that could have created a distinct corporate identity or distinct interests" (Vandewalle 2012, 147). These features shaped the military's response to protests with units of the regular army quickly defecting or folding, while loyalist units linked by patrimony and patronage aligned with the regime. The situation in Yemen mirrored that of Libya, whereby President Saleh assigned tribal affiliates and kith and kin to the praetorian guard and more well-trained military units. Additionally, with the case of the Syrian Arab Army, the most important units fell under the command of Alawi officers, with the chain of command structured around sectarian allegiance rather than any formal command experience (Droz-Vincent 2014, 39). As a result, the Syrian Arab Army actively quelled protests.

Some scholars argue that the above explanations are too 'reductionist' in nature to fully articulate the complex and varying nature of Arab military's responses to the uprisings. W. Taylor (2014) offers a model based on 'restraints' and 'interests' faced by Arab armies during the uprisings in order to hypothesise the divergent reactions.<sup>1</sup> In this vein, cases in which the army had *low restraints* and *high interests* to support the population (Tunisia) resulted in the willingness of the army to support the protestors, while cases with *high restraints* and *low interests* in supporting the protestors (Syria and Bahrain) remained loyal to the regime. During conditions of *low restraints* and *low interests* (Egypt) the army hesitantly supported the dissenters while in cases marked by *high interests* and *high restraints* (Libya and Yemen) the army fractured in response to mass uprisings (Taylor 2014, 3).

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<sup>1</sup> See pages 47-49 for an explanation of what constitutes *restraints* and *interests*

Florence Gaub (2016) provided one of the most recent contributions to the field of civil-military relations in the Arab World following the 2011 popular uprisings. Gaub noted the scholarly contention regarding why Arab militaries intervene in politics and subsequently determined that, as opposed to a solitary reason, a set of interrelated factors can provide an understanding as to why militaries become involved in politics. She examines the underlying factors that explain the political involvement of Arab militaries from a historical perspective and concludes that a total of four sequential and structural factors within the military, along with the context of the external environment in which they operate, are worth taking into consideration. Those factors consist of a cohesive military capable of acting in a unified manner, institutional self-interest, and willingness for the officer corps to act. Weak civilian control over the military and an equally feeble central authority are also important, in addition to an implicit acceptance from within society to move against the civilian authority.

Political intervention, according to Gaub, goes beyond the enactment of a coup, and encompasses activities with an aim to shape policy by influencing public opinion and mobilizing societal interests. Importantly, military fragmentation represents an inherently political act and signifies the loss of faith in the political class, because the act reveals the illegitimate nature of the institution and central authority. Gaub develops understanding of military types, based on her framework to understand the political involvement of the armed forces. Militaries that lack institutional cohesion will fragment in times of political and social upheaval as witnessed in Yemen and Libya. On the other hand, the militaries of Tunisia and Lebanon displayed a lack of institutional interests to support the incumbent regime and therefore remained inactive. Lastly, the central authorities in Jordan and Morocco remained strong enough to dissuade the historical political involvement of the military. However, the Egyptian and Algerian polities are increasingly at odds with the officer corps monopoly over the political institutions of the state.



Ultimately, Gaub convincingly argues that structural instead of cultural factors have necessitated coups in the region, due to the feeble nature of state structures and the weak legitimacy of the central authority. In many ways, therefore, praetorianism and the weak nature of the state and central authority remain important when understanding military political intervention within the Arab World. This work detracts from previous studies, to some extent, by placing an emphasis on the relationship of the armed forces with state and society, and by elongating the definition of political intervention to include non-intrusive acts, aside from coups such as military fragmentation and desertion.

#### Collapse of the Weberian State Model

The popular uprisings across the Arab World ushered in a qualitatively new phase of civil-military relations, creating an opening for a new association between the military, state, and society. One consequence of importance centres on the collapse of the 'Weberian' state model, which has served to inform and underpin 'Western' conceptualizations of civil-military relations. Max Weber's conception of the state is as an entity of power, or a political institution which successfully "upholds the claim to the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory" (Weber 1919, 4). Consequently, the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force is the paramount and defining characteristic of the state, as the state is established through legal violence.

In turn, Weber describes three forms of legitimacy or domination that a leader exercises in order to claim a monopoly over the use of force: traditional, charismatic and legal-rational (Ayubi 2009, 6). The first relies upon traditional rule because "it has always existed" (Bendix 1977, 294-7), and is unremitting in nature. Charismatic authority rests on the personal appeal of the leader, which in turn inspires loyalty and obedience, whilst legal-rational authority emanates from the impersonal role of bureaucracy, whereby authority is derived from the position or office. Once this monopoly of force is established, "pacified social spaces are created which are normally free

from acts of violence" (Elias 1982, 236). As a result, all other groups in society must be disarmed, as an exercise of domination or legitimacy is anchored to the use of (or the threat of the use of) force. The preferred outcome is a state which is strong and durable, with the ability to extract resources from the population to include taxation, conscription and the capability to implement policies beneficial to the nation and the state. Moreover, militaries or armies are not drawn from clan, tribe or interest groups, nor do they represent sectarian interests, which underscores the idea of the state being neutral. Consequently, a single cohesive military is a fundamental part of a legitimate government, organised as an appendage of the national state (Janowitz 1977, 15).

Conceptualizing the collapse of the 'Weberian' state construct requires a point of demarcation or ideal type 'state' as a measuring stick (Lambach et al 2015, 1304). As previously noted, the 'Weberian' model centres on the legitimate monopoly over the use of force within its territory to implement policies set forth by the leadership and bureaucracy. A state in this precise instance is unable to exercise a legitimate monopoly of violence (Eriksen 2011, 232). Eriksen notes the importance of the monopoly of violence in providing an understanding of a specific aspect of state collapse. This is acknowledged by Robert Jackson (1991) and Stephen Krasner (2004) and is represented by the state's failure to control its territory while maintaining a legitimate monopoly over the use of force.

Drawing from this notion, the collapse of the 'Weberian' model can be elucidated through the fragmentation of militaries and the proliferation of militia, serving to highlight the disintegration of the monopoly over the legitimate use of force. Legitimacy in this sense is inextricably tied to the monopoly over the use of force, and when that is gone, so too is the functionality of the state. Thus, civil-military relations are more broadly a gauge to understanding the legitimacy of the state.

### Fragmentation of Militaries into Militia

The fragmentation of militaries during the Arab Spring was precipitated by direct engagement against both protestors and insurgent groups, with internal cleavages, tribal and clan rivalries, corruption, and sectarian defections accelerating the fragmentation. Of all the republican militaries, only those in Tunisia and Egypt remained standing whilst political power changed hands. In contrast, the republics with a tradition of a lesser degree of institutionalization and cohesion within the military experienced the fragmentation of their coercive apparatus. This situation is most prominent with the cases of Libya, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen.

Despite the presence of militia prior to the Arab Spring, and their gradual prominence commensurate with the sub-communalisation of violence thereafter, scholars have paid little attention to the impact they might have on civil-military relations. Only William Taylor's (2014) book, *Military Responses to the Arab Uprisings and the Future of Civil-military Relations in the Middle East: Analysis From Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Syria*, directly examines the fragmentation of militaries and armed militia as a "scenario" for future civil-military relations (Taylor 2014, 200-1).

The little literature that examines the role of militia and non-state actors is sparse. However, Fredrick Wehrey and Ariel Ahram assess the growing prominence of armed, non-state actors within Iraq and Libya and the impact of such organizations on the civil-military relationship in a 2015 study, *Taming the Militias: Building National Guards in Fractured Arab States*. Indeed, the authors note the historical importance placed upon "tribal chieftains, warlords and criminal gangs" by Arab rulers to manage core state functions, such as the collection of taxes and the imposition of order to ensure territorial integrity. Under such circumstances, the advent of the modern state saw rulers attempt to build national armies to supplant this role and thus establish a Weberian state (Wehrey and Ahram 2015, 4). The Arab Spring accelerated the fragmentation of militaries and thrust these non-state actors to the fore of the security landscape and the

dispensation of power; a trend that is increasingly evident in fragmented societies to include Iraq, Yemen, Syria and Libya. Like the early Arab rulers, an inherent problem arising from this situation is that a “reliance on militia can subvert efforts to re-establish the state’s monopoly over the use of force” (ibid. 5).

The authors propose the co-option of armed, non-state actors into a national guard force and argue that, while this initiative has eluded Libya and Iraq, the framework still represents the most optimal solution to tame the militia, even though “they are no panacea to the challenges of state-building” yet can play a productive role regarding security (Ibid. 16). Indeed, this issue overshadows the assumed productive role of militia operating within a supposed “national” guard. As seen in Iraq, the politically-aligned militia accumulated enough power to both counter the central authority and remain the purveyors of force within their own respective communal, sectarian and ethnic groupings. This environment is even more pronounced in Libya, where militia rule has come to determine the nature of power in the realms of security and governance. More pointedly, the proliferation of militia illustrates the failure of the state to reaffirm dominance over the security sector, and equally highlights the growing power of sub-state actors when it comes to supplanting the conventional functions of the state to include the provision of security. The sub-communalisation of violence and rise in importance of sub-state coercive centres has only further entrenched those organizations into the security fabric of the state, requiring the need to evaluate such actors within the context of, and through the prism of, the tribal-sectarian nexus.

Robert Springborg offers an interesting analysis regarding the ‘subtypes’ of republican regimes with regards to the variance in militaries and their control, and importantly the loyalties within the respective armed forces. In the “bunker republics” of Yemen, Iraq, Algeria, Syria, and Libya, loyalties are based primarily on clan, tribe, or sect as opposed to broad alliances or affiliations to the state, with control exercised through primordial loyalties. This results in the emergence of shadow states, or alternate power bases behind the institutions who exercise a

minimal amount of control. Power is centralised around primordial loyalties and the armed forces are equally cohered around these affiliations. The fracturing of a bunker republic results in the sub-communalisation of violence and the fragmentation of state power. In contrast, the “bully” republics of Tunisia and Egypt grounded their rule on “the institutional power of the military... these leaders are not drawn from a clearly identified social formation” (Springborg 2014, 151). Consequently, the militaries in the “bully” republics are relatively institutionalised with professional loyalties to the state.

In Libya, Colonel Qaddafi recruited heavily from his own tribe in addition to favouring regions loyal to the regime. Consequently, the army fragmented along these fissures, effectively ceasing to exist as an institution in 2011. Only the revolutionary guards and other praetorian units remained loyal to the regime following the collapse of the army. While the Yemeni Army exhibited comparable characteristics to its Libyan counterpart in terms of recruitment and command appointments around tribal and regional loyalists, it differed in one major respect: during his tenure as President, Saleh allowed members of the political ruling to bargain, establish and run personal fiefdoms within the military and, more specifically, the army. The ruling bargain centred around the long-time military strongman Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, paramount Sheikh of the Hashid Tribal Confederation Abdullah ibn Hussein al-Ahmar, and President Ali Abdullah Saleh. The breakdown or fragmentation of the military mirrored the collapses of this power-sharing arrangement. The Syrian Arab Army experienced a lesser degree of fragmentation and has continued to fight against Islamic State in addition to the myriad anti-regime militia.

In Iraq, a crucial factor to consider with the case of the Army is the role of outside forces, specifically of the United States, and the decision to disband and subsequently rebuild the military from the ground up. Nonetheless, under the rule of Nouri al-Maliki the Iraqi Army came to resemble those of Yemen and Libya: highly patrimonial, with the appointment of operational and divisional commanders drawn from the Shia community, a trend accentuating the communal or

confessional prevalence within the military. While the Iraqi Army never experienced popular uprisings on par with other countries in the region, the military became embattled in a protracted conflict with the Islamic State during the summer of 2014, during which entire Iraqi Army divisions fragmented and collapsed.

‘Tribes with flags’, as these anomalous states have been called, are now dissolving into numerous ‘tribes with their many flags’,<sup>2</sup> demonstrated by the sub-communalisation of violence, through the proliferation of militia along ethnic, tribal and confessional lines. As a result, the state is in a constant struggle to exercise a monopoly over the use of force as institutions of the central state collapse and state cohesion dissipates into the periphery. The militia have now come to perform various roles, with some linked to regimes and delegated the task of national defence by the state itself. Others are drawn from the ranks of defectors or rebel factions who often seek to retain a modicum of independence while concomitantly maintaining loyalty and service to the state, and confessional aligned parties are increasingly engaged in the mobilization of members. Pointedly, and related to the core of this thesis, the principal centre of power within the civil-military nexus, or the conflation of power between the two components is restructuring from the national to the sub-communal tier.

In Iraq, the Popular Mobilization Forces, which are arguably the most powerful and cohesive coercive entity within the state, has witnessed the core Shia contingents exercise very close relations with Tehran. At the extreme for example, Abu Mahdi al Muhandis, Deputy Chairman of the Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq, and former commander of the Shia militia Kata’ib Hezbollah explicitly stated, “he would and could depose the Iraqi government if ordered to do so by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei” (Roggio 2015, npn). Despite this troubling prospect, the PMF are truly an Iraqi phenomenon. Young Iraqi recruits from all strata of society answered the call to defend

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<sup>2</sup> The phrase "Tribes With Flags" is attributed to Egyptian diplomat Tahseen Bashir, when he stated, "Egypt is the only nation-state in the Arab world; the rest are just tribes with flags".

their homeland against an onslaught by the Islamic State. As a result, the armed, non-state group is increasingly active in counter-insurgency and military type operations against the Islamic State alongside the primarily Shia Iraqi “Army”.

In Libya, following the collapse of Muammar Qaddafi’s regime and the military, the situation became much worse. The state is highly fragmented and unable to establish control over the 1,700 militia currently fighting in the country (Boghani 2015, npn). Several warlords, such as General Khalifa all-Haftar command large armies and are vying for control over the state. As the Syrian civil-war took on a ‘sectarian’ colouring, the regime benefited from the emergence of militia, who serve as reinforcements for the Syrian Army and are becoming a more vital component of the government’s forces (Holliday 2013, 29). Within the Syrian Civil War, the government along with Hezbollah and pro-regime militia, fight against the Syrian opposition, Kurdish militia, and Islamist groups. While in Yemen, for example, the Popular Committee militia was sanctioned to combat Ansar al-Sharia as early as 2011 but have increasingly slipped away from government control.

Overall, within the context of fragmenting states and the dissolution of militaries, neither the reconciliation nor a consolidation of power has occurred, with indirect rule by armies increasingly devolving and or supplanted by direct militia rule and the sub-communalisation of violence. Due to the supremacy of violence in these cases, armed groups, whether conventional armies or militia, will represent the predominant purveyors of force, be it as part of the nation state, or autonomous and militarised sub-communal actors. A key distinction between a militia and the military is the former’s affiliation to the state and the institution’s state-sanctioned practice of violence. Florence Gaub underscores this difference, stating that “[t]he key feature of the military is therefore *not what they do*, but *who they are doing it for*. In essence, a military force will – and has to, if it is to function properly – build its core sense of purpose and identity around this loyalty” (Gaub 2014, 13).

The fragmentation of militaries into militias brings into question the coherence of the state and of the armed forces. To some extent, the modern Arab state is in continual contestation with supranational forces such as Al-Qaeda, Islamic State, and the *Ummah* on the one hand, and sub-national loyalties of tribe, sect, and clan on the other. Lisa Anderson situates the position of the state amongst these forces (1987, 13):

The notions of citizenship, patriotism, and love of country which undergird loyalty to the modern state frequently face competing conceptions of identity, loyalty, and legitimacy. Indeed, even state elites often find themselves better served by nonstate ideologies: the pan-Arab nationalism of the ruling Ba'th in Iraq and Syria, the international vocation of the Libyan revolution, and the Islamic republic in Iran all constitute efforts to inspire loyalty on bases--ethnicity, ideology, religion--which deny the primacy of the state as an object of fidelity.

Nazih Ayubi adds further insight into the difficulties of rooting fidelity to the state, judging “the Arab state is not a “modern ‘solidarity’, that penetrates, synthesises and surpasses other solidarities, but one that overpowers, then dissolves and replaces all other solidarities” (Ayubi 2009, 450). Due to its historical importance in the modern Arab State the military served a far greater role than other state appendages. Equally, the military has been a deciding factor of turning points or watersheds in the modern Arab state.

These realities throughout the literature review highlight interesting themes on the matter of civil-military relations in the region and more pointedly, in fragmented societies. Despite the current state of civil-military relations in the Middle East, there is a dearth of scholarship pertaining to the civil-military relationship in Arab states with fragmented societies (Barak 2010 and Barak 2011, 406). Anthony Forester suggested examining tensions “between national, sub-national and international levels of Civil-Military Relations”, and that much of the current literature employs Western models to inform the study of civil-military relations in the region (Forester 2002 84).

A broad sweep of the literature within the context of both the Western and Arab spheres reveals a longstanding trend: scholars treat the state as a given, referent object, regardless of



whether the literature examines notions of coups, military intervention in the state or security sector reform. Furthermore, the literature fails to scrutinise the nature of civil-military relations and in some respects, civil-militia relations, in fragmented states. Prior to the Arab Spring, states to include Iraq, Yemen, Libya and Syria all entailed a relatively cohesive central authority that maintained a monopoly of violence. However, the popular uprisings witnessed the dissipation of power away from the central authority and armed forces, into more communalised forms of power and violence. This process entailing the sub-communalisation of violence and dissolution of state power underscores the need to reconsider the validity of the 'state' as a concept in the nexus to entirely appreciate 'civil'-military relations in fragmented states. Furthermore, the broader literature so far has not specifically addressed civil-military relations in fragmented states, nor has the literature after 2011 acknowledged the pronounced role and impact of politically-aligned militia and sub-state actors, whom in fragmented states, are now major players in the security and political fields.

Broadly, Western conceptualizations of civil-military relations are far removed from the Weberian construct of the state in the Middle East. The ideal type has never fully equated to our understanding of civil-military relations in the Middle East, except during periods of state coherence. Yet, the Arab Spring illustrated the myth of a coherent state in the Middle East and challenged the fundamental notions of the current literature pertaining to civil-military relations. Therefore, the nature of civil-military relations must be re-conceptualised and re-thought given the dissipation of the coercive power around sub-state militia. Additionally, the new definition of civil-military relations developed in this thesis through the tribal-sectarian nexus provides not only an understanding of civil-military relations in fragmented states, but in some cases, civil-militia relations.

Overall, the thesis will move beyond Western models, and develop a new approach that is located within the strand of literature focused on civil-military relations in the Middle East.

Importantly, while the thesis does not compare the model of the tribal-sectarian nexus\_ with the theories of civil-military relations set forth by Samuel Huntington, it nonetheless acknowledges the importance of his works.

#### The 'Tribal-Sectarian' Field as a Conceptual Approach to Civil-Military Relations in Fragmented States

Joel Migdal cautions against the assumption that the Western construct of the 'state' is inevitably empirically compatible throughout the world: "What may seem as much a part of the natural order as the rivers and the mountains around us is, in fact, an artefact of a small segment of human history" (Migdal 1988, 16). Consequently, this section provides the conceptual approach of the tribal-sectarian nexus, a model that moves beyond the state-centric approaches which have historically informed the research of civil-military relations. This is particularly important in states that have fragmented and are now characterised by a weak central authority, proliferation of armed non-state actors, and the rise of sub-state allegiances. In turn, these forces challenge the political authority of the state and its ability to maintain a monopoly of violence.

Thus, the model of the tribal-sectarian nexus is an attempt to develop a prism in which to understand the relationship between non-state armed actors, fragmented militaries and the breakdown of state capacities. It aims to investigate the nature of civil-military relations taking place outside the conventional framework of the Weberian state. Such a milieu is often based upon tribal, sectarian and communal affiliations which is not covered in the broader literature, which, as previously noted, has continually coveted the supremacy of the state.

In contrast to previous scholarship, the model affirms the increasing centrality of armed, sub-state actors in the Middle East system and is the first model of civil-military relations to explicitly assert that, in fragmented polities, the state is not the fundamental point of reference in the civil-military nexus because the conceptual approach examines and emphasises notions of state fragmentation alongside the role of sub-state solidarities and non-state actors.

Importantly, the model will highlight where the 'Weberian' construct of the state has fragmented, and tribal identity, confessional loyalty, external actors and patrimonial economy might come to determine the role that coercive actors could presently play, and illuminate the factors informing the dispensation of power within the 'state'. Moreover, it will enable for the development of a holistic pattern of military fragmentation and will provide a more lucid depiction of military loyalty and the role of the institution in state cohesion and legitimacy.

Moreover, Charles Tilly's understanding of state formation outlined in *War Making and State Making as Organised Crime* enables the model of the tribal-sectarian nexus to elucidate the process of both state formation aside from state fragmentation. War making, state making, protection, and extraction are on a continuum leading to statehood. All four aspects are mutually reinforcing and depend "on the state's tendency to monopolies the concentrated means of coercion" (Tilly 1985 181). Invariably, a state's failure to control the organised means of violence indicates a regression along the continuum of state formation. Within the tribal-sectarian nexus, the sub-communalisation of violence away from the central authority and armed forces captures the process of state degradation.

More notably, the tribal-sectarian nexus, characterised by the fragmentation of state power and the sub-communalization of violence, can be used to understand the process of state formation as contented by Tilly. Indeed, Tilly notes a contestation amongst the "wielders of coercion" to establish dominance over resources and territory to consolidate power is a focal point of state formation. Warfare and the use of violence is an integral part of this process of state making by either "eliminating or neutralizing their rivals inside those territories" (Tilly 185, 181). In fragmented states, militias and their leadership constitute the wielders of coercion who are occupied with establishing a monopoly of violence establish and progressing along the continuum of state formation. Empirically, the sub-state actors and affiliated militia in Yemen, Iraq, and Libya

exemplifying the nature of contestation to control territory and resources as espoused by Tilly to establish the monopoly of violence and establish governance.

Conceptually, the framework draws upon the ideas developed by Uzi Rabi in his book *The Emergence of States in a Tribal Society: Oman under Sa'id Bin Taymur* to inform an understanding of this 'new' political environment of the tribal-sectarian nexus. Rabi examined the formation of the Omani political arena within the context of an association between powerful tribes and efforts by the state to centralise authority. The research attempted to underscore the delicate balancing act of centralizing state authority while engaging with a powerful tribal periphery, in what he referred to as the 'Unified Tribal State', which failed to gain total supremacy over the tribal environs (Rabi 2006, 90). Based on this conclusion, Rabi determined that "[t]he state should not be seen as an independent political actor but rather as a 'political field,' i.e., an arena in which diverse actors compete for influence and resources. Political landscapes in this context should not be seen in a fully-fledged 'Weberian' manner, dominated by a rational bureaucratic model" (Rabi 2006, 3). Importantly, the 'state' within this political field continually fluctuates between "weakness and strength, and between losing or acquiring state attributes, or "stateness""(ibid). The ability of the central authority to exercise a monopoly of violence is a fundamental attribute of 'stateness'.

Similarly, In *Strong Societies and Weak States*, Migdal examines the nature of political interactions that fail to emerge within the construct of the sovereign state. In turn, the state is conceptualised as "a mélange of social organizations", with ethnic sectarian, cultural, and state-based institutions denoting these societal clusters (Migdal 1988, 14). The focal point of Migdal's model is the ever-present contestation between the 'state' and social organizations for social control and the indulgence of power. In this political field, innumerable societal actors compete for resources and power in a political environment whereby "the state is one organization among many" (Migdal 1988, 28). In this regard, the state is not framed as a monolithic entity, since

counter forces can stymie these 'states' efforts to entirely consolidate power. Accordingly, the state and actors within the polity shouldn't necessarily be held a priori; that is to say, there is a constant interplay amongst the forces whereby "[s]tates may help mould, but they are also continually moulded by, the societies within which they are embedded" (Migdal et al 1994, 2).

In this line of understanding, the "state is not always ontologically distinct from non-state actors" and the conflict taking hold in fragmented polities "is better understood as a struggle over who controls the state, rather than as a conflict between the state and a non-state actor" (Claussen 2018, 561). Consequently, these notions will enable the framework to elucidate not only the role of tribes, but a myriad of social actors, such as the emergence of armed non-state actors, in addition to the military. Through these notions, it can also be clarified how the interplay of such societal clusters not only shape the contours of state and society, but the institutional dynamics of the monopolies of violence.

Military cohesion, as applied within the thesis, is partly derived from a 1984 National Defence University study, *Cohesion in the US Military*. Specifically, the study understands cohesion as "the bonding together of members of an organization/unit in such a way as to sustain their will and commitment to each other, their unit, and the mission" (Johns, et al. 1984, 9). Therefore, military fragmentation is understood within the context of this definition, while state collapse is noted by the decline over the monopoly of violence, or the collapse of the Weberian state construct.

Historically, the sub-state actors and solidarities revolving around tribes, religious sectarianism and ethnicity have been powerful forces across the Middle East. Conceptually, Iraq and Yemen are societies in which the sub-state loyalties emanating from the tribe, sectarianism and other communal identities have had significant value throughout history. Ethnic, sectarian and tribal forces can have a direct impact on military cohesion and the nature of power in the

tribal-sectarian nexus. In this regard, military disintegration and the decline of the central authority provides the space for armed, non-state actors and sub-state solidarities to gain power. The rising prominence of these actors and associated loyalties “call into the question the political authority of states and their continuing monopoly on legitimate violence” (Berzins and Cullen 2003, 11). Indeed, this problem becomes pronounced within fragmented states, where the sub-communalisation of violence has often eclipsed state-sanctioned monopolies of violence.

Broadly speaking, tribes have played a fundamental role in the process of state formation across the Middle East and continue to remain important political, economic and military actors across the region. In cases such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Yemen and Libya, the emerging states “failed to form completely centralised bureaucracies and therefore a monopoly of authority” (Khoury & Kostiner 1991, 15). Ostensibly, state fragmentation will provide tribes with more power relative to the central authority. This is even more noticeable in fragmented states where the decline of state power has given rise to more traditional forms of solidarity and social organization. However, because the term ‘tribe’ has been used to characterise a number of social organizations or groups, a precise “all-encompassing definition is virtually impossible to produce” (Ibid. 5). However, tribal solidarity and the ability of the tribe to act as a unified organization are two aspects this thesis will incorporate into the model. The notion of kinship, in conjunction with the cohesive power of solidarity, result in the tribe best understood as a polity.

The notion of tribal solidarity is a fundamental component of the tribal groupings across the Middle East. At the basic level, a myth of common ancestry formed the initial foundation for tribal solidarity. In certain cases, tribal fidelity serves as a stronger sense of deferential respect and consciousness which supplants and surpasses that of national identity of the territorial state. In this regard, while the tribe as a social organization is waning, Tibi argues that “the tribe as a referent for social identity and loyalty has persisted” (Tibi 128, 1990).

The persistence of this loyalty and social identity has arguably enabled the tribe to remain politically unified and therefore an important actor within the state. Additionally, tribal forces and the modern state have historically battled over internal sovereignty and legitimacy. For example, within the nation-state, an essential element of political legitimacy and internal sovereignty is predicated on the “notion of citizenship which presupposes transforming tribal, and in general, prenational ties into a national identity and loyalty” (Tibi 1990, 127). The steadfast nature of tribal identity and fidelity proved problematic as a competing form of identity against the state and as such, tribal affiliations and loyalty can erode the cohesiveness of the state (Kostiner 2008, 22-23). However, tribes are not fundamentally opposed to the central authority, nor are they organizationally structured in a hierarchal manner. As such, “[t]ribal leaders, or sheikhs, do not have unconditional authority over their tribes or their members”, and consequently, a “sheikh’s legitimacy and authority depend on his ability to provide for his constituents” (Al-Dawsari 2018, 19). In this regard, sheikhs can benefit from a patron-client relationship to ensure tribal cohesion, among other methods beyond traditional legitimacy.

Patron-client relations are also a key component of tribe-state relations. The modern state endeavoured to envelop the tribes into the patrimonial system. As Kahled Fattah explains, “[t]he contemporary relations between tribes and state institutions in the Arab world are expressed, mainly, through relationships of patronage and clientism between influential tribal sheikhs and political elites” (Fattah 2012, npn). This patron-client relationship arguably manifests not out of the benevolence of the leader, but rather because of the significant role tribes perform in the political and social order within the state. Furthermore, in economic terms, a tribal sheikh can sustain power by distributing patronage and maintaining the overall welfare of his tribe. In this regard, tribal solidarity can be motivated by the distribution of resources or assets to the tribal leader who in turn can deliver his tribe as a unified whole.

Aside from tribalism, sectarianism and communal identities have increasingly become a durable and emotive solidarity, providing a platform for rallying the masses as the central authority and coercive institutions decay and ultimately collapse. In this regard, sub-state solidarities become more salient as the cohesion and power of the central authority declines. However, it should be noted that sectarianism has morphed into the filter of choice, whereby the outside world endeavours to understand the Middle East and the perceived Sunni-Shia divide. Sectarianism, however, is a societal fault line like racial or tribal divides.

In this regard, sectarianism and communalism are better understood as a group identity structured along communal lines. The saliency of sub-state solidarities can mould the edifice of state-appendages. Importantly, the sectarianization of such institutions can occur when “religious identity is politicised [...] as part of an obvious struggle for power (Makdisi 2008, 559). Accordingly, “if the structure of a political system permits the use of identity mobilization for political gain or rewards for engaging in identity politics”, such a system will foster the mobilization of identities (Nasr 2000, 173). Thus, the agency of sectarian rhetoric and ethnic identities for mobilization purposes will inevitably provoke allegiances and affiliations around those communal flags.

This agency of communal identities (tribal, ethnic and sectarian) can be greatly exacerbated following the decline of the central authority. To be sure, when examining the cohesion of the Arab states after 2003, Asher Susser argues that, “Arabs have returned to the warm and familiar embrace of tradition and the primordial identities of family, tribes and religious community in the hopes of finding some relief” (Susser 2008, 10). Importantly, the rise of traditional and primordial identities has witnessed the decline of “secular nationalism in both its pan-Arab (*qawmniyya*) and nation-state (*wataniyya*) forms” (ibid).

The nature of warfare within the tribal-sectarian nexus\_ is characterised as a battlefield coalesced around “varying combinations of networks of state and non-state actors” (Kaldor 2013,



2). Within this milieu of 'new wars', "ethnic, religious or tribal" considerations are the motivation for societal segments vying in war (ibid). In line with Susser, Kaldor argues the saliency of sub-state identities results from "the erosion of more inclusive (often state-based) political ideologies like socialism or post-colonial nationalism" (ibid). The 'state', in accordance with the 'new' contours of the battlespace, illustrates a devolution of state capabilities, institutional strength and cohesion at the hands of sub-state actors and solidarities.

The second frame of a patrimonial economy, as employed in this thesis, focuses on the role of patronage, the institutionalization of corruption and criminality, alongside the importance of 'Warlordism'. Accordingly, the patrimonial economy approach within the framework is "concerned with the interaction of political and economic processes in a society. It focuses on the distribution of power and wealth between different groups and individuals, and on the processes that create, sustain and transform these relationships over time" (Collinson 2003, 10). It deals with the level of corruption, criminality and patronage that underpins the modes and means of exchange between elites and militia, or armed, non-state actors.

Based on this understanding, patronage, or the distribution of material incentives in exchange for loyalty, is a focal aspect in understanding the patrimonial economy of the sub-communalisation of violence. In this regard, patrimonial economy is utilised to illustrate how the 'state' organises and distributes the nation's wealth, along with how this wealth can also be manipulated by non-state actors to secure loyalties and fortify their own power. In such environments, "[t]he system as a whole is held together by the oath of loyalty, or by kinship ties (often symbolic and fictitious) rather than by a hierarchy of administrative grades and functions" (Clapham 1985, 48). In this system, a specific relationship of mutual exchange can be described as either patronage, clientelism or patron-clientelism (Lemarchand & Legg 1972, 151-152). During times of state coherence, this system entails the regime "distributing jobs and money in exchange for loyalty from its citizens" (Bank & Schlumberger 2004, 51). Consequently, loyalty and political

acquiescence in this environment are established through the distribution of resources or through acts of corruption and criminality.

This is witnessed with regards to the military's corporate interests in the state economy. Scholars have established that the economic interests of the officer corps can determine the institution's connection to the ruling elite and responses to periods of upheavals (Finer 1962, 72-84) (Nordlinger 1977, 65-66) and (Cook 2007, 65-66). And yet, few studies have systematically applied patrimonial economy as a method to illustrate the impact on military cohesion and the dispensation of power. Indeed, the military and constituent officer class within the Arab World have historically enjoyed some degree of penetration into the corporate endeavours and economic affairs of the state, although at the behest of the ruling elite in return for their unwavering loyalty (Springborg 2011, 397).

Consequently, the marriage of certain segments of the officer class with commercial interests in the state economy, and indulgence in illicit economic activity, is an institutional privilege enabled by the regime elites and political authority. At the very least, permissible environments that foster endemic corruption will prove to adversely impact the institutional cohesion and the capability of the armed forces. In some instances, such practices serve to erode traditional solidarities to the nation-state in favour of economic considerations. In turn, the officer corps and military formations can expect to consider access to economic privileges, survival of illicit streams of income, and corporate holdings when calculating the relationship with the regime during periods of socio-political uncertainty and warfare.

The nature of criminality that has emerged in the post-Cold War global setting is one that coincided with a change from ideologically driven insurgencies to those based on economic motives. Criminal insurgencies "*have their own* economic gain as motive" (Snow 1996, 56). In this vein, warlords and other actors are concerned more with economic enrichment as opposed to

enacting political or social goals. Smuggling, bribery, the illicit production of goods and other activities are broadly practiced. These instances have become, to varying degrees, institutionalised to garner authority and maintain coercive power. This is particularly evident following state collapse and accords with the fact that, in the tribal-sectarian nexus, informal modes of power and economic exchange overshadow formal government institutions and rule-based procedures dictating political and economic transitions in the Western world.

Warlordism is an integral component of the sub-communalisation of violence and the dissolution of state power. In such an environment, warlords are one of the myriad non-state actors (Kaldor 2013, 2). The nature of warlordism is characterised by a leader who both exercises considerable economic and military strength and can mobilise manpower for combat. This is important because the study holds the 'state' to be on an equal playing field relative to other societal actors, and Warlords in this sense exercise 'civil' power and command large militia that often eclipse the militia of the 'state'. This leader will also have a great amount of autonomy relative to the central authority (Freeman 2015, 179).

Warlords can often be former regime elites, who utilise their wealth and networks of patronage to maintain armed militia in the wake of state fragmentation. Consequently, patronage is useful when discerning patterns of solidarity. As witnessed in cases such as Somalia, Afghanistan and other areas, the disintegration of the political centre and weakening of security institutions incubates the emergence of warlordism. The thesis will hold the advent of warlordism to be more pronounced following the elite fragmentation of a patrimonial state, or one in which patrimonialism and patron-client relations heavily influence the nature of power and authority. Part of this has to do with how the regime and the army fragmented in Yemen, and the role of patronage and according nature of loyalties in this process. Under these circumstances, the political authority and military power of the state dissolves into the periphery and around sub-groups of former regime elites.

Lastly, studies of civil-military relations in the Arab World have not explicitly examined how external actors impact military cohesion and the fragmentation of state power. However, the feeble nature of loyalties, and cohesion in the 'tribal-sectarian' field, means that external actors are positioned to influence and impact military cohesion and the dispensation of power in several ways. In this regard, the research will examine the role and impact of the foreign actors in altering the overall civil-military relationship in Iraq and Yemen. Primarily, external actors impact the civil-military relationship by implementing policies of military reform, alongside the process of political development and distribution of rents and resources. Moreover, foreign powers can directly influence the process of sectarianization, communalisation and impact tribal solidarity in ways which have positively, or adversely impacted the basis of civil-military relations in Iraq and Yemen. In this regard, external powers can introduce societal realignment, or a shift in the structures of power, by fundamentally altering the centres of power and those who access the levers of power.

## **Chapter 2: An Historical Overview of Civil-Military Relations in Iraq**

### Introduction

This chapter provides a military-centric historical introduction of the army in the Republic of Iraq and traces the trajectory of the institution's development. Accordingly, the chapter underscores the relationship of the forces amongst the state and society. To achieve the broader objective of providing a conventional understanding of the civil-military nexus in Iraq, the chapter will delineate the historical roots of the formation of the military. Political nature of the officer corps, and the ideational currents of the institution will be examined to gain an understanding of the organization's relationship and loyalty to the regime. The chapter will introduce segments of the conceptual approach within the context of the 'tribal-sectarian' field and lay the foundation to understand the 'state' component in the military nexus.

This section will examine the broader nature of the civil-military relationship existing in Iraq from the British mandate period (1919) until Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in 2003. As one of the

first state-erected institutions, the Army played an integral role in nation and state building, and the officer class came to embrace Iraqi nationalism. Over time, however, the Iraqi Army (IA) conducted a successive number of coups and attempted coups. Subjective political control, under the Baath Party and the rule of President Saddam Hussein, exerted enough political control over the officer corps to ensure the subordination of the institution to the regime and person of Saddam Hussein. Importantly, on the eve of the invasion, the institution existed as a patrimonial army heavily influenced by political, sectarian and tribal allegiances.

### Colonial Beginnings and Nation-Building

Shortly before his death, King Faisal I (1921-33) lamented “[i]n my opinion...an Iraqi people does not yet exist” (Batatu 1978, 25-6). During the preceding twelve years, the government of the United Kingdom attempted to establish an overarching identity adhered to by all strata of Iraqi society. This task involved the amalgamation of a diverse peoples, whom, under the Ottoman Empire, witnessed sub-state solitaries form the basic unit of social organization (Zubaida 2000, 364). This undertaking of the seemingly arduous creation of ‘Iraq’ amounted to the British imposing a state and building a nation against the backdrop of the 1920 rebellion instigated by tribesmen, Shia and Sunni clerics and Kurdish tribes, amongst a diverse group that engaged in conflict against one another. Inheriting the throne of Iraq in 1921, the politically attuned Faisal understood the need to garner an all-encompassing identity connecting Iraq’s mosaic of societal actors, which in turn, would imbue the nascent monarch with a modicum of legitimacy and ensure his political longevity. While he desired the establishment of a military to motivate this process, other forms of coercion initially took precedent.

During the formative years of the Iraq Mandate, the British government relied on two armed formations to safeguard the internal stability of the Iraq Mandate. One important formation was the Iraqi Levies, a brigade sized contingent of primarily Assyrian Arabs, which represented the first indigenous force to appear within the Iraq Mandate. British officers

commanded the Levies, and the soldiers in turn displayed loyalty to the Crown, as opposed to 'Iraq' (Tarbush 1982, 76). However, the Royal Air Force emerged as an important asset for the British, who used airpower to fortify the territorial integrity of the Iraqi Mandate and maintain internal order. This procedure of 'air policing', in the words of British Premier Winston Churchill, proved instrumental in "enforcing the maintenance of order", and the adhesive binding Iraq together, a notion iterated by Secretary of State for the Colonies Leo Amery in 1925: "[i]f the aeroplanes were removed tomorrow, the whole structure [of Iraq] would inevitably fall to pieces" (Sluglett 1976, 270).

While the British and levies held responsibility for Iraq's sovereign, The Cairo Conference in March of 1921 determined the need to establish an army capable of ensuring internal stability and security. Furthermore, a strong IA would allow for Britain to spend as little financial resources as necessary in the safeguarding of Iraq (Stansfield 2007, 44). The chief concern of the British High Commissioner revolved around the formation of an army that was numerically small yet efficient: one that could ensure internal order and domestic stability. Great Britain's fiscal health following the First World War, and a desire to reach a solution allowing for an absolute minimum troop presence drove this desire. In turn, this would save the Treasury precious resources.

During this period of institutional and national consensus building, substantial attention was thus centred upon efforts to establish an army capable of not only forming an unanimity regarding national identity, but also guarding the internal integrity of the burgeoning state. During the transition into post-Ottoman governance, the army represented the only truly modern institution and vanguard for projects of modernization, due in large part to the role of King Faisal I and countless ex-Ottoman officers proliferating the military bureaucracy of the state. The officer corps constituted one of the most "educated, experienced and worldly layer of the [Iraqi] population" (Al-Khalil 1989, 165), and thus possessed the traits necessary to guide the process of state and nation building. The cadre of ex-Ottoman officers understood that the first order of

business regarding state-building was “the creation of a strong and autonomous army” (Dodge 2003a, 138).

King Faisal I himself acknowledged the difficult task of “imbuing this [Iraq] human mosaic with a national Iraqi identity” (Dawisha 1999, 554), and envisioned the army as the backbone of nation-building (Batatu 1979, 765). The military represented the only state institution capable of introducing acculturation, whereby “[r]ecruits with traditional backgrounds must learn about a new world in which they are identified with a larger political self” (Pye 1961, 82-3). The military would provide all Iraqis with “a sense of cohesion and social solidarity because men of various regional and ethnic backgrounds are given a common experience” (Janowitz 1977, 157). However, the initial integration of around 640 ex-Ottoman soldiers into the officer corps began the process of a Sunni-Arab dominance within the officer corps (Davis 2005, 56). Most of these Sunnis came from the upper echelons of the Sharifian Army, while the other ex-Ottoman officers entered “not because of any particular loyalty to the new state or its regime [...] but simply because they were the only Iraqis with military qualifications” (Heller 1977, 82). Lacklustre recruitment resulted from a weak ‘national spirit’, along with higher salaries provided to members of His Majesty’s indigenous force, the Levies (Tarbush 1982, 84-5).

King Faisal I advocated for the introduction of conscription to generate more manpower and aid in the formation of a professional and national institution. The King hoped that conscription might dissolve sub-state loyalties in favour of a unifying fidelity to the nation-state (Parasiliti & Antoon 132, 2000). However, domestic opposition, and British trepidation surrounding the issue, meant conscription remained on the political back burner for over a decade (Sluglett 1972, 142-54). London understood the inevitable opposition to conscription within the Iraqi Mandate, and specifically from the tribes, and proved unwilling to ‘coerce’ the tribes into the Army under a framework of conscription.

Despite the failure to immediately enact conscription, the 1930s witnessed an uptick in recruitment and resulted in a substantial amount of Shia and minority recruits (Tarbush 1982, 79). However, recruitment into the officer corps disproportionately favoured Sunnis (Hashim 2003, 31) and continued to do so over the coming decade. For example, in 1936, a sample of sixty-one officers demonstrated two were Christian, one was a Shia while the remaining officers were Sunni-Arabs (Tarbush 1982, 80-2). More importantly, the military remained a far-cry from the King's vision of a nationally cohesive institution subordinate to a strong state because ethnic, class and cultural leanings greatly influenced a soldiers' loyalty (ibid. 120). The integration of officers from the Ottoman Army hindered any possibility of an Iraqi identity from emerging, as a substantial portion of the officers adhered to Arab nationalism. Based on this, the military became "inculcated with a Sunni Arab vision of nationalism" (Stansfield 2007, 84).

Arab nationalism within the military and state came to represent the "political, economic and cultural exclusion of the bulk of the populace from public life" (Davis 2005, 55). However, this Arab Nationalism aligned more closely with the exclusionary Iraqi nationalism, acknowledging Sunni Arabs as the most important segment of society, as opposed to sharing any ideological strain with the notions of Arab Nationalism later propagated by Nasser. As a result, portions of society in opposition to this narrow nationalist discourse faced violent retribution from the state and military. However, neither the Sunni-Kurdish nor Shia populations would suffer the repercussions of failing to embrace Sunni-Arab nationalism; instead, the small Assyrian community would be the first to experience the army's wrath in its perceived role as the guardian of Iraqi national identity.

Animosity towards the Assyrian community stemmed from the group's innumerable presence within the Levies, which was despised by the Iraqi Army (al-Marashi & Salama 2008, 32), and conflation with a larger conspiracy by the British to re-establish territorial control over Northern Iraq (Tripp 2007, 78). Further tension also emanated from the desire for autonomy and



unwillingness to amalgamate into the wider project of nation-building. Both issues galvanised discontent towards the Assyrian population. Deep seated resentment left the community vulnerable to aggressive reprisals which materialised during a four-day period in August of 1933. The army emerged from the Assyrian Affair as a symbol of national independence and unity (Simon 2004, 114). More importantly, the use of force underscored the Arab nationalist outlook of the army and its willingness to crush perceived threats to national cohesion (Stansfield 2007, 85).

The Assyrian Affair emboldened the army to continue along the path as guarantor of domestic stability. Two years later in 1935-1936, the IA embarked on a campaign against another perceived threat to national-cohesion: the tribal groupings within the North and South of the state. Pointedly, the Iraqi tribes in those territories refused to comply with conscription or in certain circumstances, abandoning their military positions if ordered to confront fellow tribesmen in combat as members of the Iraqi Army (Al-Marashi & Salama 2008, 34). Loyalty of the tribesmen therefore proved problematic. Additionally, at this juncture, the tribes in those areas enjoyed a marked degree of autonomy, like “mobile mini-states commanding military might” (Jabar 2000, 28), and impeding the army from embracing its assumed role as a national unifier (Davis 2005, 60).

Overall, the period of the early 1930s witnessed technocratic or military solutions applied to seemingly political problems; in other words, civilian politicians unleashed the army unto segments of Iraqi society deemed a threat to internal security. In turn, the government’s increased dependence on the repressive role of the army resulted in a measured decline of civilian control over the officer corps (Tarbush 1982, 120). This, in conjunction with the emergent nature of Iraq’s political structures, increased frustration of the officer corps, and the enfeebled nature of the monarchy laid the foundation for military involvement into the Iraqi political landscape (Parasiliti 2001, 84). This confluence of factors came to a head in October of 1936 and ushered in

the Arab World's first coup d'état instigated by the Assyrian Affair's lead Provocateur, Colonel Bakr Sidiqi.

Over the next half-decade, the army held the role of 'arbitrator' over the Iraqi political landscape whereby the Officer Corps may not have directly dominated the institutions of the state, but nonetheless exercised power "by virtue of their actual or threatened use of force" (Nordlinger 1977, 2). In this environment, civilian rule was fragile at best and dependent on the decree of the officer corps. Moreover, the period of 1935-41 witnessed profound political instability, one that was underscored by the innumerable encroachments of the officer corps into the political arena, which became the defining characteristic of Iraqi politics. The proliferation of coups transcended conventional political strife and materialised due to an "internecine ideological struggle" flowing within the officer corps (Simon 2004, 118), which had expanded from 12,000 in 1932 to around 43,000 in 1941 (Tripp 2007, 76). The numerical expansion of the Iraqi military continued to alter the very nature and ideational edifice of the officer corps. This rendered the officer corps susceptible to wide-ranging influences emanating from inside Iraq, the wider-Arab world, and Europe.

The 1941 coup d'état was notably different from those in the past in that, while preceding coups entailed the removal of civilian leadership, the conspirators of the 1941 coup d'état, led by the civilian Rashid 'Ali and a cadre of officers known as the 'Golden Four', sought to usurp and subsequently re-orientate the dispensation of power by dislodging the pro-British monarchy (Tripp 2007, 100). In this regard, the Golden Four subscribed to a fervent Iraqi Nationalist stance underpinned by anti-colonialist sentiment. Inevitably, the putsch constituted a strategic threat to London, partly because of the close cooperation between Iraqi officers and Nazi Germany and necessitated the Anglo-Iraqi War. British intervention resulted in the restoration of the potentate of 'Abd al-Ilah' and solidified British occupation of Iraq until 1947. A general shift within the officer corps occurred throughout this period. Despite a relative ethno-sectarian homogeneity amongst

the officer class (Sunni-Arabs), discernible ideological fissures emerged surrounding pan-Arabism, Communism, 'Iraqi first', and even Nasserism. However, the officer corps found a common-ground in a shared animosity towards the power exercised by the British (Al-Marashi & Salama 2008, 69). Consequently, opposition to British influence constituted the greatest unifying force within Iraq at this time (Stansfield & Anderson 2005, 2).

The nationalist officers that played a decisive role in the numerous coups and counter-coups had receded into a clandestine existence, only to emerge from the shadows in 1958 to deal the Monarchy a coup de grâce after three and half decades in power. The July 14th Revolution of 1958 transformed the existing political order, inaugurating in not only a republican regime, but more importantly a military dictatorship led by the coup's primary conspirator, General Abed al-Karim Qasim. During the following decade, the dispensation of power flowed from the officer corps who subordinated civilians to the military and governed Iraq as "ruler-type praetorians" (Nordlinger 1977, 26-8).

#### The Party and The Army

Baathist ideology spread into Iraq in the 1940s and morphed into the Iraqi Branch of the Arab Baath Socialist Party in 1952. Over time the Party came to view itself as "the vanguard and leader of the 'Arab Revolution'" (Baram 1983, 188). By 1962, the Party had effectively infiltrated the political and security institutions of Iraq with a cadre of loyalists. The permeation of these networks enabled the Party to solidify enough power to launch a coup in 1963, which provided the nascent Baath Party with a glimpse of political power, only to be usurped nine-months later by Arab Nationalist officers who had originally assisted in the coup. As a key figure within the Party, Saddam Hussein contemplated the Baath removal from power over the next five years and determined the need for a cohesive political party, one with control over the institutions required to centralise political power, along with the subordination of the military. Hussein understood the

latter as the most important because controlling the machinery of the state required the full subordination of its coercive institutions (Chubin & Tripp 1988, 19).

Baath Party members-maintained networks of influence within the officer corps, despite their removal from power. One important patronage network was situated around tribal networks of Takrit and came to be referred to as the 'Takriti Connection'. Historically, Takriti tribesmen represented a sizable portion of officer candidates before and after the monarchy (Baram 2003, 94). In addition, many Takriti tribesmen infiltrated the military in the aftermath of the February 1963 Coup and were elevated into positions of power following the 1968 Coup. In this sense, the key leaders of the July 1968 Coup hailed from Takriti, and in turn, precipitated a Takriti usurpation of power against Iraqi President Abdul Rahman Arif (Hashim 2003, 17). Once the Baathists consolidated political power through a secondary coup enacted on July 30th, 1968, the dispensation of power became concentrated within the five-man Revolutionary Command Council (RCC). The RCC signified the ultimate decision-making apparatus following the coup and acted as a 'guardian council', designed to ensure the subordination of the officer corps. Importantly, three of the five RCC members were from Takriti and included: President Ahmad Hasan Bakr al-Takriti, Salih Mahdi Ammash, Hardan al-Takriti, Saadun Ghaydan and Hammad Shihab al-Takriti.

The composition of the RCC illustrated a prominent trend whereby tribal networks and kinship relations bulwarked the Party in the immediate aftermath of the coup. Consequently, the Iraqi officer corps began to emerge as an institution in which tribal relations were instrumental in officer placements and promotions. While adhering to the Sunni-Muslim Faith proved important in some respects, tribal connections ultimately dictated the edifice of the officer corps. Despite the prominence of Takriti tribesmen, a demonstrated fealty to the Baath Party was equally (if not more) important.

While the 1968 revolution highlighted the role of the military as the arbitrator of power in Iraq, the dispensation increasingly shifted towards civilian rule. Standing firmly at the helm of politics, the Baath Party envisaged a 'return to the barracks' for the army (Jabar 2003a, 116). To consign the army to the barracks, a model of civil-military relations emerged, exemplified by political control over the armed forces and enacted through: indoctrination, oversight by security forces, the dispersion of Party members amongst the military hierarchy, and control over officer selection and promotion (Janowitz 1977, 80).

As "the power behind the throne" (Stansfield & Anderson 2004, 51) and party 'strongman', the then Vice President Saddam Hussein played a direct role in orchestrating rotations, purges, and forced retirements. As General Ra'ad Hamdani notes in an interview, the Party was attuned to the threat emanating from Israel following the June 1967 War, which influenced Party-Military relations in that while Party officials desired to promote party loyalists within the army, they "did not sacrifice the level of military professionalism during the time of crisis" [...] stating "our slogan at the time was 'Better a good soldier than a good Ba'athist'" (Woods et al 2009, 24). Maj. Gen. Aladdin Hussein Makki Khamas reaffirms the nature of early Party-Military relations during the Presidency of General al-Bakr: "we did not feel the pressure of politics and ideology as strongly as we did under Saddam," [and while] "both placed party loyalists in key positions and purged the army" [...] "Bakr did not do it to the extreme that Saddam did" (Woods et al 2011, 16). Importantly, the 'Baathification' of the military and broader officer class succeeded in supplanting primordial ties and solidarities throughout the rule of President Hussein. The totalitarian model utilised Baathism and pan-Arabism as the ideology to subsume society.

According to Nordlinger, when enacting political penetration, the civilian government strives to "obtain loyalty and obedience by penetrating the armed forces with political ideas and political personnel" (Nordlinger 1977, 15). With respect to the Baath Party, the RCC served as the initial mechanism to ensure the regulation and elimination of detractors within the government,

society, and the armed forces (Perlmutter 1977, 136). The Baath Party Military Bureau, an ancillary component of the RCC, developed a plan and overarching framework to guide and monitor the political and ideological currents circulating within the military, guaranteeing the project of ideological inculcation continued in a persistent manner (Tripp & Chubin 1988, 19).

In 1972, Hussein cultivated a comprehensive security partnership with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R), resulting in The 1972 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, which in turn served to impact and shape the contours of Iraq's Army, as well as intelligence bureaucracies, and assist in the ideological subordination of the officer corps. The Directorate of Political Guidance established the following year (Bengio 2002, 149), mirrored the main political administration of the Soviet military and sought to emulate the role and function of the political commissar or *zampolits*. Accordingly, loyal Baathist minders proliferated the organizational structure of the Iraqi Army, with the mandate to disseminate and indoctrinate the Party diktat (Simon 2004, 168). However, Hashim underscores the inherent futility regarding attempts at total ideological indoctrination of the military, observing that "[t]otalitarian regimes never achieve complete control over the armed forces; they simply cannot attain ideological uniformity among the officer corps" (Hashim 2003, 35).

Concurrent with the implementation of the political commissar system was the emergence of a mammoth and seemingly omnipotent intelligence apparatus. Again, party officials looked towards the U.S.S.R, whose Committee for State Security (K.G.B.) directed the training, equipping, and overall expansion of Iraq's growing internal intelligence organs, while the Military Intelligence Directorate (G.R.U.) coordinated similar efforts with their military counterparts *Estikhabarat* (Al-Khalil 1989, 12-13). Intelligence organs operating within the Baathist state proved integral in taming the military, albeit in a more nuanced role that focused not on the promulgation of Baathist ideology, but conventional tasks such as cultivating networks of informants keen to ferret out and report on potential subversive elements within the military.

A commensurate expansion of 'counter-coup' forces occurred during this period with the development of paramilitaries and 'parallel armies' serving as an additional ballast to the conventional armed forces (Kamrava 2000, 82). Despite an impressive force posture, the highly ideological Popular Army lacked, by design, the other essential measures of military capability: modernization, sustainability, and readiness. In this light, the organization proved more valuable in its primary function as a counter-coup force, and was "the party-based, party-led mass alternative to the regular army" (Quinlivan 1999, 144). The paramilitary force operated as a "pedagogical value as a counterbalance to the army" (Al-Khalil 1989, 31). The revered Republican Guard (RG), on the other hand, acted as President Hussein's praetorian force, and in this respect constituted a proper counter-coup force (Quinlivan 1999, 146).

The Baath penetration of the military and certain subordination to the state allowed for Hussein to expand and modernise the military into one of the most powerful armed forces in the region (Tripp & Chubin 1988, 18). The nationalization of oil in 1972 aided in this desire and resulted in a substantial rise in revenues, increasing even further following the 1973 oil embargo (Stansfield & Anderson 2004, 55). As a rentier state flush with cash, Iraq enjoyed the privilege of amassing an impressive military apparatus without the requirement of funds accrued through the taxation of society (Stansfield 2007, 95-6). The Party quickly capitalised on oil wealth to exponentially increase defence spending to a level unmatched by other Arab states at the time, rising from \$764 million in 1970 to \$1.57 billion four years later. By the following year, 40 percent of GDP or around \$2 billion was allocated towards arms procurement (Tripp 2007, 206).

The Iraqi military adopted Soviet weaponry during this period of armament and sought to emulate Soviet military culture and doctrine. The Party procured an array of advanced Soviet weapon systems to include tanks, surface-to-air missile systems and heavy artillery pieces (al-Marashi & Salama 2008, 123). Organizationally, junior officers, as opposed to non-commissioned officers (NCO), formed the backbone of the military (Eisenstadt & Pollack 2003, 85) and thus the

IA never possessed a true NCO corp. The Iraqi Army expanded from 100,000 soldiers in 1973 to over 220,000 a mere five years later (Devlin 1985, 132), and experienced a force transformation unknown in any other Arab state at the time (Hashim 2003, 26), into a strong military institution and into a key regional player.

Saddam accelerated the Baathification of the military after becoming president in 1979. As a tribesman without proper military training, the Iraqi leader believed that “Bedouin tribal courage and loyalty” amalgamated with the core principles of Baathism determined the merit of an Iraqi officer (Woods et al 2011, 14-30). Party loyalists experienced rapid promotion in the ranks up to the divisional level, while professional officers commanded corps and worked at the military’s staff level (Woods et al 2011, 25). Tribal and regional affiliations emerged as important factors regarding access to the corridors of power within the intelligence and security structures of the state. The most well-known example, as previously noted, was that of the Takriti connection, whose kinship had enjoyed prominence within the army since its inception (Sakai 2003, 139-40). The clan’s historical longevity in the officer class was largely because it managed to avoid the consequences of the innumerable purges in the post-monarchy period (van Dam 1980, 48-9). Individuals from Takrit’s environs of Baiji, Rawa, and Al-Dour, in addition to Nasiriya had tribesmen within not only the political but also security structures of the Baathist state (Jabar 2003a, 116). Specifically, the tribal cohorts proliferated the RG and later the Special Republican Guard (SRG), and eventually formed the tribal nucleus of Iraq’s security sector (Baram 1997, 5 & 2003, 96).

The elevation of tribal kin to the corridors of power generated “a merger between the family and the party, with the former using the latter as a vehicle to control the country” (Aburish 2000, 161-2). As noted, the Takriti connection denoted the epicentre of power in Iraq, in the sense that loyalty and promotions within the military were determined by tribal affiliations. To this end, Baathism represented a broader legitimizing agent and ideology to cohere the state, while the



power itself was exercised by a coterie of tribal kinsman. At the same time, tribal, regional and sectarian affinities often overlapped, and it is thus difficult to discern how pronounced of a role each played regarding personnel appointments across the broader political and security structures of the state.

While the IA focused on internal defence during the rule of King Faisal I, under President Hussein, the mandate of the military centred on the defence of the following: regime, territorial integrity and the Arab Nation. In effect, the Baathification of the army ensured the officer corps remained beholden to a party controlled and propagated ideology. This form of ideological indoctrination eradicated any space for other ideals to prosper outside the control of the Baath Party. Thus, a 'Baathified' military ultimately came to represent an 'ideological army' subordinate to the Party. However, and regardless of ethnic, sectarian or tribal affiliations, membership with the Baath Party was a prerequisite for becoming an officer. This makes it difficult to assess whether Saddam did create an ideological army or did indeed 'Baathify' the officer corps. Much like being a member of the Nazi Party in Germany, Ba'ath Party affiliation provided citizens with upward mobility in the social, economic and political spheres in Iraq, and did not necessarily mean a member was an ardent believer in the principles of Arab Socialism. As with Hitler in Germany, ultimately loyalty rested with Saddam Hussein.<sup>3</sup>

The nature of party-military relations in this period of Iraqi history (1968-1978) contrasted to the Western model of civil-military relations. Among other differences, two key components of this model are premised on: the recognition of the division of labour amongst the political and military elites, and allowing the military to carry out its own affairs as a professional body absent from the interjection of political bias, such as the promotion or appointment of officers because of fidelity to the party or politics (Nordlinger 1977, 13). However, many consummate

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<sup>3</sup> Researcher's Interview with Brigadier General (Ret.) Ismael Alsodani. 10 April 2017.

professionals officered the Iraqi Army, albeit within an institution stymied by innumerable Baath loyalists. To this end, Baathist functionaries faced the arduous task of balancing the subordination of the army to the Party and thus diminishing the possibility of a coup on the one hand, while fostering an adequate degree of professionalism on the other to ensure the military remained able to perform in war (Tripp & Chubin 1988, 243).

Regardless of whether the Iraqi military matched Western perceptions of civil-military relations, Saddam Hussein managed to modernise the Iraqi state and advance the socioeconomic standing of society. More significantly, he succeeded where his predecessors had failed: ensuring the political consolidation of the state and a return of the army to the barracks. Yet, as the 1979 war with Iran loomed on the horizon, the army would be released from the barracks and placed on a war footing with the nature of civil-military relations, once again experiencing seismic shifts.

#### The Iraqi Army at War

The Iraqi Army transformed from an institution posing a persistent threat to political stability into a force culled of political ambitions and wholly subordinated to the Party. Despite this, President Hussein amassed an imposing war machine during this process of ideological subordination. The army's first true initiation into combat against a foreign enemy would be against the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) in September of 1980. The army, having largely been used for internal security, was now expected to engage in conventional combat following the decision by Baghdad to launch an invasion of neighbouring IRI. Fearing the consolidation of an Islamic Republic that might appeal to his own Shia population, Saddam launched a war that soon became one of attrition that lasted eight years. President Hussein had regarded the IRI to be weak in the immediate aftermath of the revolution and calculated he could achieve the strategic goal of dominating the disputed Shatt al-Arab waterway, while at the same time, Iraq would emerge as a true Arab superpower.

Regionally, Hussein envisaged the war as a “demonstrative use of force” with the intention of proving Iraqi military prowess to Iran, while demonstrating Iraq’s indispensable role as leader and guardian of the Sunni Arab regional environs on the other (Tripp & Chubin 1988, 54). While the conflict with the IRI arguably failed to facilitate President Hussein’s wider political and strategic objectives, the war altered for a brief period the nature of civil-military relations.

The nearly decade-long conflict can be understood as occurring in three major stages (Gause 2010, 57-8). The first phase commenced with the opening Iraqi assault into Iranian territory and continued into 1981, during which IRI forces launched a series of counter-offensives, until mid-1982 when Iranian forces succeeded in regaining territory lost to Iraq. Thereafter, a series of failed ceasefire negotiations led to an Iranian incursion into Iraqi territory. The protracted “phoney war” devolved into trench warfare akin to the First World War, with Iraqi forces adopting a largely defensive posture.

The deteriorating situation led Baath apparatchiks to convene a meeting in July of 1986 and formulate an innovative approach to the conflict spurred by two major military setbacks experienced at the Battles of al-Faw and Mehran in February and May of the same year. Throughout his rule, Saddam Hussein had stymied the professionalization of the officer corps to coup-proof the military because he feared the emergence of a corporate identity within the respective services that might necessitate a coup (al-Marashi & Salama 2008, 166). Yet, it became increasingly clear that political subordination and military efficacy appeared mutually exclusive, with the political leadership constraining the ability of the officer corps to effectively engage with the Iranian threat as professional soldiers. Specifically, President Hussein exercised a considerable degree of personal control, from a strategic level down to an operational level, as he purposefully moulded the command structure around Soviet doctrine (Woods et al 2001, 44-5).

Saddam's policies in conjunction with the protracted nature of the war and the Iranian threat not only propelled the army into a position of defence but "would forge a professional identity and enhanced solidarity among the officer corps" (Al-Marashi & Salama 2008, 154). In the wake of this, President Hussein faced what amounted to an 'open mutiny' from segments of the officer corps, who in turn demanded not political power, but "the professional freedom to run the war [...] with minimal interference from political authorities" (Karish 2002, 52-3).

From this moment onwards, the army fought to assure the territorial integrity of the state, the person of Saddam Hussein and the Sunni-dominated Baathist Party through which the dispensation of power emanated forging a "community of interest" (Tripp & Chubin 1988, 116). The 'community of interest' facilitated the re-emergence and tacit acceptance of a professional officer corps. Mehran Kamrava provides a clear understanding of the professionalization that took hold, which rests upon the introduction of "modern equipment and technology", making recruitment and promotions less arbitrary, and having "professional" cadres of specialist officers and military experts at various levels and branches of the armed forces (Kamrava 2000, 69-70). Thus, President Hussein allowed senior officers to exercise an "expertness", coming from an understanding of the "force required to carry out particular military operations and the procedures needed to bring this force to bear on the operation" (Quinliven 1999, 152).

Devolution of command and control authority to the officers operating on the ground resulted in a lessening of constraints which invariably enabled the officer corps to engage in prosecuting the war as professionals. One clear example is the adoption and application of a combined arms approach to the conflict. This involved, for example; the integration of air assets, such as bombers and helicopters, with heavy artillery, tanks, and infantry. Specifically, through an impressive integration of aerial attacks, amphibious assaults, and a multi-pronged mechanised infantry assault, Iraqi forces routed the Iranian military during the second Battle of al-Faw (Woods et al 2009, 15). During periods of warfare, Huntington (1958) argues that there exists a division

of labour between the political elite and officer class. As military professionals and experts on the management of violence, he argues for the political elite to provide the officer corps with the required latitude to conduct warfare and exercise their military knowledge as professionals in the conduct of war. Arguably, Hussein's decision to cede military control to the officer corps in represented as one of the key moments when the Iraqi military most closely accorded with certain facets of Huntington's theory on civil-military relations.

The decision to 're-professionalise' senior officers bore fruit, with Iraqi units successfully defending Basrah against a formidable Iranian force. The increase in professionalism enabled the IA to win a series of defensive battles in 1987 and subsequently launch several successful counterattacks, which ultimately broke the will of the IRI forces. In the end, and during the latter years of the war, the Iraqi armed forces were "able to sustain solid tactical proficiency and complex military operations that integrated activities across multiple combat arms" (Talmadge 2013, 182), hitherto unattainable during the formative years of the conflict.

Over the course of the war, paramilitaries were bolstered and thrust into combat alongside the Popular Army and the elite RG. However, the Popular Army was poorly trained and equipped, lacking unit cohesion. This was something that President Hussein became increasingly aware of, calling the paramilitary organization "a burden to the regular army" (Tripp & Chubin 1988, 58). A critical juncture in the war illustrated the battle incompetence of the Popular Army: in the spring of 1982, when Iran launched an offensive resulting in the Liberation of Khorramshahr, the Popular Army lost seven brigades while a further three surrendered en masse to Iranian forces.

The elite RG experienced the largest expansion and professionalization amongst Iraq's armed forces. Taking into consideration the guidance of professional officers, President Hussein orders the restructuring of the elite force from the squad level up to the division and corps commands (Woods et al 2009, 14). By 1986, the RG expanded from a single brigade to over seven

(Quinlivan 1999, 145), and became equipped with the latest Soviet weaponry such as the T-72 tank, BMP infantry fighting vehicle and heavy artillery. The RG was originally recruited heavily from certain tribes, notably Saddam's own (Albu Nasir), the Jubbur, and the 'Ubayd. However, after the May 1982 Iraqi retreat from Khorramshahr, President Hussein expanded recruitment policy to encompass other Sunni as well as certain Shia tribes.

Notwithstanding, this increase in professionalism and corporate identity did not result in a lessening of political control over the Iraqi armed forces (Tripp & Chubin 1988, 117). Patronage networks, and the privileging of tribal, as well as regional, affiliations in determining appointments and advancements went unchallenged, as did the pervasive presence of political commissars. Albeit as Toby Dodge notes, with a mandate "restricted to non-strategic issues" (2003b, 62). In this vein, it's important to note that, while President Hussein willingly heeded military guidance from the more adroit segment of the senior military leadership, the Iraqi leader was constantly beleaguered by and fixated on the loyalty of professional officers. As Maj. Gen. Mizher Rashid al-Tarfa al-Ubaydi of Iraqi intelligence highlighted, President Hussein always questioned: "was it [loyalty] [to] him or [to] Iraq?" (Woods et al 2009, 102). While politically charged officers were inextricably linked to the person of the President, the loyalty of the professional officer corps rested with Iraq.

It's important to comprehend the shift of the army from that of internal repression into one of national defence to a bulwark of the nation-state. The Shia community's unwillingness to acquiesce to Iranian calls for insurrection against the Baathist regime indicates a solidarity with Iraq. Moreover, the protracted nature of the conflict, in conjunction with substantial Iraqi casualties, seemed untenable unless an outpouring of nationalist sentiment was manifested. However, the war served to "atomise Iraqi society, throwing its members back on the security of primordial loyalties and collective identities" (Tripp & Chubin 1988, 84). Notwithstanding, Iraqi Shias constituted the bulk of the army's infantry and fought loyally with relatively few defections

(al-Khalil 1989, 265). Moreover, an increasing number of Shia officers who displayed competence on the battlefield and loyalty to Iraq experienced increased prestige, and subsequent promotions within the command structure (Tripp 2007, 238).

Additionally, during the war with Iran, Iraqi nationalism “managed to override or, at least, paper over communal divides” (Jabar 2003b, 166). On the domestic front, the Baath leadership engaged with a rhetorical and symbolic narrative meant to engender an emotive and collective sense of identity amongst Iraqi society. Principally, the notion of “The Battle of Qadisiyaa” emerged at the forefront of this ‘war populism’ campaign aimed at bolstering Arab Nationalism. The historic battle fought in 636 pitted Arab Muslims against Sassanid Persians and resulted in the Persian conquest of Iraq. Ostensibly, the battle carried significant resonance in the minds of Iraqi Arabs, and President Hussein therefore sought to capture the emotive power of the battle to rally Iraqis in a modern-day battle against the Persians invaders.

#### Wither the Strong State and Army

The nearly decade-long war inflicted detrimental economic and political damage to the regime of Saddam Hussein, with the Iraqi leader in an uneasy position given the failure to overthrow the IRI. A highly mobilised, 1,000,000 strong army represented a threat to the stability of the president’s grip on power. The period of professionalization imbued the officer corps with a distinct corporate identity and Hussein feared that, at the very least, praetorianism might come to determine military-regime relations in the war’s aftermath (Tripp 2007, 240). During the Iran-Iraq War, the officer corps developed an increased corporate solidarity, and an Esprit de Corps, which resulted in the officer class becoming acutely aware of their importance in safeguarding the rule of President Hussein (Al-Marashi & Salama 2008, 174). As a result, the officer corps planned and launched several attempted coups during the period of 1988-1990. To remedy this situation, and deny cohesion to the officer class, President Hussein reversed the policies enacted

in 1986 and reverted to the default position of coup-proofing to insulate the regime from subversive elements within the armed forces.

The economic impact of the war meant Hussein could no longer coup-proof the officer class with the long-standing practice of allocating patronage through economic benevolence. The bulk of the nearly \$100 billion in foreign assistance Iraq received to fight against Iran was from loans by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, who demanded repayment of the loans, much to the dismay of President Hussein who had framed the war with the IRI as a wider-Arab struggle against the Persians. Kuwait failed to reciprocate this sentiment and intentionally increased oil production to further weaken the Iraqi economy. In this context, economic considerations played a significant role regarding President Hussein's decision to invade Kuwait (Halliday 1997, 114), alongside the less than insightful analysis into the reactions of the international community, which the president determined would remain non-committal to the defence of Kuwait. Economic reasons aside, an integral reason informing President Hussein's decision to invade Kuwait was the belief that the Iraqi Army could morph into an "uncontrollable Leviathan" (Jabar 2003a, 118). Simply put, Baathist leadership faced a series of dilemmas: invading Kuwait provided President Hussein with an opportunity to not only keep control of the IA, but also further consolidate control over the institution (al-Marashi & Salama 2009, 176).

On August 2, 1990, four RG Divisions spearheaded the invasion alongside a Special Forces division with certain units ferried in by helicopter, while others launched an amphibious assault (Al-Marashi & Salama 2009, 180). With the forces meeting little in the way of serious resistance, Kuwait was triumphantly declared Iraq's 19th province by day's end. However, the victory proved short lived, as the American-led coalition forces (COFOR) began amassing a substantial force in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia under Operation Desert Shield. The air campaign commenced on January 17th, with a six-week long aerial bombardment that decimated the infrastructure supporting the Iraqi government and the armed forces.



On February 24th 1991 COFOR launched a massive ground assault against Iraqi forces occupying Kuwait in Operation Desert Storm, and within 100 hours succeeded in both liberating Kuwait and pushing President Hussein's forces back into Iraq. Hussein's chief of general military intelligence, Wafiq al-Samarrai, assessed the outcome as the worst military defeat in Iraqi history, an assessment rejected by Saddam Hussein (Stansfield 2007, 131). For the Iraqi President, despite the actual outcome on the battlefield, the 'Mother of All Battles' equated to victory as it took a coalition of thirty nations to dispel the 'mighty' Iraq from Kuwait.

Historically, and in line with autocratic leaders across the region, President Hussein manipulated the exports of oil and the inner-workings of the economy to sustain a patron-client relationship to bulwark his rule (Sassoon 2016, 160-68). However, economic sanctions implemented through United Nations Security Council Resolutions 661 (1990) and 687 (1991) decimated the Iraqi economy and with that, the ability of the regime to sustain clientelism. As a result, the Iraqi President no longer had access to the revenue required to distribute patronage, and in turn, secure the loyalty of the officer class.

The weakening of the central government, alongside a decline in access to revenues, aided in the strengthening of tribal and religious loyalties. To fortify control of the state, President Hussein rekindled tribal affiliations as international sanctions gradually eroded the long-standing structures of power. The transformation centred around a departure from Arabism as the focal point of Iraqi identity to a more amicable approach towards Islam, and the concurrent reinvigoration of tribal identities, all of which served to redefine the Iraqi identity. More importantly, the policies reenergizing sectarian and tribal identities served to reconstitute segments of the officer corps and broader-security arrangements.

In the direct aftermath of the First Gulf War, rebellions emerged in the Kurdish north and Shia south, wresting fourteen of Iraq's eighteen provinces from government control. The spark

that kindled the uprisings came from aggrieved Iraqi soldiers who, in a symbolic act, fired a tank shell into a portrait of President Hussein on the outskirts of Basrah. In the Kurdish north, soldiers demonstrated similar discontent towards the regime, with around 150,000 soldiers deserting (Jabar 2003a, 120). Due to the anti-regime reactions of the army, quelling the rebellions fell upon military intelligence, a relatively small number of conventional army units and divisions of the battle-hardened and fiercely loyal RG (Tripp 2007, 247).

Consequently, the formations involved in the suppression of the uprising centred on the more specialised and loyal units as opposed to regular army units. The uprisings constituted a seminal event in Saddam Hussein's tenure as President of Iraq, with the perceived threat of a widespread uprising informing calculations regarding internal security and the risk of a coup emanating from within the army. To this end, the Iraqi Army was reorganised and downsized, with the aim to create a small, efficient fighting force, one that had dual responsibilities of defending the sovereign integrity of Iraq and playing a nationalist role (Eisenstadt 1994, 44). More importantly, the increasing fragmentation of the central authority led to the rise in tribal and religious ties informing the nature of loyalties and edifice of the officer corps.

The reform of the security state and the specialised units was considered necessary to reinforce the regime from potential uprisings in the future. In short, the SRG, Fedayeen Saddam, and Military Security represent the most important organizations to emerge in the post-war Iraqi security complex. Rather quickly, the multiplicity of forces evolved into a concentric defence, whereby a new parallel guard emerged to bulwark President Hussein from the original Praetorian Guard (Al-Marashi & Salama 2009, 188). The most prominent example would be the emergence of the SRG to act as a counterweight to the RG. The Fedayeen Saddam recruited almost exclusively from the town of Takrit, or the president's own Albu Nasr clan (al-Marashi & Salama 2008, 187) while this trend of recruitment was also evident in the RG and SRG. Similarly, Saddam Hussein erected a massive network of patronage during his 34-year rule over Iraq. Saddam's own Albu

Nasir clan in Takrit, along with the tribes in the surrounding towns and villages, came to represent the nucleus of power within Iraq, as the tribesmen proliferated the more important security portfolios amongst the various internal security, intelligence, and military appointments, while Sunni-Arabs made up the majority of the officer corps.

It is Important to note the Takriti connection within the officer corps predated the ascendancy of Saddam Hussein to power and coincided with the Baath's rise to power in 1968. The officer class was made up of predominately Iraqi Sunni-Arabs, while the Iran-Iraq war slightly altered this calculus to meet manpower requirements. However, while the officer class was always a Sunni dominated coterie, the end of the First Gulf War and advent of sanctions, coupled with a few instances of disloyalty, forced Saddam Hussein to restructure the officer corps around tribal kinsmen a select number of officers with noted personal loyalty to the president. As a result, most of the Corps and Division formation commanders (Brig. General. and above) originated from either the president's tribe, direct blood relatives of the Iraqi leader, or the select few Generals with unquestionable loyalty to the regime.<sup>4</sup>

Iraqi tribes historically wielded considerable social power in an analogous manner to other tribal groupings in the Middle East. However, Ronen Zeidel qualified that the Iraqi state emerged as a contemporary political machine, with the dispensation of power gradually cemented firmly in the centre and thus "did not remain attached to traditions nor enshrine them in the political fabric" (Zeidel 2016, 184). Ideologically speaking, the state-led discourse of Baathism, fortified by a Sunni exclusionary nationalism, succeeded in containing and side-lining the importance of tribal solidarities to the periphery. In short, the tribes never fully embraced the state-oriented processes of centralization.

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<sup>4</sup> Researcher's Interview with Brigadier General (Ret.) Ismael Alsodani. 10 April 2017.

The Baathist ideal crumbled concurrently with the collapse of the economy, alongside an increasing failure of the Party to mobilise support for the regime. Thus, President Hussein recalibrated regime survival and the nationalist discourse around the process of re-tribalization. Within this environment, the tribes were absorbed into the institutions of the state to provide Saddam with a political lifeline. However, the positioning of tribesmen focused solely on the security of the state, rather than enabling the tribal sheikhs to exert influence over the economic or political institutions in Iraq (Ibid.181). Politically speaking, privileged tribal affiliations played an integral role in bulwarking the authority of President Hussein.

The advent of the Iran-Iraq War in 1980 war lessened restrictions regarding the tribes recruited based on manpower considerations, although Party allegiance remained a requirement for enlistment into the Military Academy. In this regard, as opposed to a tribally based regime after 1991, Saddam Hussein established a circle of trust with tribe, clan and immediate family representing the focal point of this circle.

Increasingly, the regime facilitated the recruitment of tribal youth into the military academy, favouring the Sunni tribal groupings of al-Jabouri, al-Obadi, al-Takriti, and al-Dulamai in addition to most of the tribes occupying the Northern and Western environs of Iraq, and to include those from Anbar, Ninewa, and Salah ad Din.<sup>5</sup> As a result, the tribes, especially the Sunnis, provided an officer cohort, because “drawing from tribes to fill the officer corps [was a] tried and tested procedure in Iraq”,<sup>6</sup> to ensure stability within the officer corps. Certain Shia tribes gained some prominence in the wake of the First Gulf War. For example, the Kharfaja tribe in the Babylon Province suppressed Shia uprisings during the 1990s and gained some standing within the upper echelons of the Baath Party and military based on this demonstration of loyalty with Saddam, while the Bani Hasan of Karbala also experienced an elevation in standing (Defence Intelligence

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<sup>5</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Brigadier General (Ret.) Ismael Alsodani. 10 April 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Ali Allawi. 15 August 2017.

Staff 2002, 11-12). While loyal Shia tribes gained acceptance into officer corps, they were not mobilised in numbers similar to Sunni tribesmen who demonstrated greater fidelity to President Hussein.<sup>7</sup>

Tribal prominence in the security field therefore exhibited both change and continuity after 1991, as President Hussein required alternative security guarantees in the wake of mass-uprisings and crippling economic sanctions. In terms of continuity, the influx of the tribal groupings into the military and officer corps remained under the auspice of the Military Academy, and thereby a 'conventional' stated-based pipeline of recruitment and introduction into the coercive institutions of the state. Furthermore, while tribal associations served to inform recruitment and placement patterns into the Iraqi Army, the "tribal" attachments and solidarities remained relatively subdued. On the one hand, Baathist ideology viewed the tribes as inferior, while on the other, President Hussein desired to obfuscate the regime's preference for his tribal kin within the political and security structures of the Iraqi state.

Importantly however, the official recruitment tactic, aimed to ensure an entity with nomadic solidarities, experienced some measure of subordination to the Party and the office of the President. Nonetheless, the precarious security situation alongside widespread economic anomie forced President Hussein to reconcile with a large portion of the Iraqi tribes. After 1996, Hussein "purchased security" by providing the tribes with money and weapons (Baram 1997. 20). Under this arrangement, the Sunni tribes situated in the Northern and Western areas of the state were enveloped into the military, while the Shia tribes in the South experienced a harmonious and autonomous relationship with the Sunni-dominated regime in Baghdad. The Southern

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<sup>7</sup> Researcher's Interview with Brigadier General (Ret.) Ismael Alsodani. 10 April 2017.

provinces, at this time, eluded the control of the Baghdad, and as a result, a devolution of power manifested itself.

The relationship that emerged between Baghdad and tribes in general focused on the distribution of financial rewards and weaponry, and in return the tribal groupings maintained a productive role in the security sphere of their respective territory. The weaponization of the tribes denoted a modicum of trust and confidence in the ability of the various tribal leaders on the part of President Hussein. Money, therefore, and not devotion to the Iraqi leader determined the relationship of the tribalized regions.<sup>8</sup> More importantly, the courting of the tribes was indicative of the gradual decline in central authority and generally precipitated the emergence of private, tribal militias and sheikhs commanding numerically substantial formations of armed tribesmen, newly emboldened by Saddam's overtures.

Despite such arrangements, the tribes were not particularly devoted to President Hussein; sheikhs simply favoured an amicable financial relationship with the regime as opposed to open hostilities.<sup>9</sup> This 'new' social contract that was negotiated resulted from the deterioration of the 'state', along with Baghdad's inability to distribute revenue and exercise coercion to maintain control over society across the periphery. More importantly, this type of relationship and reliance on the tribes underscored the increasingly brittle nature of the Iraqi regime, and the inability of the state and armed forces to effectively exercise a monopoly of violence over Iraq.

The aptly titled 'Faith Campaign' represented the most poignant religious policy change enacted by President Hussein. A hallmark of the Faith Campaign revolved around an increased tolerance of the regime towards overt displays of religious piety. This created an environment which allowed for the proliferation of the religious fanaticism, often associated with Salafism, so

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

long as such religious piety did not materialise in the form of political opposition to the Party. Scholars and Iraq observers argue that the Faith Campaign radicalised elements of the Iraqi Army, who in turn formed the backbone of the post-2003 insurgency and, subsequently, the Islamic State in Iraq. To be sure, former soldiers within the SRG, Fedayeen Saddam, and the myriad intelligence services joined ISI. However, the Faith Campaign and religion as an impetus for involvement with the regime or as a qualification for placement within the officer corps is more theoretical than empirical.<sup>10</sup>

Deciphering the prominence of religious sectarianism within the army at that epoch is difficult because despite embracing Islam, Hussein remained committed to ensuring religion could never be used as a platform to directly challenge his rule. This is in addition to the fact that the Iraqi President remained a largely secular leader. While Saddam oversaw the proliferation of religion through the Faith Campaign, the policy represented an attempt by the leader to harness the legitimizing power of religion and piety emerging during a period of economic hardship, as opposed to introducing religion as an alternative solidarity within the officer class and society writ-large.<sup>11</sup> Thus, in line with other Arab leaders, President Hussein sought to deny religion any prominence within the officer corps and vehemently persecuted Wahhabism, issuing an edict professing that any Iraqi soldier or officer indoctrinated by Wahhabism would face execution.<sup>12</sup>

The edict emerged in the aftermath of the wars in Afghanistan and Bosnia, which witnessed thousands of radicalised, military aged males returning to Iraq. However, as war with America drew closer, President Hussein coalesced the Jihadists into units who fought against American-led COFOR during OIF.<sup>13</sup> In summation, sectarian preferences and the importance of

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<sup>10</sup> Researcher's Interview with Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Craig Whiteside. 5 January 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Researcher's Interview with Brigadier General (Ret.) Ismael Alsodani. 10 April 2017

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

religion only emerged as a tool for President Hussein to retain a modicum of power, and therefore failed to imbed itself into the officer class or wider society as an ideology.<sup>14</sup>

Patronage and patrimonial affiliations persisted as the fundamental mechanisms to garner the officer corps' loyalty during the final days of President Hussein's rule. Despite sanctions and subversive actors attempting to usurp Saddam's rule, the resilience of the Iraqi leader and the ability to ensure the loyalty of the officer corps was a "testament to the viability of the Iraqi leader's patronage network" (Al-Marashi & Salama 2009, 191). As a colonel in the Iraqi Army, retired Brig. General Ismael Alsodani affirmed that, irrespective of ethno-sectarian affiliations, tribal kinship, or displaying the characteristics of a 'good Baathist', promotion to the rank of general officer was a privilege restricted to Saddam's inner-circle. Thus, tribal, ethnic and patrimonial relations with the Iraqi leader remained fluid and more important during varying stages of his rule depending on the circumstances and threats to regime stability. Unquestionable loyalty, however, remained constant.

### Conclusion

This chapter provided an historical background to the nature of civil-military relations in Iraq and a foundation for the study to advance. Importantly, Iraqi scholar Salim Mattar noted through his extensive study of Iraqi Nationalism "that the primary factor for the persistence of tension and violence [is] the brittleness of Iraqi national identity" (Dawisha 1999, 553). Indeed, Iraq was and remains a fragmented society along territorial, tribal, ethnic and sectarian identities. King Faisal was aware of this problem and sought to use the military as a tool for acculturation and to establish an Iraqi identity. However, this effort failed as the Sunni-Arab population came to dominate the officer corps and went on to launch successively attempted and successful coups, inspired by a myriad of ideological leanings. The 'in and out' political role of the armed forces

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<sup>14</sup> Researcher's Interview with Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Craig Whiteside. 5 January 2018.



failed to build a strong state, let alone establish an Iraqi Nationalism. The rise of the Ba'th Party under the leadership of Saddam Hussein was notable for two reasons. The party succeeded in subordinating the officer corps through the process of Baathification, and established strong state institutions with centralised control. This led to stability in the civil-military relationship. However, loyalty rested firmly with President Hussein and his personalization of power.

The Iran-Iraq war witnessed Saddam manipulate Arab nationalism to rally Iraqis in the fight against Persian Iran, where he managed to ensure the loyalty of Iraqi Shias throughout the course of the war. However, Hussein's decision to invade and annex Kuwait resulted in international condemnation and the enforcement of economic sanctions. The latter effectively crippled his regime, the armed forces, and eroded Baathism as the ideological pillar of the state. The decline of Baathism and Arab nationalism as a rallying point for the regime forced the leader to take hold of other forms of solidarity to cohere the state and officer corps. While the fragmented nature of loyalties in Iraq surely impeded the emergence of a holistic Iraqi identity, this problem afforded political elites with multiple sentiments to manipulate in the path towards power and the centralization of authority. Saddam at first maneuvered religion into the public sphere and thereafter allocated greater importance to tribal identity and solidarity. Historically, the central authority had succeeded in subsuming the tribal periphery under government control and the state emerged as a strong entity detached from tribal traditions. Accordingly, institutions experienced a similar course of development and were largely free of allegiances based on tribal fidelity. However, the decline of state power in the 1990s forced Saddam to renegotiate patron-client relations with the Iraqi tribes.

Importantly, Saddam exercised the practice of 'etatist tribalism', whereby he placed tribal loyalists into positions of power and utilised a system of patron-client relations to control the machinery of the state (Jabar 2000, 28). In this environment, the state and regime were strong, and thus able to co-opt tribal affiliates into the structures of power. However, once the regime

weakened in the 1990's, Saddam had to recalibrate this relationship. This led to a rise in social tribalism, in which the weakening regime "devolved functions such as judicial powers, tax collection and law enforcement" to the tribes (ibid).

Notwithstanding, as a tribal man, Saddam understood the importance of the tribes and formed relationships with tribal sheikhs, providing tribesmen with weapons to bulwark security in the provinces. The reliance on tribal and religious symbols to fortify his rule and his military illustrated the brittle nature of the state in the shadow of economic sanctions, along with the inability to maintain the patrimonial networks that enabled Hussein to rule Iraq.

In Iraq, the patrimonial system is evident through the Tikrit connection, with members of kith and kin holding prestigious portfolios within the Iraqi regime. The Baath Party infiltrated all major organizations in Iraqi society, with the most important being the army. Accordingly, the Baath Party was an extension of Saddam's personal power through a patronage system which he alone would command, and thereby control society. Saddam placed his close relatives and loyal Baath members in charge of most important military and intelligence positions, a staple of authoritarian rule and the preferencing of tribal affiliations.

Ultimately, therefore, Saddam came to rely on a confined patrimonial network of family, clan and tribal relatives to occupy the senior officer positions in an armed force that had been decimated by years of sanctions. In this system, however, loyalty was not to the Baath Party, the military, nor to the state, loyalty ultimately rested with the regime and the personalization of power under Saddam Hussein.

## **Chapter 3: The Army in a Tribal State**

### Introduction

This chapter will discuss the historical development of the Army in North Yemen, in addition to the influence of tribal groupings and solidarities in relation to the army in the Old People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. Following unification, the importance of tribes and patrimony in informing power-relations will be highlighted alongside the nature of control within the tribal republic during a period of the Houthi insurgency, Southern Secessionist movement, and the emergence of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). More importantly, the chapter will elaborate on the following issues: the degree and nature of power the central authority exerted over the military complex, and the methods used by the regime to secure the loyalty of the officer corps. This will be done against the backdrop of tribal-state relations and patronage in Yemen.

Equally important is the notion that focuses on a continuous struggle, one which has, on the one hand, borne out between the tribes and the centre on the other over control of the armed forces. Throughout the fractured history of civil-military relations in Yemen, the army as an institution constituted an arena for the contestation of innumerable political, social, and economic forces. It came to embody the underlying nature of power and illustrated the discursive nature of loyalties permeating the Yemeni state. Patronage politics and tribal affiliations, as it will be shown, played an important role in shaping the solidarities of the officer corps and provides an anchor point in which to further explore the fragmentation of armies as the research progresses.

While the Yemeni Army followed a civil-military trajectory like the wider-Arab world, the robust societal power of the tribal factions emerged as an integral component of the civil-military nexus. Yemen observer Abdul-Ghani al-Iryani describes the pronounced role that the tribes have increasingly come to play across the armed forces: "[i]n Yemen we don't really have a military as an institution, we have tribal factions in uniform, many of whom can be bought over to the other

side” (Finn 2011, npn). The tribal army reflected the tribal-sectarian nexus\_ and nature of the state.

Accordingly, the upcoming section will provide a background to the current history of civil-military relations in Yemen, highlighting not only the historical development of the military, but also the important interplay between the military as an institution and a myriad of tribal groupings.

#### The Emergence of the Military-Tribal Nexus

Following independence from the Ottoman Empire after the Great War, Imam Yahya (1905-48) required an armed force to ensure the core functions of a state: consolidating political rule firmly within the centre, collecting taxes, and countering the powerful northern tribes. A fighting force was established under the guidance of Turkish Officers, who agreed to stay behind to train and equip an army. The Turkish Officers imbued the Yemeni trainees with a military efficacy, one that had been acquired from the Prussian and subsequently German Empires: a doctrine emphasizing the unique standing of the military in a society that required a strong national army capable of political intervention if necessary (Hashim 2003, 13). However, the Imam became increasingly suspicious of the ideological views espoused by the Turkish advisors and established a counter-coup force, ‘The Army of Defence’ which operated alongside a group of irregular tribal fighters recruited heavily from the Zaydi highlands (Khaled 2010, 2-4). This formed the bands of three armed organizations that then emerged.

By 1931, young Yemeni officers were sent abroad to the Baghdad Military Academy for military training and became inculcated with nationalist political leanings, ones which emphasised the importance of constitutions and the glory of republicanism. The newly minted crop of “Free Officers” sought to transform Yemen from a poor and underdeveloped state into a modern nation, free of the prehistoric constraints of the Imamate system. As staunch adherents to Arab Nationalism, the officers desired a strong ‘Arab’ state with an educated Arab society. After several

efforts to usurp the Imamate proved unsuccessful, the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) was established in September of 1962, following a coup d'état instigated by Colonel Abdullah al-Salleh.

While the September Revolution of 1962 reconstituted the political order, the overthrow of the Imamate ushered in eight years of internecine conflict, and a proxy-war of sorts, pitting the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia against the Republic of Egypt. As a dynastic regime, Saudi Arabia inherently disliked the republican system of governance and Pan-Arabism associated with Nasser's Egypt. Thus, the Kingdom willingly aided the largely Zaydi Royalist tribes, loyal to the deposed Imam, while Egypt sustained the Republican Sufi tribal forces from the South.

Tribal leaders additionally found themselves in possession of not only substantial weaponry, but more importantly, in command of large, well-trained tribal forces (Burrowes 1987, 23). By the conclusion of the civil-war, the military prowess of the tribes increased substantially in comparison to the YAR army, to the extent that the tribal levies possessed the ability to potentially outfight them when unified (Peterson 1982, 174). In the immediate aftermath of the civil war, certain tribal leaders emerged as important power brokers whom, alongside "a nascent military and group of merchants connected to the military and state", began to form the political bedrock of the Yemeni state (Schmitz 2016, 37).

Apart from the Khawlan bin Amir (the five tribes within the immediate vicinity of Sa'ada) most North Yemenis share lineage with the two historically prominent tribal organizations in the Northern Highlands: the Bakil and Hashid Tribal Confederations. The confederations are led by paramount leaders from the Abu Ra'as and al-Ahmar clans respectively. Those tribal leaders who enjoyed increasing influence within the military in the aftermath of the civil-war came from both the Hashid and Bakil Tribal Confederations. For example, Sheikh Naji al-Ghadir was one of the most powerful military commanders to emerge from the Bakil Tribal Confederation at the end of the 1962 civil-war (Clark 2010, 99) (Dresch 2000, 94).

Consequently, the 1962 civil-war propelled al-Ghadir from a minor tribesman into the paramount Sheikh of the Bakil Tribal Confederation (Halliday 1974, 128-9). Likewise, the impressive political, military and economic influence of Abdullah al-Ahmar of the Hashid (who would eventually become paramount sheikh) increased in the aftermath of the civil-war. Most importantly, the end of the civil-war elevated members of the Sanhan Tribe (President Saleh) and the Hamdan Tribe (President Hamdani) and enabled them to emerge as powerful military actors both within their own right and across the conventional army (Dresch 2000, 148).

The Presidency of Abdul Rahman al-Iryani (1967-74) accentuated the power of tribal forces, whose policies by design fuelled the evolution of the YAR population and the reassertion of the tribe as a societal and political force (Stookey 1974, 249). This was particularly noticeable with regards to the “Sa’ada’s Colonel Sheikhs” (Brandt 2014, 108), in addition to those tribal units raised during the civil-war who were integrated into the military of the new Republic. The integration of tribal groupings into the political and military structures of the Republic accelerated the influence of tribal commanders amongst key units within the “small, unreformed regular army” (Burrowes 1987, 32). At this period in the YAR’s military development, the fledgling army increasingly became a “tribalized” force, exacerbated by traditionally prominent tribal leaders. These sheikhs enjoyed access of patronage, along with the ability to buttress their standing in relation to the central authority in the aftermath of the 1962 civil-war and policies of President al-Iryani.

The successful coup instigated by Ibrahim al-Hamdi (1974-77) and his presidency witnessed efforts to curtail tribal influence. From the onset, his administration engaged in projects of state building and modernization to solidify political, economic and security power in the central authority. Despite al-Hamdi’s aspirations, the security institutions inherited by the president consisted of “a large number of relatively self-contained fighting units, little armies within the armies” and continued to be plagued by parochial allegiances (Burrowes 1987, 64). Thus, the

strategy of both strengthening and modernizing the armed forces proved to be a difficult undertaking.

During the 'Revolutionary Corrective Initiative' in June of 1975, President al-Hamdi implemented policies to reverse the institutionalization of tribal forces within the army, erode tribal allegiances, and diminish the political-military influence of tribal sheikhs by purging them from senior leadership roles within the army (Brandt 2014, 109). While efforts aimed at the reorganization of the armed forces occurred with varying success, the underlying defect of the institution remained the presence of small, self-contained units with parallel loyalties, which came to represent sturdy power centres for tribal elites (Burrowes 1987, 64). Perhaps, had the military undergone fundamental structural adjustments, the coercive balance of power between the state and tribes would have emerged in favour of the former.

Despite the labours of President al-Hamdi to modernise the armed forces and wider state institutions, he was assassinated in 1977, with countless observers claiming that his attempts to detach the state and military from the tribal clutches resulted in his demise (Knights 2013, 264). In the aftermath of al-Hamdi's assassination, the institutional nature of the military within the maturing republic remained far from a unified and cohesive instrument of the state, and, despite the battle of the 'Septembrists' to professionalise and modernise (creating a loyal and cohesive institution), the outcome was anything but. To be sure, tribal forces constituted a substantial impediment to such efforts as tribal influence came to dominate the armed forces (Seitz 2016, 159).

#### President Saleh, The Tribes, The Army, and the Politics of Patronage

The fully realised institutionalization of tribal influence within the military occurred alongside the rise to power of the officer-turned politician, Ali Abdullah Saleh (1978-2012). Saleh's rule ushered in an era, whereby "tribal culture was no longer separate from the culture of the government. In fact, it came to define the government's culture" (Day 2012, 96). While tribal

influence was already afoot in the military, it solidified around the rule of Saleh and the emerging patterns of patron-client relations.

When the Yemeni leader emerged from the obscurity of the relatively minor Sanhan clan of the Hashid Confederation and into the office of the president, very few Yemeni's knew his name, yet alone forecasted his political longevity. However, the political rise and long-standing rule of Saleh illustrates the inner workings of the relationships between tribal forces and patronage networks within the military - a relationship that Saleh further entrenched during his rule (Seitz 159, 2016). During his military service, he benefited substantially by bonding with the growing tribal and commercial elites. Upon graduation from the Tank Academy, Saleh's first posting was at a military installation which served as the primary smuggling artery between the port of Mocha and city of Taiz. The then-Maj. Saleh profited by accepting bribes from the bootleggers, in addition to forming friendly relationships with Taiz commercial elites during qat sessions (Day 2012, 90-92). These new relationships, and penetration into the patronage network, enabled Ali Abdullah Saleh to form a base of support amongst the elite and eventually gain political standing in the old Republic.

Once in office, President Saleh exercised his rule through a neo-patrimonial system reinforced by an informal network of patronage politics. Over time, this network evolved and elongated into the institutional structures of the armed forces (Alley Longley, 2010, 387). In this system, Saleh preserved authority and legitimacy through the distribution of patronage, as opposed to law or ideology common with the modern state system. Despite the presence of bureaucratic institutions and state like attributes in Yemen, these structures functioned more as avenues to obtain power, distribute patronage and secure loyalty. This process obfuscated the distinction between the private and public sphere within the state, because public or state properties are often dispersed for the personal benefit of the ruler. In this context, Saleh administered and sustained power and legitimacy through patron-client relationships as opposed



to law or ideology, whereby clients provided the president political loyalty in exchange for avenues of economic enrichment. Importantly, the military came to represent the epicentre of the patronage network and dominant corporate actor (Phillips 2011, 55).

Based on this understanding, civil-military relations into the 1970s can be understood as a “military-tribal complex”. Economic, political and social status in Yemen was determined by “either or both strong tribal and military (or security) connections” (Burrowes & Kasper 2007, 264). By the 1980s, however, the civil-military relationship experienced alterations, as President Saleh transformed the military a key actor within the civilian economy. The president’s courtship and merger of the tribal and commercial elite resulted in the formation of the “tribal-military-commercial complex” (Burrowes 2005, 2). The emergence of the patronage complex described by Burrowes coincided with a discernible change in the patrimonial economy of Yemen, whereby tribal sheikhs, business elites, and preferred members of the officer class were absorbed into the structures of the state and the dispensation of power.

The economic power and influence of the military expanded due to the formation of the state-run Military Economic Corporation (MECO). MECO was initially established to provide discounted goods and services to soldiers. However, in the 1970s, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund pushed for Yemen to liberalise its economy in return for loans and grants. In turn, President Saleh allocated 60 percent of import quotas to MECO. Under this arrangement, the corporation gradually expanded its portfolio beyond conventional military goods, into the real estate market, commodities and other non-defence related assets. Organizationally, while a civilian directed MECO, the deputy director and governorate representatives all came from the military, and this enabled the officer corps to benefit from the revenue generated by MECO. The vast penetration of the officer class into the civilian economy altered the socioeconomic power dynamics (however defined), as being an officer in the military became equally, if not more important, than an individual’s tribal affiliations regarding access to

patronage. MECO and the economic affairs of the military became an important facet of neo-patrimonial rule, and enabled Saleh to garner the loyalty of the officer corps and tribal sheikhs.

Hydrocarbons and petroleum also represented the principal factors that contributed to the patronage structures in Yemen and coincided with the rise of MECO. In 1984, the American firm *Hunt Oil* discovered substantial pockets of oil and gas within the vicinity of the Marib/al-Jawf regions that were large enough to export abroad in commercial quantities. The state directly accrued oil revenues, causing the oil and gas sector to represent a lucrative source for state revenue and thus providing an economic lifeline that would further fuel the patronage system. The role of oil within an expanding patronage network directly benefited the high-ranking officers of the Sanhanian old-guard to include Ali Abdullah Saleh, Abdullah al-Qadi, Ahmed Farag, Mohammed Abdullah Qadi, and Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar (ICG 2013, 3).

The discovery of oil directly transformed the 'rules of game' and the traditional socio-political standing of the tribal leaders. Prior to the discovery of oil, tribal sheikhs obtained influence and power from hereditary standing that resulted in a consensus of rule across the larger tribe. At this period, agriculture, trade and remittances from foreign workers figured heavily in the patrimonial economy of Yemen and tribal power. The advent of oil, as noted, enabled non-traditional actors to capture wealth and reallocate these resources to construct and solidify their own networks of patronage. The process eroded the importance of traditional modes of loyalty and power, in favour of the ability to distribute patronage and steal away the fidelity of tribesmen.

Apart from MECO and the oil and gas industry, the General People's Congress (GPC) at this period, the most powerful political party in the Republic, provided President Saleh with a supplemental source of patronage. Formed in 1982, the GPC enabled the Saleh to consolidate his political rule by appealing to a broad range of ideologies and personalities, ones ranging from Pan-Arab Nasserist socialists and members of the Islamic Front and Baath Party, to traditional tribal

sheikhs. All were absorbed into a political patronage apparatus. While tribal, personal and military loyalties determined access to state distributed patronage by Saleh, the GPC, “incorporated people from very different ideological backgrounds on the strength of its own patronage system” (Phillips 2011, 177).

Therefore, the GPC was not so much a political organization as it was an extension of Saleh’s rule and network of patronage. Like other ‘state’ institutions in Yemen, individuals gained membership into the GPC “on the basis of loyalty, not loyalty to the state or the homeland -- loyalty to one man (Saleh)”.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, membership into the upper-echelons of the GPC was a mechanism for Saleh and other political elites to distribute political patronage to control clients. Actual GPC membership denoted loyalty to the regime and a path of upward-mobility into the ranks of government service and positions of power.

#### The Solidification of a Tribal Military Prior to Unification

President Saleh cultivated a powerbase within the officer class and supervised the reintegration and co-option of tribalism into the military. The Yemeni leader’s tribal relatives from the Sanhan clan and the larger-Hashid Tribal Confederation benefited immeasurably from the new arrangement and enjoyed a disproportionate indulgence to command positions and affiliated networks of patronage (Phillips 2011, 52). The rise of the immense patronage network rooted within the military enabled the tribes to further “bolster their parochial security and economic position” within the political-security realms (Knights 2013, 265). A 1987 CIA research brief claimed that the major reason for such appraisals was the fact that, outside of Sana’a, military conscription rested with tribal sheikhs who raised tribal battalions in return for government subsidies and patronage (Central Intelligence Agency 1987, 6). This system led to a further fragmentation of the military because tribal soldiers professed loyalty to individual tribal

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<sup>15</sup> Saleh and Cronies Draw Fire from a Broadening Swath of ROYG Critics.  
[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09SANAA1014\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09SANAA1014_a.html). Accessed 12 November 2016.

commanders as opposed to an ideal of Yemen, although Saleh remained the focal point of this patronage network given his control over state resources.

In this sense, the entrenchment of tribal influences into the armed forces reinforced a pervasive lack of professionalism; tribal bonds, as opposed to merit and military competency, determined placement to important positions within the military-security apparatuses. Moreover, tribal bonds in the military inhibited the emergence of a central, 'national' ideology, which in turn could underpin an *Esprit de corps* within the institution to the nation or state. Dresch astutely describes the dialectical opposition concerning a sheikh in uniform: "a Sh[ei]k who holds a colonel's rank uniform or government Minister does not thereby cease being a Sh[ei]k" (Dresch 1984, 172). This discursive relationship made it difficult to detach tribal loyalties from military allegiances within the armed forces (Fattah 2010, 43).

Ultimately, as the 1980s ended, "elites throughout North Yemen began to view networks of patronage around the president as the nucleus of political and economic competition" (Longley-Alley 2010, 390). The military penetrated the civilian economy and thereby secured access to avenues of enrichment which, over time, established the institution as a focal point in the wider patronage network. As a result, military service constituted an opportunity to unlock access to patronage. Still, tribal solidarities remained a crucial factor with regards to military service and recruitment into the officer class and NCO corps. However, the pervasive economic role and position of the military within the patronage network, alongside tribalism within the institution, pervaded the military until its fragmentation in the wake of the Arab Spring in 2011.

#### Civil-Military Relations in the PDRY (1967-1990)

The development of the military in the newly independent People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) experienced a different evolution in its relationship to the state. A fundamental reason for this difference centred on the socialist disposition of the emergent political class, along with the according desire of the PDRY to model the military in the image of its Soviet patrons

(Central Intelligence Agency 1984, iii). While the attempt succeeded in organizing an institution with a rigorous training and doctrine program, tribal loyalties were never fully stamped out.

The PDRY was established following the British withdrawal from the Aden Emergency and the collapse of the Federation of South Arabia. In comparison to other Arab experiences of statehood, known for nationalist officers seizing power, the PDRY underwent a near true revolution, whereby the social order would be transformed and come to define the social, economic, and political order informed by socialism. The Marxist-bent National Liberation Front came into power and eventually became the ruling Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP). Militarily, the political leadership of the PDRY absorbed the remnants of the British-trained Federal Regular Army (FRA) and transformed it into the 'People's Defence Force' (PDF) with the goal of establishing a revolutionary force tasked with internal security and external defence of the state. However, both undertakings occurred under the subjective-control of the political leadership.

Institutionally, the remnants of the FRA remained relatively cohesive in the immediate aftermath of the socialist revolution in the old South. The State Department's Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research, Thomas Hughes, assessed in 1969 that the "new regime is weakest in the army", with "the military divided between opponents and supporters of the new regime" (State Department 1969, 545-6). Hughes' assessment made light of the discord that had developed between the junior and senior officers. While the former demonstrated support towards the National Liberation Front, the latter appeared hesitant to embrace the growing socialist order and by extension, the NLF (Brehony 2013, 35).

Despite this discord, the political foundations of the new state became centred on the principles of socialism with the institutional character of the armed forces following a similar path. In particular, the 'Glorious Corrective Movement', initiated on June 22nd 1969, lay the foundation for the political subordination of the National Front over the PDF (Brehony 2013, 60). The

solidification of Marxism meant the PDRY became heavily dependent upon the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and Eastern Bloc states for military-to-military partnerships and assistance, with the most prominent relationship formed with Moscow in an agreement concluded in February of 1968 (Halliday 1984, 224).

The defence pact triggered a significant influx of Soviet influence, which served to inform the civil-military relationship revolving around the restructuring and re-equipping of the PDF. Starting in 1968 and continuing until unification in 1990, the PDF accumulated a wide-array of Soviet arms ranging from surface-to-air missiles, battle-tanks, aircraft, and armoured personnel carriers. Additionally, many PDF soldiers and officers received advanced military training in the Soviet Union. The PDF heavily favoured not only Soviet technology and weapon's systems, but also sought to emulate Soviet military structure and hierarchy within the overall force posture (Cigar 1985, 778). According to a 1984 declassified National Intelligence Estimate produced by the Central Intelligence Agency, Eastern bloc (primarily East German Stasi) advisors held a more ancillary role in the development of the military forces in general and tended to focus on the formation of internal security organs, while around 500 Cuban advisors were instrumental in overseeing the development of the People's Militia: an ideological bulwark of the regime (Central Intelligence Agency 1984,12).

Whilst the YAR sought the consolidation of tribal forces into the wider-state structures and armed forces under the leadership of President al-Iryani, the political leadership of the PDRY sought to eradicate the influence of tribalism, which was discernibly more fragmented in comparison to the YAR to form a broader feeling of nationhood (Brehony 2013 69). The PDRY desired to restore society through the erosion of sub-state (tribal) and supra-state (Islamic) fidelities in favour of loyalty to the state and the Party. Soviet and Eastern Bloc advisors played a key role in this process by safeguarding the institutional growth of the armed forces along acceptable political lines. Political commissars played an essential role in this process with the

‘proper’ communist credentials, an increasingly important requisite for recruitment and promotion within the People’s Defence Forces. As a result, the military experienced a degree of political indoctrination, particularly amongst the young soldiers with a focus on the glories of socialism and the promulgation of nationalist views across the wider society. The penetrating influence of Soviet and Eastern Bloc forces, political subordination, and the policies of detribalization contributed to the development of an institutional caricature of the old South Yemen. This is in a fashion dissimilar to the more tribalized character of the military in the North.

Up until around the mid-1980s, tribesmen from the old Dathina state, the homestead of Mohammad Ali Nasir, had enjoyed some measure of influence within the officer corps of the FRA during the British occupation and thereafter (Reich 1990, 346). Despite this, the PDRY made considerable “inroads into the tribal affiliations” (Wenner 1984, 135-36) across the wider social, political, and military landscape, whilst the revolutionary flair of the NLF was harnessed to erode the power of tribalism (Brehony 2013, 60). Moreover, the notable presence of Adenis within the officer class provided a cohort of ‘urbanised’ Southerners into the Peoples Defence Forces. This was based on the distinction between urbanised city dwellers and inhabitants of the tribal hinterlands. As a port city, the British ‘modernised’ Aden through the introduction of modern infrastructure and other social projects, while the hinterlands remained untouched by projects of modernization. Therefore, while the citizens of Aden experienced a development towards the social and political structures of the modern state, the ‘tribe’ and tribal solidarity persisted as a coherent social referent in the hinterland. British policies relegated tribalism, for the most part, to the confines of the hinterlands.

However, the importance of tribalism did not evaporate from all social, military and political spaces within the PDRY. A 1984 CIA report that assessed the military capabilities of the North and South noted that “units on both sides are recruited from and generally assigned to their tribal areas”, which meant that the armies were factionalised along tribal lines, with tribal

solidarity surpassing loyalty to the central authority (Central Intelligence Agency 1984, 5). Both governments understood the importance of the tribes and thus recruited friendly tribesmen into the officer corps. While the Sanhan was important in the North, Aden recruited senior military officers from the regime stronghold of Lahij Governorate, along with men from the Dhalai and Radfan tribes who manned important positions surrounding the Capital (ibid.,6). Nevertheless, the endemic institutionalization of tribalism within the PDRY armed forces failed to materialise on the scale as witnessed in the armed forces of the North.

Moreover, the PDF experienced a marked politicization and indoctrination along Marxist ideological lines, whereby the YSP did absorb positions within the wider-security sector (Barany 2016, 9). In the North, the GPC neither gained a foothold nor determined the institutional composition of the security forces in the North on par with the YSP; tribal forces and patrimony constituted the key determinants within the North's armed forces. While the PDRY Army failed to embrace the role of state building as with other Arab militaries, the PDRY armed forces played an important domestic role as "an unwitting arbitrator of ideological currents" (Barany 2016, 9). This was most evident in the 1986 civil-war, during which a myriad of unit commanders provided support to the various factions in the conflict (ibid).

While the tribal-military-commercial complex predominated the North and defined the contours of power within the corridors of power, the army of the Old South (to some extent) was beset by tribal solidarities, despite a seemingly dominant Marxist ideological bent in the government. Like Baathist Iraq, YSP affiliation and loyalty determined admission into the officer corps, yet tribal affiliations and solidarities persisted beneath the Party rule. While urban officers existed within the PDRY military, units were recruited from and stationed within heavily tribal areas. Inevitably, in such instances, tribal bonds amongst those units would be equal to or greater than any allegiance to a Marxist ideology advocated by Aden. Although the military efficacy of the old South superseded the North, institutional cohesion remained an issue, based on the civil-war



and accompanying factional discord that eroded the cohesion of the political and military elite. Disunity within the government and core military elite ultimately “paved the road for the unification of the PDRY and the YAR” (Fattah 2010, 37).

#### Two Armies and ‘National’ Unification

The Yemen Arab Republic and the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen officially unified to form the Republic of Yemen on May 22, 1990. Discord in the nascent civil-military relationship emerged immediately, demonstrated by the amalgamation as opposed to integration of the YAR and PDRY armed forces. Southern military personnel were absorbed into the Northern military institutions resulting in a military integration that was in name only. The overall political-military façade of the agreement resulted in the integrated military failing to act as, let alone embody or embrace, the process of national unification.

Oil played an integral role both pre and post-unification. The 1984 discovery of oil facilitated the unification process, with the South eagerly seeking joint exploration ventures with the North, which possessed vast quantities of oil centred around Marib and in the Northwest Shabwa. However, Yemen’s largest discovery of oil in the unified Republic came in 1992 in the Hadhramaut province, where Canadian Occidental conducted oil operations in the Wadi al-Masilah (Day 2012, 105). The main objective of the Northern political elite was to undercut and bring the South into the larger YAR political-military machinery, whilst also marginalizing the PDRY Marxist state as a relic of the Cold War. President Saleh tactfully posted army units from the North near the Southern oil fields and the Port of Aden, both of which contributed to Yemen’s petroleum-driven economy.

From the onset, former Marxist and Republican political elites proved hesitant to implement the broader objective of military unification. This meant that the immediate merger of the respective armed forces remained on the backburner in the wake of unification. This was based on a mutual suspicion, as both sides sought to independently establish autonomous

military capabilities (Hudson 1995, 21). The divergence resulted in two distinct ‘armies’, politically subordinated to the GPC and YSP, and the distinct forces continued to “retain their separate identities” (Whitaker 1997, 220). To some extent, President Saleh desired the incorporation of southerners into the machinery of the state and the officer corps. As an officer from the Old South, Saleh allowed Vice President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi (1994-2012) to place southerners in certain key military positions. However, this move was opposed by Gen. Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar because these moves provided space for Hadi to gradually consolidate power around a core of former PDRY personalities.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, Gen. al-Ahmar was against the absorption of former PDRY into a unified military and the officer class, because of the potential for the action to weaken his own power and influence in the officer corps relative to Hadi.

Thus, while impediments surrounding military unification appeared intractable, tangible efforts regarding military unity and integration were evident in the rotation and exchange within a handful of Northern and Southern brigades. The organization of force disposition was merely symbolic and failed to realise the full integration of the respective military organizations (Warburton 1999, 24). Moreover, unit cohesion remained an issue based on the discursive nature of tribal loyalties which would erode any emergent solidarities, either to the military or a united Yemen, and make it exceedingly difficult for the military to embrace the role as a national unifier.

Following unification, political and military elites from both sides agreed that a unified military must be comprised of professional soldiers within the officer ranks. They also needed to be apolitical, with career advancement being based on merit, and with the ability to uphold the monopoly on violence (Gaub 2025, 41). In other words, the agreement encapsulated the fundamental components of Western civil-military relations. Despite an explicit desire for the structural reformation of the military in accordance with Western practices, the typical pattern of

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<sup>16</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Bob Newman. 8 September 2017

tribal predominance within the security structures continued unabated (Philips 2011, 87). Ultimately, in the wake of unification, the military forces failed to emerge “as a national symbol of unity and defence against foreign countries” (Warburton 1994, 24).

Particularly, despite national unification, the underlying power structures and regional loyalties associated with the PDRY and YAR surpassed national unity to the newly unified Republic. Likewise, political and security interests from the North and South remained deeply entrenched as the unification process progressed. (Day 2012, 117). The failure to foster a unified, national army was elaborated upon in 1990 by a Yemeni politician, who noted, “there were not just two armies. Regional and ideological divisions influenced both. There was no truly national army in the North and no truly national army in the South” (ICG 2013, 5).

#### Civil-War and the Domination of the Tribal-Military-Commercial Republic

The consolidation of power within the army around the Northern Highland tribes resulted in the exclusion and disempowerment of the Southerner’s from the political-military landscape. To this end, and from a military standpoint, “Yemen’s civil war in 1994 erupted mainly because of disagreements over the division of posts between northern and southern factions in the military” (Gaub 2015, 3). The two and half month conflict ensured a total political and military victory of the Sanhan tribal elite over the South (Warburton 1995, 20). The 1994 civil-war effectively muted any further discussion or possibility regarding the political and military consummation of the North and South.

On July 7th 1994, President Saleh offered amnesty to Southern soldiers and their commanders; despite the amnesty, the president ordered the disarmament of all Southern military and police forces (Day 2012, 137). This course of policy facilitated the forced retirement of over 80,000 soldiers and officer corps from the old PDRY following the 1994 civil-war, leaving them with a meagre retirement pension. It is important to note that the Northern officials viewed Southern military personnel with suspicion due to supposed Marxist sympathies, who in turn

faced intractable resistance when attempting to enter the patronage networks underpinning the military (Clark 2010, 232).

It was impossible for the former PDRY military personnel to experience upward mobility in the Northern-dominated armed forces without effectively penetrating the networks of corruption and influence. Ultimately, the grievances coalesced around Southern disfranchisement after the 1994 civil war and would eventually aid in the formation of al-Hirak in 2007. The movement formed the backbone of calls for Southern secession and was initially almost entirely comprised of retired military officers from the old PDRY. Following the reunification war of 1994, commanders from the North proliferated throughout senior positions within the military (Droz-Vincent 2011a, 393). Thus, the political-security landscape came to be dominated by the Sanhan tribal elite and, generally speaking, tribesmen from the highlands within Sa'ada (Brandt 2014, 110). These tribal elites exercised power "through their tribal and military or security positions" which surpassed official or titular titles derived from positions within the government (Burrowes & Kasper 2007, 264).

The military also underwent an organizational restructuring into five regional commands or military districts subordinated under the command of President Saleh's family, apart from the Central Military District led by Southern military officers (Phillips 2011, 89-90). As illustrated by the commanding officers of the respective military districts, patrimony, and tribal affinities determined the edifice of the officers' class, as well as the staffing of non-commissioned officers with many of the NCO's hailing from the Northern Highlands and the Hashid Confederation (Barany 20, 2016). Again, the strategic importance of oil to fuel the networks of patronage emerged as a critical issue following the 1994 civil war. President Saleh, alongside a handful of Northern highland elites, sought the South's oil field as the ultimate prize of the civil war. For example, Saleh convinced Canadian Occidental to relocate from Aden to Sana'a and replace the

predominantly Hadrahmi staff with Northern workers, a move that greatly angered the Southern population (Day 2012, 148).

Furthermore, the end of the 1994 civil war provided access to supplemental streams of income, alongside opportunities for the members of the tribal-military-commercial complex to accumulate additional wealth. The Military Economic Corporation was rebranded as the Yemeni Economical Corporation after the end of the civil-war. The conglomerate's tribal-military shareholders benefited from the seizure of Southern real estate in addition to oil and gas assets.<sup>17</sup> YECO also absorbed the two largest private enterprises in the North (Phillips 2011, 110). The period of economic liberalization further accelerated the economic power of YECO and the Northern military and tribal elites, who secured lucrative import licenses and other economic ventures concerned with real estate, and the oil and gas sector.<sup>18</sup> By end of the 1990s, the Yemeni Economical Corporation symbolised an invaluable source of patronage across the officer corps. The wider policies and practices depicted the pervasive manner of disempowerment directed towards the Southern military and security personnel, in addition to the predominance of the Northern security forces from the highland tribal elite. Thus, not only did unity fail to facilitate the emergence of a national army, the overall process of unification in the political, as well as military, realms endured as a "Potemkin façade" (Dunbar 1992, 462).

Ultimately, by the turn of the Century, the institutionalization of tribal forces and networks of patronage emerged as interconnected components to inform the civil-military relationship in Yemen. In summation, whereas the officers guiding the emergent republic post-1962 sought the institutional modernization of the military as an instrument for state-building, tribal forces manipulated the military and viewed the institution as a vehicle to secure parochial loyalties and

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<sup>17</sup> Researcher's Interview with Adam Seitz. 23 May 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

establish patronage centres capable of generating liquid wealth. Importantly, President Saleh co-opted tribal groupings (with the Hashid featuring prominently) into the patron-client networks within the armed forces as a mechanism to ensure the institutional subordination of the military to his person. In this sense, while the tribes have always wielded power in Yemen, Saleh's policies towards and interactions with the tribesmen afforded them undue social and political influence gained from the beneficial standing within the patronage networks.

#### Elite-Military Relation, Patronage, and Patrimony

At the turn of the 21st Century, Saleh desired to centralise power around his person and began to challenge implicit pillars of legitimacy and ruling bargains that had historically ensured a modicum of stability in Yemen. Before moving forward, it is important to identify the layers of elites representing the structures of governance in post-unification Yemen. Sarah Phillips, through extensive fieldwork and qualitative analysis, provides a useful understanding of the regime itself, and the core elite within the regime as the 2000s emerged.

The regime's broader contours within the government centred on a network of tribal and military elites, while a smaller group of around 50 tribesmen from the president's clan and the village of Sanhan formed the nucleus of power as the regime elite. Importantly, just a few hundred individuals from six prominent families within the Bayt al-Ahmar clan from Sanhan pervaded the regime inner-circle (Phillips 2011, 92). The six families included: 'Afaash, Akwa, Najar, al-Qadhi, al-Daheen, and al-Jabar (the clan of Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar)" (ibid).

A 2005 US State Department diplomatic cable provides additional insight into the ruling-bargain practiced in Yemen since 1978. The ruling pact centred around Sheikh Abdullah al-Ahmar (then-paramount Sheikh of the Hashid Tribal Confederation), Gen. Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar (commander of the 1st Armoured Division (1AD) and most powerful military figure in Yemen, of no relation to Sheikh al-Ahmar) and President Saleh. In return for supporting the rule of Ali Abdullah Saleh, the president allowed both the Sheikh and Ali Mohsen free reign in economic

activities for personal advantage.<sup>19</sup> The bargain enabled Gen. Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar to emerge as the éminence grise behind the military throughout the late 90s and early 2000s. US Defence Attaché to Sana'a Lt. Colonel Bob Newman (1998-2001) recalled: "in order to engage the Yemeni military, we at the embassy had to engage Ali Mohsen".<sup>20</sup>

The ruling-bargain existed without interruption, until around 2002, when Yemen reached peak oil levels and the resource began to decline as a source of patronage. Thereafter, President Saleh embarked on a set of antagonistic policies that tightened the dispensation of power around neo-patrimonial rule. The process was accelerated through a fortuitous relationship with the United States, which occurred following the attacks of September 11th, pursuant Global War on Terror (GWOT) and the threat of Al-Qaeda within Yemen. Soon, Yemen would come to represent one of the countless 'front lines' in the war against terrorism alongside countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq. Against this background, Saleh presented himself as an indispensable ally in the GWOT and champion in the fight against Al-Qaeda and, later in 2009, the Yemeni based franchise Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Saleh used strategic rent in the form of counter-terrorism aid from the United States to offset the decline in oil and as an alternative source of patronage to dispense.

At the time, the US proved more than willing to partner with Saleh, not only because of the terrorist threat, but also because Yemen regularly teetered on the brink of state failure. Washington sought to erode the capabilities of Al-Qaeda responsible for the 2002 bombing of the USS Cole, the Houthi Rebellion, and the emergence of AQAP by allocating a substantial amount of counter-terrorism based financial assistance to the Republic.

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<sup>19</sup> Will Saleh's Successor Please Stand Up? [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA2766\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA2766_a.html). Accessed 15 November 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Researcher's Interview with Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Bob Newman. 8 September 2017.

US-Yemeni CT cooperation resulted in an influx of American military (Special Forces and advisors) and intelligence personnel to prosecute the war on terror beginning in 2002. However, a more vital component, 'strategic rent', emanated from the Pentagon's financial largesse allocated to Sana'a with the purpose of bolstering Yemeni CT capabilities. In 2001, the Bush Administration authorised nearly \$400 million through the Department of Defence 1206 funding to train and equip missions. According to a US diplomatic cable during the period 2002-2009, the US allocated over \$115 million in foreign military financing aimed at the training and equipping of Yemeni counter-terrorism capabilities.<sup>21</sup>

The strategic rent derived from Washington benefited the general patronage networks and specifically privileged patrimonial-elites within the military. Broadly speaking, the influx of external patronage empowered Saleh to fortify patronage networks within the already overinflated military budget and allocate further military appointments as well as broadening the practice of 'ghost soldiers' (Seitz 2016, 166). The phenomena of ghost soldiers consist of individuals who exist solely on paper or continually fail to report for duty and whose salary is collected by officers as part of the patronage system. While President Saleh provided partial payments of the financial aid to conventional elites such as Gen. al-Ahmar and Sheikh Abdullah, his sons and nephews accrued a disproportionate amount of CT aid and contracts. This illustrated the increasing tendency to privilege patrimony and familial considerations over the conventional rule-bargain.

However, the strategic rent provided by Washington in monetary terms paled in comparison to the diminishing revenues derived by the Yemeni government from the sale of oil. As a result, President Saleh exaggerated the threat of AQAP to ensure continued access to US counter-terrorism aid (Lewis 2013, 87), and tended to conflate all armed Islamic activity with that

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<sup>21</sup> Brennan-Saleh Meeting Sep 6, 2009. [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09SANAA1669\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09SANAA1669_a.html). Accessed 13 November 2016.



of Al-Qaeda (Harris 2011, 73). Saleh's equalization of AQAP, al-Hirak and the Houthi Rebellion had not gone beyond the notice of senior American intelligence and diplomatic figures. Deputy Director of Central Intelligence Agency Kappes had noted to the US Ambassador to Yemen, Stephen Seche (2017-10), that "Saleh's decision to reverse himself and characterise AQAP as the most serious threat facing Yemen was almost certainly taken with his USG interlocutors in mind" [...] with the president driven by a desire to "elicit the necessary level of political, economic and military assistance" to ensure a measure of stability in Yemen.<sup>22</sup> This is because Washington's benevolence hinged upon the security threat to the US and wider-international community posed by the Al-Qaeda franchise.

As Phillips notes, "crisis has kept the system running, and has been, to a significant degree, a deliberate choice by Yemen's power elite" (Philips 2011, 12). With the instance of AQAP and US strategic rent, the more Sana'a required US CT aid to fuel the patronage networks, the more reliant the regime was on AQAP's status as a prolonged threat. US officials acknowledged as such, noting that while Yemeni CT initiatives reaped some benefits, President Saleh sought to juggle domestic threats all the while ensuring he extracted maximum financial aid from the US.<sup>23</sup> President Saleh manipulated the threat posed by AQAP to continuously prompt aid from the US to sustain his patronage networks and, by extension, the institutional coherency of the state.

The newfound influx of strategic rents, while not supplanting oil, did enable President Saleh to constrict the parameters representing the dispensation of power. In doing so, he marginalised pre-established elites within the tribal, military, and economic spheres. In this regard, external patronage played an instrumental role in the alteration of long-standing sources of patronage allocation and ruling-bargains. In political terms, the constriction of the patronage network

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<sup>22</sup> Saleh Sees Foreign Hand Behind Yemen's Internal Woes.

[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09SANAA1015\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09SANAA1015_a.html). Accessed 6 November 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Yemen GWOT Assessment. [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA916\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA916_a.html) Accessed 18 November 2016.

coincided with the elevation of the Saleh family into positions of military power. The actions eroded the corporate identity of the military and marginalised conventional and traditional tribal elites who hitherto had paved the way for Saleh's ascension into and dominance over the political landscape.

An important aspect to consider in this regard is the role of patrimony, both in terms of presidential succession and in informing the character of the officer corps. In this sense, rational-legal authority describes the nature of leadership and authority in the modern state. In the case of Yemen, as a republic, presidential elections and mandates located within the constitution would be the presumed method of transferring power following the end of Saleh's rule. However, neo-patrimonial rule, a component of traditional leadership, constituted the system of governance under President Saleh. Saleh, therefore, and in line with monarchical aspirations amongst the Arab Republican Presidents at the time, attempted to groom his eldest son, Ahmed Ali Abdullah Saleh, to take over the political reins of the Republic (Rabi 2014, 196).

Col. Ahmed Saleh enjoyed roles of increasing responsibility, influence and loyalty within the military as commander of the Republic's two most well-trained, equipped and funded units: Yemeni Special Operations Forces (YSOF) and thereafter, The Republican Guard (RG). The elevation of Ahmed Saleh was not well received within the officer class of the RG. In 1999 it resulted in measured tension between the president and Gen. al-Ahmar, whose half-brother preceded Ahmed as Commander of the RG.<sup>24</sup> General outrage at the promotion was evident within the division because most considered Ahmed immature, too young, and incompetent as a military commander; this is in the context of Ahmed returning from the Jordanian Military Academy believing he could mirror the military process of the recently crowned King Abdullah II.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Researcher's Interview with Lieutenant. Colonel (Ret.) Bob Newman. 8 September 2017.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Apart from questions surrounding Ahmed's competency and leadership qualities, heredity succession ran counter to the ruling bargain, due to the considerable power of the tribes and military. Saleh's successor would (according to the then US Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) Nabeel Khoury require tribal support, noting that, given the increasingly feeble relationship between the president and Sheikh al-Ahmar, "he [President Saleh] cannot take tribal allegiance for granted in his own re-election in 2006, let alone in paving the way for his son to succeed him in 2012".<sup>26</sup>

Another principal factor regarding patrimony was illustrated by the pervasive presence of the Sanhan clan within the armed forces, a façade of nominally ranked officers obfuscated the true power exercised by President Saleh's tribe, yet in the aftermath of the 1994 civil-war, the Sanhanian elite emerged from a clandestine existence and the Saleh family monopoly over the military became a reality (Day 2012, 137).

Furthermore, the president's immediate family, of the 'Afaash clan, enjoyed predominance across not only among the armed forces, but the wider Yemeni security sector, with around 31 immediate family members promoted to influential security positions (Knights 2013, 273-4). Prominently, the president's brother, Mohammed Saleh, commanded the Air Force, while his son Ahmed controlled the Yemeni Special Operations Forces.

Two of the Saleh's favoured nephews, Yahia and Tareq, directed the Central Security Forces and National Security Forces, respectively. Consequently, the 'Afaash clan, in control of the elite military formations, gained disproportionate access to the counter-terrorism aid allocated by the Pentagon. This was confirmed by the President's first cousin, Gen. Mohammed al-Qadhi, who noted that President Saleh "[had] a firm grasp on the military and security services, which are stacked with men from Sanhan".<sup>27</sup> Accordingly, by the mid-2000s, the Sanhan and President

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<sup>26</sup> Saleh-Al-Ahmar Tensions Portend the Launch of a Presidential Election Campaign For 2006, and Beyond. [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA426\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA426_a.html) Accessed 13 November 2016.

<sup>27</sup> Another ROYG Insider Speaks Out: "He Won't Listen to Anyone". [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09SANAA1611\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09SANAA1611_a.html). Accessed 17 November 2016.

Saleh's constituent 'Afaash clan dominated the military and security apparatus. The actions of President Saleh demonstrated the premium placed on patrimony at the expense of the wider-Hashid Confederation and the old-Sanhanian elite.

The role of US external patronage in combination with Saleh's penchant towards patrimony within the military put him at odds with the traditional elites who, since 1978, served to inform the political, social, and military foundations of Yemen. Saleh increasingly marginalised paramount Sheikh al-Ahmar<sup>28</sup> and Gen. al-Ahmar. The president's deteriorating relationship with his fellow tribesman and top-general would not only produce the most immediate fissures within the armed forces, but also play an integral role in Saleh's downfall as the Arab Spring accelerated into a full-on revolution.

The enmity between President Saleh and Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar eventually permeated into the institutional makeup of the military. In this respect, a schism materialised, effectively fracturing the Yemeni Army around both President Saleh and Ali Mohsen. The elite Republican Guard, Special Forces and Counter-Terrorism Unit fell under the domain of the Saleh family, while the forces in the Northwest Military District such as the 1AD and units in the Eastern Region aligned with Gen. al-Ahmar (Barany 19, 2016). Upon taking command of the Republican Guard, the president's son Ahmed Ali expanded the force strength from eight to eighteen brigades as the eve of the Arab Spring loomed closer. Importantly, the expansion occurred at the expense of not only 1AD under the command of Gen. al-Ahmar, but also to the detriment of conventional army units.

Thus far, the chapter has outlined the historical trajectory and institutional development of the Yemeni armed forces, highlighting a similar beginning to other militaries in the Arab World

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<sup>28</sup> Saleh-Al-Ahmar Tensions Portend The Launch of A Presidential Election Campaign for 2006, and Beyond. [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA426\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA426_a.html) Accessed 11/16/16. Accessed 15 November 2016.

through unification, the subsequent civil war, and reunification. Prominently, the penetration and institutionalization of tribal influence, emanating from the Northern Highlands, alongside patrimony served to shape the institutional edifice of the tribal army. While the institutional existence of the military is beyond conjecture, a myriad of forces vied to shape the organizational structure of the military across the North, and more pointedly, the highland elite enjoyed immeasurable control over the patronage networks. Yet, as noted, the centres of power were increasingly concentrating around Saleh and his immediate family. This was to the detriment of the established social, military and political elite.

#### Instability and Regime Decline

Considering the above, a final factor influencing the civil-military relationship was caused by non-state actors who pressured the political legitimacy of Saleh and threatened to shatter the very fabric of Yemeni society. In the South, economic crises paved the path and lay the foundation for the emergence of the secessionist movement, al-Hirak. Al-Hirak emerged in 2007 and crystallised around the humiliation of the South following the 1994 civil-war and widespread marginalization from the institutions in the new Yemen. Primarily, the amnesty offered Southern soldiers and officers following the 1994 civil war centred on the reintegration into a supposedly 'unified' military apparatus. However, the civil war left many open wounds. The tenuous pace of integration coupled with the proliferation of Northern officers dismayed the Southern officer corps. This, in conjunction with an economic crisis and broader marginalization of the South, paved the movement al-Hirak. Al-Hirak formed the backbone of Southern secessionism and consisted of hundreds of former Southern army officers who were dismissed following unification and put on meagre retirement pensions (Rabi 2014, 142). Over time, the movement incorporated diverse segments of Southern society.

The significance of al-Hirak rested on the abundance of former officers who came to represent and symbolise the old South's lost statehood. In May of 2007, seeking dignity and an

opportunity for economic advancement, the “Local Association for Military Retirees” facilitated a mass demonstration underpinned by nationalist tendencies and the desire for Southern secession. The movement became the main source of political instability and further fragmented Yemen as other crises plagued the increasingly fractured state. However, economic grievances played a role in the creation of the movement and illustrated a broader trend: the patronage system, the system that the state exited under, was no longer a viable mechanism of governance and stability.

A rebellion in the Sa’ada Governorate formed another intractable source of instability. The Bakil Tribesmen of the Shia-Houthi rebellion proved to be not only the most tenacious of challenges, but more importantly transformed itself from a localised to national conflict, with the insurgents eventually enjoying the dispensation of power and control over the machinery of the state by February 2015. The causes of the conflict date back the 1970s and 80s, with the migration of Saudi-Wahabis into the governorate. Bringing a puritanical outlook on the Sunni beliefs into the governorate, they were at odds with the Zaydi community who were additionally facing subjugation at the hands of the Saleh regime.

The Zaydis established religious schools and eventually coalesced in large numbers around the desire to establish a Shia Zaydi imamate. Saleh initially sought to limit the influence of the Islah Party, so he turned a blind eye to the Houthis and nurtured them as a political counterweight (Rabi 155, 2014). However, this strategy backfired when Saleh “lost the ability to balance different regional players and alliances while keeping his rivals off-guard” (Day 2012, 176). In this sense, Saleh was no longer able to ‘dance on the heads of snakes’ and the Bakil tribesmen, along with the Houthi rebellion, became one of the major threats to regime stability. From 2004 and 2010, President Saleh fought six vicious and sporadic internecine counterinsurgency campaigns against the movement.

Throughout, the Houthi insurgents gained an extraordinary military competency and transformed into a formidable armed, non-state group. The group's considerable strength, training, and size resulted in territorial conquest beyond the immediate vicinity of Sa'ada. Conventional Yemeni forces were increasingly stretched thin as the battle against the Houthis continued into the 'sixth-round'. This led President Saleh to deploy the elite Counter-Terrorism Unit; a force envisaged by its American and British trainers for counter-terrorism operations in conventional operations against the Houthi rebellion. The move proved to be a strategic failure and underscored the desperation of Sana'a in the fight against the Houthi Rebellion.<sup>29</sup>

Apart from deploying the CTU into a conventional combat role, the Yemeni government attempted to co-opt many tribesmen into the fight, with many of the tribal battalions raised from the Hashid Confederation.<sup>30</sup> However, the units were intentionally erected as a parallel force to "keep conflicting tribal interests out of the army, and the army out of potential tribal feuds" (Barany 2016, 25). These moves 'tribalized' the conflict and Saleh initially enjoyed support from many of the militarily endowed Sa'ada Sheikhs. Two powerful tribes, the Bani Uwayr and Ruhm, had been well-represented across the officer corps and inevitably benefited from the nature of patronage politics. Thus, they remained beholden to President Saleh due to patronage considerations (Brandt 2014, 113-14). In this respect, the protracted nature of the conflict severely diminished the capabilities of the Yemeni military, and thus, the insurgency exposed the inability of the Yemeni government to combat the insurgents without the support of non-state actors (Rabi 2015, 157).

Increasingly, the central government no longer stood above the myriad of armed, non-state actors dotting across Yemen's security landscape. The Saleh regime found it increasingly difficult,

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<sup>29</sup> Yemen's Counter Terrorism Unit Stretched Thin by War Against the Houthis.  
[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09SANAA2230\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09SANAA2230_a.html). Accessed 18 November 2016.

<sup>30</sup> Tribalized "Popular Army" Against the Houthis Will Exacerbate the Sa'ada War.  
[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09SANAA1847\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09SANAA1847_a.html). Accessed 18 November 2016.

if not possible to single-handedly defeat the Houthi's co-option of non-state actors and forced government mobilization of a 'coalition of the willing', ranging from Yemeni-Shia, along with a multitude of tribal groupings, to Sunni-Salafi extremist elements.

Another important aspect of the conflict centred on the proxy war and 'militarization of politics' prosecuted amongst rival power-bases within the regime. President Saleh manipulated the conflict surrounding the Houthi rebellion to erode the influence of his primary political detractors. Gen. al-Ahmar and his 1AD were not only forced into a war of attrition during the various rounds of the Houthi insurgency. Moreover, the General was frequently denied the requisite men and material to prosecute the battle; instead, the Republican Guard, overseen by Colonel Ahmed Saleh, enjoyed increased procurement of weapons and manpower (Barany 24, 2016).

The conflict with the General reached a climax in an audacious example by President Saleh to neutralise his main political-military rival. Yemeni authorities intentionally provided the Royal Saudi Air Force with the targeting coordinates for al-Ahmar's headquarters, hoping that Gen. al-Ahmar would be killed in the air strike.<sup>31</sup> Overall, the elite-conflict during the insurgency provided Saleh with an opportunity to erode both the credibility and political standing of one his primary political opponents. Beyond conjecture, Gen. al-Ahmar emerged from the Houthi conflict beleaguered, and his military influence severely diluted.

By 2009, the insurgency appeared unstoppable as the fighting spread across the border into neighbouring Saudi Arabia which responded with military action in Operation Scorched Earth (August 11, 2009 – February 12, 2010). While the Yemeni Army engaged southern secessionists in the South, Saudi Arabia invaded the deep north of Yemen, attempting to cull the Shia

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<sup>31</sup> Saudi Arabia: Renewed Assurances on Satellite Imagery.  
[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/10RIYADH159\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/10RIYADH159_a.html). Accessed 12 November 2016.



insurgency through brute force. A cessation to the hostilities was negotiated by the international community in March of 2010.

### Conclusion

In the case of Yemen, the foundational tribal-military nexus was elongated by the incorporation of commercial elites. Patrimony increasingly denoted the officer class, with tribal-elites and President Saleh's kin gaining a disproportionate amount of power, therefore resulting in the constriction of the tribal-military-complex along patrimonial lines. Despite the uneven trajectory, elite-tribal affiliations informed the identity and control over and the Yemeni armed forces.

As the nature of the relationships changed, the Yemeni armed forces were beset by rampant corruption, one fuelled by patrimonialism. Of greater importance, however, was the slow process of the military beginning to unravel, with the fragmentation being driven in part by the discursive nature of tribal loyalties, economic considerations, and patrimony. The embedding of tribal currents within the military presented a situation in which rooting the fidelity of the institution to the state is seemingly impossible. The Yemeni military as an institution never fully embraced a lucid national identity or ideology which encompassed all Yemenis on an equal basis. While the politics of patrimony ensured stability up until this point, the system came under strain and the potential for fragmentation of this network, and thereby the state, appeared even more likely given Saleh's centralization of power and the resulting possibility of elite fragmentation in the military and political spheres.

In terms of political authority and ability to exert control beyond the periphery, the regime of President Hussein proved far more apt at penetrating all segments and structures of society through the Party and Baathist ideology, whereas in Yemen, President Saleh faced clear difficulty in penetrating the periphery without the enabling power of the tribes and segments of the elites. Comparatively, the organic social structures of both Iraq and Yemen allowed for the emergence

of local solidarities centred upon tribe and sect, which often surpassed and or supplanted fidelity to the nation-state. Owens has highlighted that “power structures within these republics evolved differently from their counterparts due to the existence of a number of expressive features generally associated with the fragmented nature of society” (Owens 2012, 94). Both Saddam Hussein and Ali Abdullah Saleh established a period of seemingly durable rule, underpinned by communal loyalties and the use of force; the dualities holding the respective states together, all of which were cloaked by a façade of legitimacy.

The idealised notions of Western civil-military relations failed to emerge in both Iraq and Yemen. Baathism politicised the Iraqi officer corps, whose loyalty rested with the Party, and Saddam Hussein, while tribalism informed the nature of loyalties in the Yemeni military, conditioned by the elaborate network of patronage established by President Saleh. Within both cases, loyalty therefore rested with the regime and person, as opposed to the state. This is a legacy of the Republican regimes, where, oftentimes, regime and state in the region are seen as coterminous and as such, is important with regards to the nature of military fragmentation and state authority. Thus, in both Iraq and Yemen, patrimony served as a tool of institutional privilege, and cemented the officer corps to the regime as opposed to the state.

## **Chapter 4: Fragmentation of Iraq, The Army and the Struggle for Communal Predominance**

### Introduction

The notions of civil-military relations and the state developed by Western scholars, and based on the Weberian state construct, have formed the bedrock for the examination of the security sector and civil-military relationship. However, these ideal types are clearly diminishing within the Middle East and fragmented states. In Iraq, there is now a changing relationship between the state and its monopoly over the legitimate use of violence. This is illustrated by a progressively fragmented central authority in contest with a tribal-sectarian nexus\_ and the sub-communalisation of violence.

Accordingly, this chapter applies the tribal-sectarian nexus\_, and examines the role and impact of tribalism and religious sectarianism on the cohesion of the military and the power of communalism in terms of shaping the dispensation of power. In turn, this chapter will show how communalism became the political dispensation of power following 2003, and increasingly shaped the loyalties of the Iraqi Army.

It is important to provide an understanding of solidarity and cohesion with regards to Iraq. National solidarity is the “sense of belonging among the different segments of the population, support of state and regime, and broad consensus to live together within the state” (Kostiner 2008, 21). Such a sense of cohesion is therefore broader than the narrow allegiances derived from tribe, sect, or kith and kin, encompassing a more robust understanding of collectiveness under the auspice of a nation-state. However, in the case of Iraq, primordial affiliations were not vanquished with the emergence of the modern nation-state. Rather, the structures of autocratic governance contained the tribal-sectarian nexus\_, and sub-state solidarities thus remained relatively dormant in favour of a regime-driven ideology, which according to Kostiner “wrought a form of solidarity that was predicated on the resignation and acquiescence of various parts of the population to the state framework” (Kostiner 2008, 24).

Cohesion and solidarity are therefore significant aspects of 'stateness', with the former playing a crucial role regarding the overall stability of the political entity that is the state. When assessing civil-military relations in such an environment, it is useful to entertain the importance of tribal and other communal solidarities. This is particularly important in the post-2003 Iraqi dispensation, that came to be characterised by sectarian strife and communal discord within the political institutions. This eventually morphed into a destabilizing factor within the security sector and overall civil-military relationship.

However, the prominence of primordial loyalties is not unique to Iraq. To be sure, Arab leaders have historically faced the challenge of maintaining monopolies of violence and instituting sustainable governance because they have failed to establish popular legitimacy across society (Khoury & Kostiner 1990, 3). Opposition has largely emanated from the tribe, sect and communal actors due to this lack of legitimacy from the central authority. In this sense, the rise of sub-state actors and affiliated solidarities is driven by the erosion of state legitimacy and weakness of the central authority. With the case of Iraq, the state-centric ideology of Baathism and highly centralised Baath Party apparatus signified the façade, affording legitimacy, cohesion, security and a semblance of stability in Iraq. Yet, throughout the Presidency of Saddam Hussein, communal affiliations often reinforced the patrimonial nature and distinctiveness of the IA.

However, in the wake of Operation Iraqi Freedom, "The ISF [Iraqi security force] itself is the battleground in the larger communal struggle for power and survival. Middle Eastern concepts of civil-military relations are fundamentally different than Western concepts" (al-Jabouri 2015, 2). This reality highlights the need to assess the role and impact of sub-communal identities to discern the 'civil' component in fragmented societies, where the central authority is weak, and militaries are plagued by sub-state loyalties and actors. Thus, when revisiting notions of civil-military relations and gaining an understanding of the 'state' component in the military nexus, this chapter will test the hypothesis of the tribal-sectarian nexus\_ by examining the influence of tribal and

sectarian solidarities regarding the dispensation of power, military cohesion and the ability of civil-military relations to gauge regime legitimacy.

Accordingly, this chapter will illustrate the sub-communalisation of violence around communal identities and non-state actors to frame the tribal-sectarian nexus, and thus the 'state', in the military nexus in post-2003 Iraq. The role and impact of the Sunni-tribes will be examined to underscore how tribal solidarities impact the coercive nature of the 'state' and discuss how, from the beginning, the confessional nature of Iraqi politics permeated into the military.

Within this setting was the entrenchment of sub-state solidarities and the true sub-communalisation of violence around ethnic, sectarian and tribal armies in a 'civil'-militia relationship. Lastly, the chapter will conclude by highlighting how the protracted nature of communal discord played a discernible role in the second fragmentation of the Iraqi Army in 2014. In total, this chapter will demonstrate how the model of the tribal-sectarian nexus is a valuable approach when attempting to discern the 'civil' or state component in relation to an increasingly fragmented central authority in Baghdad.

#### The US, Tribes and Patronage in the Aftermath of the Invasion

In Iraq, the "foundations of a modern state were built on the old imperial framework of institutions" (Kostiner & Khoury 1991, 13). Thus, the case of Iraq is notable for the centralization of power within the central authority and the state "did not remain attached to traditions nor enshrine them in the political fabric" (Zeidel, 2016, 184). Iraq therefore emerged as a modern state and power was centralised outside of traditional tribal structures and influence. Much of this was owed to the coercive regime of Saddam Hussein and its ability to repress the tribes to the periphery.

Despite this, Iraqi tribes still provided “a referent for social identity and loyalty” (Tibi 128, 1990) in the aftermath of the First Gulf War and more notably following Operation Iraqi Freedom. The power of tribal identity and solidarity is a prominent feature concerning the configuration of security and military relationships with the central authority, and is usually determined by the strength of the central authority in relation to the periphery.

Politically, Iraq is unique in that other forms of social and ideological mobilization surpassed the forces of tribalism and kinship as mechanisms for political change. This is due in part because only the Iraqi Sunnis place emphasis on tribal affiliations. Iraqi Shias mainly view tribalism as a roadblock to sectarian cohesion while the Iraqi Kurds hold a similar stance regarding tribalism and ethnic solidarity. Although the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) are mobilised around tribal lines internally, the ethnic Kurdish identity is mobilised as a counter to the Arab Iraqi identity. The Sunni tribes in some instances joined the insurgency while others aligned with the nascent Iraqi government and COFOR in the fight against the Iraqi Al-Qaeda franchise during the coalition surge of 2006-2008.

In the initial aftermath of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the Iraqi tribes were not part of the offensive conducted by the American-led COFOR. Despite the tribal nature of Iraq and the productive security role exhibited by the tribes under Saddam Hussein, successive American diplomats and officials failed to acknowledge the potential benefits of integrating the Iraqi tribes into the military and forming security relationships with them. As Administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority of Iraq (CPA) (2003-2004), Paul Bremmer and senior CPA officials considered “the tribes as anachronistic, a part of Iraq’s past we could do away with to make Iraq in a more modern and Western image”.<sup>32</sup> The policy constrained US military officers from absorbing tribesmen into new military formations and Coalition Military Assistance Training Team (CMATT)

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<sup>32</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Dr. Peter Mansoor. 17 May 2017.

was initially forced to refrain from recruiting tribesmen into the developing units of the Iraqi Army.<sup>33</sup>

This outlook contrasted with officials in the emerging Iraqi government, who understood the inherent importance of the Iraqi tribes within society. As early as June 2004, these officials began to voice concerns over the ostracization of the tribes. Iraqi Minister of Defence Saadoun al-Dulaimai (2005-06) continually lobbied CMATT commander, Maj. General Daniel Bolger, to incorporate the tribes precisely because Iraq is a tribal society.<sup>34</sup> The Minister of Defence appealed for the formation of tribal battalions raised in a similar fashion to the old British county Regiments because such an arrangement would strengthen the power and national identity of the army. However, US Ambassador to Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad (2005-7) adamantly opposed the plan and maintained the need to follow Washington's mandate of dismantling 'old' Iraq and expressed a desire to refrain from working with the tribes.<sup>35</sup> The vacillating nature of tribal loyalties led American officials to believe that tribesmen would remain devoted to their kith and kin as opposed to wholly embracing the emergent Iraqi nation-state and affiliated security institutions.

However, American military officers disagreed with the 'diplomatic' assessment and understood the effectiveness of mobilizing the tribes to yield security gains. Initially, the Special Activities Division of the Central Intelligence Agency orchestrated a tribal battalion along the border with Syria to interdict the flow of insurgents and weaponry. Apart from the "Desert Protectors", the US Marines operating in the Anbar Province worked with the tribes impartially because the Multi-National Forces-West came to understand the inner-workings of the inherently tribal province. Marine commanders lobbied for the emerging 7<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army Division to draw heavily from Anbari tribesmen and afterwards, station the division in the province.<sup>36</sup> The

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<sup>33</sup> Researcher's Interview with Lieutenant General (Ret.) Daniel Bolger. 29 September 2017.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Researcher's Interview with Lieutenant General (Ret.) Daniel Bolger. 29 September 2017.

importance of working with the tribes was evident in that certain “sheikhs could deliver their tribe and speak for their tribe” which could lead to the mobilization of manpower and unite behind American military objectives.<sup>37</sup>

In 2005, Multi-National Forces-Iraqi (MNF-I) Commander George Casey Jr. become concerned with the intensity of the insurgency movement and ordered Maj. General Rick Lynch (DCS for Strategic Effects) to coordinate efforts across the tribal outreach officers within the subordinate commands and develop a sustainable plan to work alongside the tribes.<sup>38</sup> In the same year, COFOR coordinated with the Abu Mahal tribe in Western Anbar during Operation Steel Curtain and managed to dislodge Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) from Qaim (Long 2008, 78). Despite the success of the security plan with the Abu Mahal, the US and its allies failed to replicate this across wider Iraq. Nonetheless, several tribes, such as the Dulaimai, continued to resist AQI within the Anbar Province.

While American officials remained hesitant to directly engage with the tribes, the tribal hierarchy itself was far from discernible. To recall, President Hussein ‘created’ new sheikhs and tribal leadership to marginalise traditionally legitimate tribal leaders who might have posed a security threat. Therefore, upon arrival in Iraq, US military officers and diplomats were immediately thrust into a multi-tiered tribal hierarchy with traditional sheikhs and those sheikhs gaining prominence under President Hussein. Chaotically working with the tribes might in some cases elevate a clan, family, or sheikh to a status otherwise unobtainable and in turn, irritate fellow tribesmen or other tribes.<sup>39</sup> By and large, cooperation between the coalition forces and Anbari tribesmen remained scant up into the middle of 2006.

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<sup>37</sup> Researcher’s Interview with General (Ret.) David Petraeus. 29 August 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Researcher’s Interview with General (Ret.) George Casey Jr. 17 July 2017.

<sup>39</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Richard Welch. 15 June 2017.



By mid-2006, the magnitude of violence committed by AQI became a clear threat to Iraq's integrity and COFOR coordinated with Anbar tribesmen in what has become referred to as the Anbar Awakening. At its height, the Awakening movement included tribal members from the primarily Sunni areas of Anbar, Ninewa, Salah ad-Din, and Diyala. A patron-client relationship of sorts would emerge thereafter, which Khaled Fattah provides some insight into the inner-workings of such a relationship: "[t]he contemporary relations between tribes and state institutions in the Arab world are expressed, mainly, through relationships of patronage between influential tribal sheikhs and political elites" (Fattah 2012, npn). In this sense, the US was able to establish and secure a short-term patron-client relationship of this nature with the tribes that aided in the success of the Awakening. US-tribal relations accelerated, when Sheikh Sattar al-Rishawi, of the Dulaimai tribal confederation, rallied the Albu Risha tribe in a concerted campaign against Al-Qaeda.<sup>40</sup> The Sheikh was able to unite the Albu Risha and Albu Mahal tribes in a coalition to fight AQI in the Anbar Province under the guise of the Anbar Salvation Council. This event precipitated the emergence of the wider Anbar Awakening that came to constitute one of the most important moments during the war. Significantly, it represented the first concrete connection between tribesmen, the central authority and coalition forces.

Upon replacing Lt. General Casey Jr. in 2007, Lt. General Petraeus expedited tribal outreach with the Anbar Salvation Council and formed The Sons of Iraq (SOI) from the broader Awakening movement. As the movement gained steam, the program rallied tribesmen from Ramadi, Baghdad, and Diyala into paramilitaries. Gen. Petraeus provided a true measure regarding the importance of the relationship, stating in a 2007 report to Congress that Anbar [the tribes] had become "a model of what happens when local leaders and citizens decide to oppose al-Qaida [sic] and reject its Taliban-like ideology" (Gartenstein-Ross & Moreng 2013, npn).

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<sup>40</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Richard Welch. 15 June 2017.

While the virulent nature of AQI arguably rallied the tribesmen to confront the insurgency in the province, the conventional socio-political aspects of the tribe proved equally important. In short, three families constituted the backbone of the Awakening. Chief amongst them was Sheikh Abdul Sattar Abu Risha, an opportunist, known smuggler and outright schemer who became a lead proponent and organiser of the Awakening.<sup>41</sup> The relatively low-level Sheikhs sensed an opportunity to establish good relations with the Americans to advance the stature of his tribe.<sup>42</sup> While conventional wisdom holds the barbarity of earlier ISI iterations forced the emergence of the Awakening, opportunism, along with the failure of the movement to understand the tribal eddies, provided the impetus for tribesmen to join the ranks of the Awakening.<sup>43</sup>

Col. Welch, a former Green Beret and civil-military advisor, outlined the economic importance of tribal leaders working with the US: “tribal leaders are tribal leaders because they’ve been by consensus appointed or elected by their tribes because they believe they can solve their problems and one of the big problems was economics”.<sup>44</sup> The largesse and benevolence of U.S. forces could solve the economic and military problems of the tribe. In this sense, as ‘the Strongest Tribe’, American financial and military support enticed the tribesmen to rally behind the American coalition cause and fight the insurgency.

The patronage aspects of the relationship centred on the American distribution of “contracts to build or refurbish military facilities, pumping stations, roads, schools, clinics, and utility services” (Cigar 2014, 11). While the US provided the requisite supplies for the tribesmen to prosecute the war against the insurgency, Washington also gave the prominent sheikhs with alternative forms of payment who in turn allocated the wealth to the wider clan and tribe. Thus, US commanders provided the tribal battalions with weaponry as well as money and

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<sup>41</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Craig Whiteside. 5 January 2018.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Richard Welch. 15 June 2017.

reconstruction contracts. As noted by Brig. General Ismael Alsodani, patronage will secure tribal loyalty, and while not provoking a sense of devotion to the American forces, the relationship nonetheless ensured the tribal auxiliaries rallied against AQI.

The formation and successes experienced by the SOI in Anbar provided an impetus for the emergence of similar tribal security groupings across Iraq. In June 2007, a Salah ad Din Support Council arose with a similar mission and mandate to erode the insurgency by coordinating efforts and conducting operations in tandem with ISF.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, a small tribal contingent was formed in Ninawa Province to aid in security and stabilization efforts in that area.

However, successful and sustainable security relationships with the tribes was predicated on the centralised nature of the tribe itself. Certain tribal sheikhs in Northern Iraq generally exerted less influence over their less centralised tribesmen, and this made it difficult for the American forces to pinpoint prospective ‘Colonel Sheikhs’ to organise tribal efforts to combat the insurgency. To this end, the decentralised tribal structure of Salah ad Din Province meant that while local tribes confronted radical Islamic groups, a larger and more collaborative tribal effort at the provincial level was unlikely because U.S. and COFOR found it difficult to locate a sheikh with broad influence over all of the tribes.<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, the Shia tribes in the South proved more difficult to work alongside, despite the central authority sharing the same sectarian faith. Basrah Security Chief Gen. Mohan underscored this point in a conversation with US Diplomat Louis L. Bono: “engaging with tribes to provide security would not help in Basrah, and his ISF had, therefore, stopped working with tribes. The tribes were not reliable and would change sides depending on who paid them more”.<sup>47</sup> Overall,

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<sup>45</sup>PRT Tikrit: Tribes Form Salah AD Din Support Council to Fight Terrorism.  
[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07BAGHDAD2155\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07BAGHDAD2155_a.html). Accessed 23 December 2017.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Gen Mohan on Iran, ISF, and Pic. [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07BASRAH96\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07BASRAH96_a.html). Accessed 17 March 2017.

the tribes that were successful in the fight against AQI exhibited a large degree of organizational cohesion and discipline, which in turn enabled them to confront the terrorist threat as a solitary unit. More importantly, the American forces emerged as the 'strongest tribe' and this enabled the coalition to establish inroads with the tribes and ensure the Awakening proved a short-term success.

### The Tribes and Baghdad

In contrast to the American COFORs, Baghdad haphazardly engaged with one of Iraq's most powerful socio-political and economic actors. Throughout the insurgency from 2006-08, the Iraqi Army had largely failed to contain the insurgency in predominantly Sunni areas throughout Iraq due to local support provided to the insurgents from the Sunni population. While motivation for such support varied, disenfranchisement at the hands of a Shia dominated government caused the local population to view the Iraqi Army as a Shia occupation force. This feeling was accentuated by the blatantly sectarian regime of Nouri al-Maliki.

Baghdad was unwilling to establish genuine inroads with the Sunni tribesmen. Historically in Iraq, if the political leadership desired stability in the periphery, the standard operating procedure required regime-tribal reconciliation and the provision of weapons alongside money.<sup>48</sup> More importantly, tribal customs and practices are integral to Iraqi society and therefore key personalities, whether politicians, provincial governors, or military commanders, are likely to adhere to and obey tribal dictates in lieu of state-produced mandates.<sup>49</sup> Based on this logic, Baghdad should have established a relationship with the tribes and enabled them to quell the insurgency, as initially occurred during the Awakening. At the time, however, Baghdad felt such an approach was not necessary,<sup>50</sup> partly because the central government viewed the Anbari tribes with suspicion, given the past affiliation with the Baath Party and their amicable relationship with

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<sup>48</sup> Researcher's Interview with Brigadier General (Ret.) Ismael Alsodani. 10 April 2017.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Researcher's Interview with Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Craig Whiteside. 5 January 2018.

Saddam Hussein. When the Iraqi National Security Council learned of the American relationship with the tribes as part of the Awakening, the Iraqi National Security Advisor responded, “why are [the United States] arming and funding 90,000 terrorists?”.<sup>51</sup> Mowaffak al-Rubaie’s response emphasises the broader sentiment in Baghdad regarding the conflation of Baathists, insurgents, tribesmen and Sunnis as being somewhat cut from the same cloth.

Pragmatism and opportunism, however, assists in understanding the relationship Prime Minister al-Maliki did solidify with certain tribes. As with President Hussein, the prime minister certainly hoped to establish a productive relationship with the tribes to improve provincial stability. Despite certain trepidations, the central authority established inroads with the Anbari Tribes following the Awakening and laid the ground for the integration of the Iraqi tribesmen into the security structures of the state. The Iraqi Ministry of Interior initially approved the formation, and provision of salaries to the tribal paramilitary forces composed of tribal youth in the Anbar province.<sup>52</sup> The Tribal Support Councils (TSC) enabled Baghdad to establish security arrangements like that under Saddam Hussein. In the lead-up to the military Operation Charge of the Knights in Basrah, an effort to dislodge JAM militants from the city, Baghdad provided funds to established localised tribal militia to augment conventional Iraqi forces.<sup>53</sup> TSC’s slowly emerged amongst the tribes in Anbar, Diyala, Basrah and Maysan Provinces. However, the distribution of TSC funds also served as a mechanism for Prime Minister al-Maliki to secure Dawa Party support from tribal leaders by allocating funds.<sup>54</sup>

While the Tribal Support Council represented a mechanism for Baghdad-tribal relations, the ‘issue’ regarding the Sons of Iraq question superseded this affair and remained a hotly contested

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<sup>51</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Michael Pregent 17 July 2017.

<sup>52</sup> Anbar Tribal Politics: Looking Ahead to the Post-War Period.

[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07BAGHDAD2229\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07BAGHDAD2229_a.html). Accessed 14 March 2017.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Michael Pregent. 17 July 2017.

policy in Baghdad. Iraqi officials broadly expressed a desire to move forward with the tribes to counter the insurrection, while some within the prime minister's inner-circle sought to "derail the process" and political tensions among the Badr Brigades, wider Awakening contingency, and Iraqi military emerged due to the policy of tribal engagement.<sup>55</sup>

The prime minister and his inner circle never fully trusted the tribal contingents (Boghani 2014, npn). Additionally, the process intended to transform the SOI program into a government-sustained security initiative failed to manifest due to "[s]uspensions of the Shi'a-led Maliki GOI".<sup>56</sup> The suspicion resulted from the fact that most of the 99,000 Awakening members were Iraqi-Sunnis and, for historical reasons, the Shia government in Baghdad did not wish to train and equip a force with more manpower than the British Army.<sup>57</sup> However, following heated negotiations with American officials, Baghdad agreed to integrate 20 percent of the SOI into the security sector while employing the remaining 80 percent with menial, non-security related civil-service positions.<sup>58</sup> The menial civil-service positions included jobs such as janitors and other mundane positions, which further humiliated Sunni tribesmen who risked their lives to fight terrorism.<sup>59</sup> While the prime minister ensured some tribesmen gained employment in the civil-service, he reneged on the deal to absorb 20 percent of the fighters into the military.<sup>60</sup> In actuality, however, while the SOI never experienced wholesale integration, all 99,000 individuals who formally signed up as tribal combatants received a government salary up until 2014.<sup>61</sup> At the same time, the Awakening leadership pocketed as much as 50 percent of the salaries paid by Baghdad, while in some instances, direct payment was made to lower-level members such as tribesmen who

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<sup>55</sup> "Awakening Leader Abu Azzam on GOI Cooperation Political Planning". [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08BAGHDAD749\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08BAGHDAD749_a.html). Accessed 17 March 2017.

<sup>56</sup> Support Councils In Sunni Regions: Failure to Launch. [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BAGHDAD431\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BAGHDAD431_a.html). Accessed 20 March 2017.

<sup>57</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Richard Welch. 15 June 2017.

<sup>58</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Richard Welch. 15 June 2017.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Researcher's Interview with a Former Iraqi Senior Advisor to the Minister of Defense. 4 December 2017.

manned checkpoints.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, considering the payments from Baghdad, it is debatable as to whether the tribesmen desired to manage the security affairs in the province for the long-term.

Nevertheless, al-Maliki had no intention of arming nor integrating the SOI, whose tribes and constituent clans in some instances had exercised good relations with President Hussein and ultimately, would never trust “90,000” terrorist’s. Prime Minister al-Maliki only acquiesced to the Awakening and plans concerning the integration of tribal fighters with a gun to his head, by Lt. General Casey Jr., and subsequently Lt. General Petraeus.<sup>63</sup> Al-Maliki viewed the tribes as operating with their own agenda and would thus hinder the cohesiveness of the Iraqi Army in addition to potentially undermining his own strategy of governance and consolidation of power.<sup>64</sup> Part of the issue again rests on the wavering loyalties of the tribesmen, and the actual ability to integrate the tribal soldiers into the military: because not only were the tribesmen unequivocally against the central authority, but more importantly, a substantial number of the members had engaged in insurgent activities.<sup>65</sup>

Despite the failure to integrate the Sons of Iraq, the Sunni tribes had a noticeable presence in the officer class. As the Iraqi Army reconfigured along traditional lines, the Iraqi leader strove to reduce the number of Sunni officers and started to co-opt individual tribesmen who were beholden to Baghdad, and in turn, provide fellow tribal members with loyalty to either the state, or Prime Minister al-Maliki.<sup>66</sup> This process facilitated the individual integration of the tribal officer as opposed to whole tribal units. Consequently, the recruits acted not as a tribal unit, but as an individual soldier. To this end, Nouri al-Maliki succeeded in anchoring the fidelity of individual tribal officers to the office of the prime minister.<sup>67</sup> Ultimately however, relations with tribes in

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<sup>62</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Lieutenant Colonel (Ret) Craig Whiteside. 5 January 2018.

<sup>63</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Lieutenant General (Ret.) Daniel Bolger. 29 September 2017.

<sup>64</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Ali Allawi. 15 April 2017.

<sup>65</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Lieutenant Colonel (Ret) Craig Whiteside. 5 January 2018.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

addition to other contested issues proved difficult for American ‘occupational’ forces to manoeuvre around the prime minister. While American pressure meant Baghdad worked with the Sunni-tribes, once the US withdrew in 2011 and al-Maliki was still in power, “he turned on them with a vengeance”.<sup>68</sup>

#### Tribes and the Rise of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) 2010-2014

The surge dramatically reduced violence in Iraq and tempered down ethno-sectarian discord, enabling the government to manoeuvre Iraq into a stable state.<sup>69</sup> However, as American forces prepared for withdrawal, the Awakening remained an unfinished project. At this point, no one in Baghdad desired to push for the integration of tribesmen into the Ministry of Interior, let alone the army. To make matters worse, Christopher Hill, Washington’s top diplomat in Baghdad, failed to demonstrate the finesse and acumen required to navigate the tribal contours of Iraq, let alone the increasingly complex problems taking hold in the state.<sup>70</sup> Against this backdrop, in December 2011, American forces withdrew from Iraq with tribal-security relations still in a state of flux. Post-2011 they witnessed a further deterioration in tribal-government relations and security in general, reaching a precipice in 2013 and concluding with the Islamic State of Iraq absorbing large areas of Iraqi into its so-called Caliphate.

With the US government no longer able to influence Prime Minister al-Maliki, he began to neuter the Sunni community of any political or military power. In December of 2011, al-Maliki issued an arrest warrant for Sunni Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi on fabricated charges of terrorism and issued another warrant for the Sunni Minister of Finance in a highly deliberate campaign of sectarian targeting. This overtly sectarian agenda sparked public outrage, which was met with violence and generated protests that culminated in the 2013 Anbar Province protests, and the start of the Iraqi Arab Spring. The prime minister continued to frame the Sunni community

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<sup>68</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Dr. Peter Mansoor. 17 May 2017.

<sup>69</sup> Researcher’s Interview with General (Ret.) David Petraeus. 29 August 2018.

<sup>70</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Lieutenant General (Ret.) Daniel Bolger. 29 September 2017.



in sectarian terms and “continued to denounce the peaceful protests as a Baathist and AQI scheme to destabilise his government in Baghdad” (Jensen 2015, 106). Such actions reinforced the perception that Baghdad cared little for the Sunni community, which gradually came to see “themselves as being disowned, dishonoured and abused”.<sup>71</sup> In this regard, al-Maliki laid the foundation for ISI to emerge from the ashes of AQI.

The Sunni tribes played an integral role in this context and with regards to the rise of ISIS. While some tribes had assisted in the Awakening, others took part in Islamic State’s offensive and subsequent siege of Mosul and Ramadi in 2014. Certain tribes had historically resented the post-2003 dispensation of power, and following 2012, aligned with the Islamic State in Iraq.<sup>72</sup> The Sunni-tribal contingent provided a varying degree of support to ISI and shared the commonality of never fully accepting nor acquiescing to the central authority.

The Sunni tribesmen had experienced marginalization in the post-2003 dispensation and suffered a dilution of socioeconomic as well as political standing. Yet, the relationship of the tribes with Prime Minister al-Maliki and that of the broader Sunni-tribal population must not be discounted. One important impetus compelling the former SOI members to engage in anti-regime activities centred on the fact that the Sunni tribesmen, as with the general Sunni community, had lost faith in Baghdad.<sup>73</sup> It is extraordinarily important to comprehend that the tribal battalions emerging from the protest movements were former SOI members “who got disgruntled because they didn’t get the good deal”.<sup>74</sup> This marginalization of the Sunni polity in general and Anbar Province meant that some tribes were never going to stand up and fight for the Shia-led government in Baghdad. More notably, Col. Welch recalled that even if the tribes mobilised, they

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<sup>71</sup> Researcher’s Interview with General (Ret.) David Petraeus. 29 August 2018.

<sup>72</sup> Al-Jumaila, Al-Halabsa, Al-Bu ‘Issa, Azza, Al-Mishahda in the Anbar region, Al-Bu Ajil, Al-Bu Nasir and certain clans of the Al-Jubur and ‘Ubaid tribal confederation in the region of Salahaddin and Nineveh.

<sup>73</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Richard Welch. 15 June 2017.

<sup>74</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Lieutenant General (Ret.) Daniel Bolger. 29 September 2017.

had lost faith in the US military and would not stand-up even if supported by American military might.<sup>75</sup>

The Sunni-insurgency underwent a transformation into the Islamic State of Iraq which quickly gained territory and support through various tactics. ISI initially applied a stick and carrot approach with the tribes; they targeted Awakening members with threats of death and intimidation, while at the same time, promising to pay salaries that had exceeded those provided by Baghdad.<sup>76</sup> Based on this, some Anbari tribesmen and former Awakening volunteers joined the ranks of the insurgency, who, while engaged in campaigns of intimidation against the tribes, provided considerably higher remunerations than Baghdad.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, tribal alignment with ISI was often tacit in nature, a function of financial reward and physical intimidation.

Furthermore, ISI also sought to undermine tribal cohesion to dilute the emergence of a coherent opponent, but also to recruit vulnerable tribesmen. The tribes, or tribesmen that aligned with ISI therefore lacked internal cohesion and discipline, rendering young and uneducated tribesmen susceptible to ISI propaganda.<sup>78</sup> ISI, in this regard, failed to capture all the Anbar Province due to the coherent organizational structure of the wider-Dulaimai Tribal Confederation and constituent tribes and clans. Tribal solidarity therefore surpassed the allure of joining the radical Islamic organization and pledging allegiance to ISI. Beyond this however, the terrorist entity represented a coherent organization, with an abundant arsenal of conventional military equipment, and provided a real political project. In turn, some tribesmen calculated that an alliance with ISI could be more beneficial than collaborating with a Shia dominated government

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<sup>75</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Richard Welch. 15 June 2017.

<sup>76</sup> Researcher's Interview with a former Senior Advisor to the Iraqi Minister of Defense. 4 December 2017.

<sup>77</sup> Featuring prominently amongst the tribes who have supported the Islamic State consist of: the Al-Jumaila, Al-Halabsa, Al-Bu 'Issa, Azza, Al-Mishahda in the Anbar region, Al-Bu Ajil, Al-Bu Nasir and certain clans of the Al-Jubur and 'Ubaid tribal confederation.

<sup>78</sup> Researcher's Interview with Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Craig Whiteside. 5 January 2018.

that had failed to embrace the Sunni population within the new political landscape determined by confessional or communal affiliations.<sup>79</sup>

Additionally, early derivations of ISI failed to recognise the intrinsic importance of tribal leaders in a traditionally tribal society, and thus recalculated their approach after 2009.<sup>80</sup> While still implementing the 'stick' approach, Whiteside noted ISI established a "Sunni base, through co-option and conversion of political elites, resource generation and usurpation of state resources, recruitment and network expansion, and framing using media platforms" (Whiteside 2016, 763). In this circumstance, ISI generated the perception of the 'strongest tribe', and the logic of the 'tribal way' led to an alignment of Sunni-tribes with the most powerful dispensation-the Islamic State of Iraq.<sup>81</sup> In turn, ISI lured a groundswell of local support by demonstrating capabilities and assets associated with a conventional state. ISI clearly formed an approach more attuned with the nature of tribal influence in Iraq, then earlier derivations, such as AQI.

Despite all these efforts, "[m]ost tribes were internally divided, with some members aligned with IS while others remained neutral or allied with the Iraqi government" (Schapper 2014). Nonetheless, as ISI rolled through Iraq, the Sunni tribesmen were in no mood to bulwark the al-Maliki government, perceived as beholden to narrowly defined communal interests and thereby detached from the rest of the political field. However, the notion that the Sunni tribesmen joined ISI because of sectarian motivations is too reductionist, as it fails to acknowledge the localised nature of political struggles within the tribal networks in Anbar and elsewhere. At the same time, the ease in which tribesmen floated from allying with the government to aligning with the Islamic State of Iraq illustrates the inherently fluid nature of solidarities and difficulty in fully cementing the tribes as productive actors in a civil-military relationship and beholden to the state. ISI

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

constituted a vehicle to enact change for the Sunni tribesmen, because” it was like their form of resistance and activism at the same time”.<sup>82</sup> The common thread centred around the wavering nature of tribal loyalties and ease in which former Awakening members reconciled with the movement, as opposed to remaining in solidarity with the central authority.

#### Loyalties and the Tribal-Military Balance

Operationalizing tribesmen as alternative providers of security proved productive in those areas where sheikhs exerted influence over fellow tribesmen, while in areas with a less pronounced tribal culture, the conventional IA operated with little assistance from the local tribesmen. Additionally, the rather erratic relationship between the security structures and tribes illustrates the incoherent power of tribes across Iraq. While Gen. Petraeus hailed the surge and Awakening as a strategic success and military victory, the events reflect the fragile and incoherent nature of the IA at the time, and the futility of relying on the tribal allies as a long-term security solution. Specifically, American-led COFOR’s had to depend upon sub-state actors as sponsors of security as opposed to state-affiliated institutions.

Moreover, the integration and working relationship between the tribes and central authority materialised only because of the feeble nature of the state’s coercive institutions at the time and the consequential need to augment the fight against the insurgency. This was at a time when the Iraqi Army became disproportionately Shia Arab and was unable to make headway in the Anbar Province. According to American analyst Dr. Carter Malkasian, who embedded with the Marines in Anbar, “The Iraqi Army, the focal point of Iraqization, has been unable to win the support of the Sunni population, who view it as a Shia occupation force” (Malkasian 2007, npn). In this regard, the grassroots success of the tribal militia in comparison to the failure of the IA to secure Anbar against the insurgency can be attributed to the ‘Sunni’ face of the tribesmen that

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<sup>82</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Vincent Alcazar. 14 April 2017.

made them first among equals with the local Sunni community. This contrasted with the Shia invaders from Baghdad aligned with a perceived sectarian government. Broadly, this assessment also illustrates the wider-Sunni perception of Baghdad's intentions to envelope Iraq under the banner of Shia predominance. Baghdad in this sense failed to unite the mainly Iraqi Sunni tribal population into the state framework and the armed forces.

Yet, tribal-state security relations in the wake of 2003 proved short-lived "because the tribes are drifting and moving, and their loyalties are not to the Iraqi state".<sup>83</sup> Gen. Casey Jr. acknowledged the US's desire to refrain from establishing localised tribal paramilitaries for this exact reason, and instead, wanted to disperse young-tribesmen throughout the military to shape a national institution and aid in the process of Iraqization. However, the conclusion reached was that "the society wasn't ready for that yet".<sup>84</sup> In other words, while tribal battalions proved invaluable in counter-insurgency operations at the local level and operated with ease in familiar territory, the men displayed an unwillingness to deploy outside the environs of familial land and become members of an overtly sectarian 'state' institution.

Deputy Commanding General, MNF-I, Lt. General Robin Brims concurred with Gen. Casey's assessment, and reflected that even if integration worked, the tribesmen that were recruited locally assumed that their unit's area of responsibility would be confined to their tribal domain.<sup>85</sup> The tribesmen assumed they would be mobilised, recruited, and barracked in line with the old British county Regiment system or American National Guard framework. The concerns were clear in a 2006 military graduation ceremony for Anbari Tribesmen, who received assurances that their area of responsibility would be confined to the Anbar Province. A general from Baghdad gave a speech and told the young-cadets they would be fighting terrorism all over Iraq, and once the

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<sup>83</sup> Researcher's Interview with Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Craig Whiteside. 5 January 2018.

<sup>84</sup> Researcher's Interview with General (Ret.) George Casey Jr. 17 July 2017.

<sup>85</sup> Researcher's Interview with Lieutenant General (Ret.) Robin Brims. 2 August 2017.

cadets realised the very real prospect of deploying outside of the Anbar Province, a majority took off their uniforms and walked away from the ceremony.<sup>86</sup> As witnessed during the graduation ceremony, tribesmen demonstrated an inherent aversion towards integration into a broader-national fighting force. American officials were therefore acutely aware of the power surrounding tribal solidarities and the difficulty in introducing the tribesmen to the solidarization process and diluting tribal loyalties in favour of a professional soldier subordinate to the state.

Based on this, even if the Sunni tribes were brought into the security apparatus, a strong measure of discipline and integration was required to thin out tribal solidarities. Successful integration would largely depend on the leadership and professionalism of the commanding officer.<sup>87</sup> Beyond this requirement is the inherent need for a professional military institution to facilitate the ‘soldierization’ process, a requirement the Iraqi Army was unable to accomplish during the period under consideration. Giving the Iraqi tribes too much power and weaponry might have resulted in tribal sheikhs operating as warlords wholly independent from the central authority. On the other hand, wholesale integration of the tribal cohorts into the military might have nudged along the formation of ‘tribal armies’ within an army. Irrespective of the path chosen, the tribal groupings, and unavoidable nomadic loyalties, proved instrumental in diluting the cohesion of the Iraqi state, and laid the basis for the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq.

#### Communal Politics and a Communal Army

Leadership, cohesion and the national identity of the armed forces are more than purely military issues and must be viewed with relation to the central authority, and therefore who the military is fighting for. Thus, it is important to examine certain aspects of the political communalisation of the Iraqi central authority to shed light on its impact within the civil-military relationship. In this regard, the military came to mirror the communalists, dysfunctional and

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<sup>86</sup> Researcher’s Interview with General (Ret.) George Casey Jr. 17 July 2017.

<sup>87</sup> Researcher’s Interview with General (Ret.) David Petraeus. 29 August 2017.

incoherently fragmented nature of the central authority. The desertion of Iraqi military members caused the second fragmentation of certain military units and reflected the weak legitimacy of the state and the military at the time.

Following Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), the United States disbanded the Iraqi military and state structures through Coalition Provisional Authority Orders 1 and 2. The orders caused the collapse of Hussein's secular regime and facilitated the total collapse of the central authority. This process fragmented the state and resulted in the communalisation of politics and sub-communalisation of violence. It is certain that within the modern state of Iraq, the army, tribe, and religion constituted the three inextricably linked pillars of Iraqi society. Importantly, throughout the rule of Saddam Hussein, the military and *Mukhabarat* underpinned a state-society relationship predicated on coercion. As noted by Col. Peter Mansoor, "we abolished the first pillar and ignored the second, which left sectarianism as the only remaining basis for political discourse in an increasingly fragile society" (Mansoor 2008, 82). The United States structured the post-2003 political order around confessionalism, and an ethno-sectarian system of proportional representation. Inevitably, all political life thereafter focused on tribal, sectarian and ethnic considerations as opposed to political platforms in the Western sense.

Ethno-sectarian appropriation and communalism thus became an institutional determinant of the state and military-building process in Iraq following 2003. Thereafter, communalism became the political foundation of the state spanning ministerial appointments, bureaucratic managers and increasingly the composition of the IA. In this regard, while an 'army' technically existed throughout the period under consideration, it is important to understand the impressive communalised-force disposition of the Sunni and Kurdish communities and the Shia-dominated authority. Inevitably, a Shia dominated government presided over an equally sectarian coercive institution alongside a group of political-sectarian militia. The Kurds remained aligned with the peshmerga, while the Sunni militant mobilization occurred around a crude dichotomy of tribes

and holy warriors. Regardless of how one defines the communalised coercive forces, the fact is a triad of armed organs, not a cohesive or unified national entity came to characterise the post-2003 coercive landscape.

A prominent theme therefore in the aftermath of the US-led invasion of Iraq focused on the communal politicization and entrenchment of sub-communal identities and violence within the tribal-sectarian nexus of Iraq. However, the Interim Iraqi Government, under the leadership of Iyad Allawi (2004-05), was more than willing to work with Shia, Kurds, and Sunnis to determine the optimal ethnic and sectarian balance for the emergent Iraqi Army.<sup>88</sup> While a Shia, Iyad Allawi separated religion from politics and wholly refrained from sectarian practices, and more importantly, preferencing individuals based on sectarian affiliations.<sup>89</sup> Senior Iraqi officials at the time were convinced that the Iraqi Army, which even under President Hussein was held with high regard, constituted the “vehicle for national integration”.<sup>90</sup>

However, this desire would prove to be short lived once the caretaker Iraqi Interim Government was replaced by the Iraqi Transitional Council (2005-06) under the leadership of Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari. In December of 2005, Iraqi Parliamentary elections led to the formation the first official Iraqi government. How, it generated unease within diplomatic circles based on the increased importance placed on sectarian affiliations within the security sector in the lead-up to the 2005 Parliamentary elections. Ten days preceding the elections, al-Jaafari, motivated by political reasons, had relieved every Sunni Officer from the army.<sup>91</sup> This forced MNF-I Commander Gen. Casey Jr. to confront the prime minister and confirm he would rescind the order.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Lieutenant General (Ret.) Daniel Bolger. 29 September 2017.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Researcher’s Interview with General (Ret.) George Casey Jr. 17 July 2017.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.



The blatant sectarian moves immediately worried diplomats regarding the future development of the state. British Ambassador to Iraq William Patey (2002-5) warned of a situation whereby “government and military officials are picked by political parties based on their religious sect” while DCM David Satterfield (2005-6) commented “[t]his is the third time in two months that Shia political factions have tried to gain control of the MOD” adding that “they harbour deep suspicions of a “Sunni controlled” army”.<sup>93</sup> The assessments indicate the inherently communal structure that would come to determine the foundation of Iraq’s political and military institutions.

This would increasingly lead the military to mirror the broader political sectarian trends of the state. Pointedly, the political landscape in 2006 was very much informed by sectarian politics, or policymakers reaching decisions based on sectarian or communal considerations rather than conventional political platforms. Despite a desire to obtain power and influence, the ethnic and sectarian boundaries defining the constituencies hamstrung Iraqi politicians (Joint Intelligence Community 2006a, 2). Former Interior Minister Nuri Badran divulged as much in a discussion with American officials, lamenting that “sectarian parties are the only way to have influence in Iraqi politics today” and as a moderate Shia politician, aligning with Islamists was the only tangible option to gain currency in the tribal-sectarian nexus of Iraq.<sup>94</sup> Notably, secular politicians and a secular character to inform the development of the Iraqi state remained on the periphery as the political and military landscape was enveloped by a communally aligned dispensation of power.

By 2007, ethnic and sectarian considerations had come to define the structures of the new Iraqi State. As a Defence Intelligence Agency civilian contractor and member of Lt. General Petraeus’ Commanders Initiative Group, Michael Pregent conducted an organizational analysis of

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<sup>93</sup> PM Jaafari Plans Major Shakeup of Iraqi Military Leadership; Warned By MNF-I and Embassy. [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05BAGHDAD4836\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05BAGHDAD4836_a.html). Accessed 2 February 2017.

<sup>94</sup> Former Interior Minister Ponders How to Compete with Sectarian Parties, Suggests May Try to Control Ministries Through Militia-Backed “Advisors”. [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06BAGHDAD811\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06BAGHDAD811_a.html) Accessed 25 December 2017.

the fifty most influential sectarian political-military actors in the Iraqi Government. The analysis concluded that removing the most sectarian actors from the government would amount to a 'coup'.<sup>95</sup> In other words, the epicentre of power stemmed from a coterie of personalities who privileged sectarian affiliations as the key impetus informing political decisions and the placement of individuals within proximity to the corridors of power. This would mean that communal discord inhibited the formation of a secular government and an equally cohesive, national army.

This trend was already beginning to take hold of the Iraqi Army. A June 2006 British Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) intelligence summary provides further evidence of the institutional character of the military at the time: "of the 10 Army divisions, 3 are heavily Shia (over 90 percent), a further 3 are Shia dominated, 2 are mostly Kurdish and 1 is relatively mixed" (Joint Intelligence Community 2006b, 3-4). More importantly, the officer class at this time reflected the confessional breakdown of the Iraqi state and was ostensibly 'national' in composition. While the JIC document provided a relatively adequate appraisal regarding the ethno-sectarian composition of the army, the 2006 Iraq Study Group Report underscored the emergent trend regarding the 'national' composition and loyalties of the army. This led the authors to question whether the IA "will carry out missions on behalf of national goals instead of a sectarian agenda" (Baker et al., 2006, 8). The key concerns outlined in the evaluation, specifically the increasingly pronounced conflict between communally driven agendas and national goals, transpired over the next five years, as the army came to reflect the incoherent and communally-aligned nature of the central authority in Baghdad.

To be sure, eleven of the fourteen army divisions fell under the command of Shia officers, while a pair of Sunni officers and one Kurd controlled the remaining three divisions. While Sunni and Kurdish officers held positions within the divisional-level operational commands, they often

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<sup>95</sup> Researcher's Interview with Michael Pregent. 17 July 2017.

fell subordinate to a Shia officer, which denied them any relevant command responsibility. Sectarian favouritism permeated into the command elements of Iraq's fourteen army divisions, as Shia officers controlled eleven of the divisions, and even in cases where the divisional commander hailed from the Sunni sect, a Shia officer always served as the deputy divisional commander (Sullivan 2013, 16). This is one aspect that caused the structure of the IA to evolve into an overtly sectarian institution as the prime minister side-lined Kurdish and Sunni officers alongside those Shia with questionable loyalties.

In 2007 US Ambassador to the United Nations, Zalmay Khalilzad, met Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa, in which the Secretary-General questioned the overall democratic process and political nature of Iraq. Secretary Moussa stated, "[y]ou cannot have a democracy based on sectarianism".<sup>96</sup> In the same vein, you cannot have a national military determined by communal solidarities. Yet, the inherent and divisive nature of the central authority came to taint the institutional cohesion and corporate identity of the Iraqi military.

#### The Ethno-Sectarian Politicization of the Army

The communalised nature of the tribal-sectarian nexus that came to determine the structural characteristics of the army paved the way for a subtle form of political interference. The politicization in this context refers to the ability of communally aligned political parties to erode the integrity of the armed forces and the direct meddling of the central authority to subordinate the officer corps to personalised rule and a communal ideology. A reoccurring malady befalling the Iraqi Army emanated from the localised nature of recruitment amongst the even numbered divisions. This method of mobilization meant that certain sections of the officer corps, in addition to the rank and file, would be susceptible to alternative influences and, the machinations of the communally-driven political parties. The issue of political-militia parties

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<sup>96</sup>Moussa Discuss Iraq with Ambassador Khalilzad.  
[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07USUNNEWYORK378\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07USUNNEWYORK378_a.html). Accessed 18 February 2017.

played a role with regards to the politicization of the Iraqi Army and “was the fundamental problem, there were too many different allegiances for the military, it was very politicise”.<sup>97</sup>

As commander of 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division in Baghdad (2009-10), Lt. General Bolger noted political organizations exercised “Influence on who would command [and] who had the key positions”.<sup>98</sup> Despite such influence, the US military wielded enough manpower as well as control over budgetary issues to impede political meddling in certain circumstances. Politicization was extraordinarily visible in the case of the Peshmerga and constituent Kurdish population, who challenged the central authority and retained a large degree of coercive autonomy as the KRG’s militarised force.

This was explicitly visible within the realm of the Iraqi army. For example, the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> Divisions stationed in Western Ninewa and Salah ad Din respectively were officered initially by Peshmerga, while the NCO corps were predominantly Kurdish. Thus, the problem was that the Kurdish soldiers in the Iraqi Army owed their allegiance to the Peshmerga chain of command through to the regional government.<sup>99</sup> More significantly, because KDP and PUK membership is determined by tribal affiliations, those political parties could mobilise the soldiers within the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Divisions far easier than formations influenced by SCIRI, Dawa or Badr.<sup>100</sup> Entrenched loyalties to the KRG resulted in an ‘autonomous’ Kurdish force operating within the larger setting of the Iraqi Army and illustrated the failure to establish a national military and implement a broader nationalism across the entirety of Iraq.

Apart from Kurdish influence, the largely Shia 8<sup>th</sup> Division fell under the influence of Prime Minister al-Maliki’s Dawa Party, while the Sunni Iraqi Awakening Party<sup>101</sup> had some control over

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<sup>97</sup> Researcher’s Interview with General (Ret.) George Casey Jr. 17 July 2017.

<sup>98</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Lieutenant General (Ret.) Daniel Bolger. 29 September 2017.

<sup>99</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Lieutenant General (Ret.) Robin Brims. 2 August 2017.

<sup>100</sup> Researcher’s Interview with a former Ministry of Defense Public Relations Officer. 10 August 2017.

<sup>101</sup> The Iraqi Awakening Party was formed by Awakening Members and tribesmen who fought against AQI/ISI.

the 7<sup>th</sup> Division in Anbar Province, which had experienced the amalgamation of some 3,000 members from the Awakening.<sup>102</sup> The 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Divisions were officered by Badr Corps militiamen of the SCIRI. Over time, however, “the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> Divisions were directly tied to Shia political parties”.<sup>103</sup> In this sense, there was a correlation between the political appointment of an officer and the trajectory of the individual’s loyalty. With regards to this alignment, an officer appointee displayed loyalty to the politician or political party (often communally aligned) that ‘owned’ the higher command and thereby exercised some control over policies and patterns of recruitment.<sup>104</sup>

This process effectively resulted in politically (along sectarian and ethnic lines) and tribally aligned forces in the military.<sup>105</sup> Instead of operating as a truly national force, political-militia carved out distinct, communal enclaves in the various divisions, which produced a chain of command leading to ethnic and sectarian aligned political organizations, as opposed to the Iraqi state. Armed, non-state actors challenged the legitimacy of the Iraqi government as the rightful purveyor of force and guardians of their respective communities. Overall, the militiamen remained aligned with their respective political parties and the Iraqi Army became visibly impacted by the sub-communalisation of loyalties.

The ‘politicization’ described would, at a first glance, appear to be a genuine political subordination of the officer corps, in part or in whole, in addition to the rank and file.<sup>106</sup> However, with regards to the definite influence of political parties, Brig. General Alsodani cautioned against the notion that the army was ‘politicise’ in the Baathist sense with political cells infiltrating the

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<sup>102</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Michael Pregent. 17 July 2017.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Captain (Ret.) James Spencer. 22 March 2017.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> The Peshmerga fighters in the Army were the only exception to this statement, and as outlined, remained beholden to the Kurdish Regional Government and affiliated political parties.

military.<sup>107</sup> Rather, politicians exerted some control over officer placement and promotions. The ethno-sectarian system of political appropriation obligated an officer who desired a certain command position to approach the parliamentary defence committee, or the political party controlling the committee, to elicit an endorsement for the position.<sup>108</sup> For an analogous example, a British Officer might be obliged to consult with the Defence Select Committee membership and the affiliated Conservative Party Leadership in order to obtain a placement or promotion.

However, a former public relations officer in the Iraqi Ministry of Defence additionally cautioned against inflating political influence, noting that the soldiers themselves tended to be political and therefore sought the guidance of political parties, providing “the parties a soft control over the divisions”.<sup>109</sup> All in all, an officer who desired a position would be required to elicit an endorsement from the political party and or gain influence over politicians charged with defence affairs.<sup>110</sup>

The compulsion of courting parliamentarians illustrates that while important, political associations did not totally inform the allegiances of the officer corps but were one of many considerations alongside communal affiliations informing the structural composition of the officer class. Again, political parties at this epoch in Iraqi history tended to be communal in nature and blended sectarian identities within the political process. Political elites came to hold disparate views of the IA, with the Shia viewing the institution as a legacy of President Hussein, while the Sunni political community believed the organization was initially an agent of the United States and thereafter, Iran. Unsurprisingly, Kurdish elites never trusted the institution.<sup>111</sup> As a result, this

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<sup>107</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Brigadier General (Ret.) Ismael Alsodani. 10 April 2017.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Researcher’s Interview with a former Ministry of Defense Public Relations Officer. 10 August 2017.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

environment made it extremely difficult for the Kurdish political class to trust the military and officer corps in any sense, regardless of communal backgrounds.

Throughout the process of reforming the Iraqi security sector, the US and its allies expended considerable effort to ensure the Iraqi Army matured into a professional and apolitical institution. While issues persisted during the period of 2006-2009, the US wielded enough influence to monitor process and advocate for the advancement of militarily component officers. However, Prime Minister al-Maliki, as an aspiring autocratic ruler, began to view a professional and apolitical military as a threat to his political longevity. It would mean that the officer corps was loyal to the Iraqi state and constitution, as opposed to the person of the prime minister. In this sense, he required a cadre of loyalists within the armed forces and began a campaign to replace many within with sectarian and political loyalist to 'coup-proof' the army. Despite the increasingly prominent role of sectarianism in defining the rules of the political game, the al-Maliki was initially politically weak.

To buttress his rule, al-Maliki established a network of influence and patronage directly linking the person of the prime minister with high-level generals and senior civil-servants too important defence and security portfolios. Al-Maliki began to centralise power around a numerically small, yet cohesive group of loyalists with close personal ties to himself. This cadre of individuals known as the '*Malikyoun*,<sup>112</sup> counted immediate family members as well as trusted Dawa party affiliates among its ranks (Rayburn 2012, 45). Importantly, this cadre came to form a nascent, albeit increasingly influential network. As the group started to accumulate power, it began to circumvent conventional channels of government power and would come to represent a shadow state (Dodge 2013, 245). Indeed, US Ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker, asserted Prime

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<sup>112</sup> PM Maliki: Strengthened Center or Emerging Strongman?

[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BAGHDAD379\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BAGHDAD379_a.html). Accessed 2 March 2017.

Dawa members Tariq Najm Abdullah, Sadiq al-Rikabi, Ghati al-Rikabi Ali al-Adib, Sami al-Askeri Hassan Sunayd, Ahmed al-Maliki, Mowafaq al-Rubaie.

Minister al-Maliki was “loath to delegate sensitive political tasks to persons outside this group”.<sup>113</sup> The *Malikyoun* were able to monitor the military and security institutions and thus provide al-Maliki with less formalised influence over the armed forces (Dodge 2012, 162).

Apart from the *Malikyoun*, al-Maliki established the Office of the Commander and Chief (OCINC) in 2007 and of the provincial commands as additional mechanisms to influence, and ‘coup-proof’ the military. The creation of the OCINC directly subordinated Iraq’s elite and well-trained security units to include the Special Operations Forces, Counter-Terrorism Forces and the Baghdad Operations Command to the prime minister (Sullivan 2013, 11-13). The OCINC enabled al-Maliki to circumscribe whatever feeble ‘oversight’ mechanisms and institutions existed that were traditionally designed to monitor the civil-military relations. Equally important to Prime Minister al-Maliki’s clutch over the security sector were the eleven operations commands; established along provincial lines, each command enveloped the constituent police and army units within the province under the centralised command of one general, handpicked by the OCINC. The process enabled the organization to stove-pipe operations and exercise situational awareness over the entire Iraqi Army through an abbreviated chain of command.<sup>114</sup> Aside from a desire to ‘coup-proof’ the IA, the prime minister never trusted the Sunnis, a sentiment that originated from the historical legacy of the Shia within Iraq and a personal role as a long-standing member of the subversive Dawa organization during the rule of Saddam Hussein.

American diplomats were acutely aware of the al-Maliki’s sectarian leanings and came to understand his worldview as being “deeply informed by the Shi’a historical experience” in Iraq.<sup>115</sup> This ostensibly equated to an inevitable deep-seated mistrust and suspicion of the wider-Sunni

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<sup>113</sup>PM Maliki: Strengthened Center or Emerging Strongman?

[https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BAGHDAD379\\_a.html](https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BAGHDAD379_a.html). Accessed 2 February 2017.

<sup>114</sup> For example, the 7th Division Commander, to the Anbar Provincial Commander, through to the Office of the Commander and Chief, and thereafter, the Office of the Prime Minister.

<sup>115</sup> PM Maliki: Strengthened Center or Emerging Strongman?

[https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BAGHDAD379\\_a.html](https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BAGHDAD379_a.html). Accessed 18 February 2017.



Officer Corps within the IA whom the al-Maliki equated with Baathism. It would appear the prime minister was conditioned to look for treachery, specifically his “twin betes noires” of a military coup and a Baathist resurgence.<sup>116</sup> Two prominent examples encapsulate the broader structural changes al-Maliki initiated across the security sector. Al-Maliki began the process of removing key Jaysh al-Mahdi and Badr militiamen from divisional command positions and placed them into the Headquarters of the Iraqi Land Forces. They would be replaced with Shia officers and Dawa Party loyalists.<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, while the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had been Kurdish, from 2008-2010, al-Maliki began replacing component Sunni and Kurdish commanders with Shia and officers affiliated with the Dawa Party.<sup>118</sup>

Because of these sectarian-motivated modifications, and his increasingly authoritarian leadership, al-Maliki formed a point of contention for members of the US military on the one hand and civilian officials on the other. The aftermath of the hotly contested March 2010 Parliamentary elections further aggravated members of the American military. Gen. Raymond Odierno, CG of US Forces in Iraq (2008-10), briefed President Obama to the effect that al-Maliki was a sectarian actor and validating his victory sends the wrong message to the Iraqi people, and Washington needed to cut him loose.<sup>119</sup> Conversely, Christopher Hill (2009-10), the top American diplomat in Baghdad, who failed to appreciate the complexities of Iraq, convinced President Obama and Vice President Biden to support Prime Minister al-Maliki. Domestic US politics and President Obama’s campaign promise to end the war in Iraq determined Washington’s decision to align with al-Maliki. The choice, however, generated the perception amongst the Sunni, Kurdish, and secular Shia

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Michael Pregent. 17 Jul 2017.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid

<sup>119</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Dr. Peter Mansoor. 17 May 2017.

communities that the United States had effectively condoned an Iranian supported Shia-government with an indisputable record of sectarianism.<sup>120</sup>

The concerns expressed by Gen. Odierno were prophetic. After the drawdown of US forces in Iraq (USF-I), the society became more entrenched into their communal forms.<sup>121</sup> The Iraqi leader now enveloped the Ministerial portfolios of Defence and Interior under the domain of the OCIC and thus exercised undisputed control over Iraq's security apparatus. Prime Minister al-Maliki removed all the relatively competent and professional officers in favour of political loyalist and sectarian appointees with little or no previous military experience.

Soon after, all the poorly qualified officers who were loyal to the Iraqi leader took control of key commands, often to the detriment of truly professional officers who were all moved to less important positions.<sup>122</sup> In some instances, inexplicable appointments took place, such as placing a Shia Arab from Basrah in charge of a Kurdish brigade.<sup>123</sup> Regardless of who was placed where, al-Maliki came to see the IA as a force that would emulate the legacy of the old Saddam-era Iraqi Army regarding an institutional organization and identification. In other words, under Nouri al-Maliki a Sunni force became a Shia force.<sup>124</sup>

Moreover, al-Maliki attempted to turn the Iraqi Army into an extension of his political bloc, ideologically wedded to him through subjective-political control. To be sure, civilian control rested with the Prime Minister alone, absent any institutional semblance of checks and balances. Arguably, however, al-Maliki at most, only succeeded in controlling some of the specialised units and the 54<sup>th</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup> Brigades of the 6<sup>th</sup> Division stationed in Baghdad. Undoubtedly, the prime

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<sup>120</sup> Researcher's Interview with Lieutenant General (Ret.) Daniel Bolger. 29 September 2017.

<sup>121</sup> Researcher's Interview with Daniel Bolger 29 September 2017.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Researcher's Interview with Lieutenant General (Ret.) Daniel Bolger. 29 September 2017.

<sup>124</sup> Researcher's Interview with Ali Allawi. 15 April 2017

minister had managed to completely destabilise the cohesion of the Iraqi Army, producing an institution marked by incoherent loyalties up the chain of command.<sup>125</sup>

In this regard, the prime minister's sectarian policies of privileging Shia officers to the detriment of Sunni and Kurdish ones meant that the "the force you saw in Mosul when IS rolled in 2014 were Dawa loyalists who said I didn't want to fight or die in Mosul" and "would rather fall back into Baghdad and protect Sunni Shia fault lines."<sup>126</sup> The process of pragmatic sectarianism, overseen by al-Maliki and the communal nature of Iraqi politics in general, was one of the primary reasons as to why the military didn't "have anything to fight for except these politicians and they are not going to do that".<sup>127</sup>

#### Civil-Militia Relations and a Divided Army

The communalisation of Iraqi politics coincided with non-state actors steadily accumulating the coercive strength necessary to emerge as strong competitors to the central authority of the state. A notable example of this competition revolves around the development of political and communally aligned militias who succeeded in consolidating power over the political and security institutions of the state. Sub-state actors enmeshed themselves within state-institutions and further bolstered the importance of communal identities as the basis of power. As will be shown, these groups slowly eroded the state capacity to consolidate control over the security sector and establish an Iraqi identity within the armed forces.

The 'political party militia' phenomena reflected the religious, ethnic and political attitudes across the Iraqi landscape. This trend began as early as 2006, when political parties across the communal spectrum began to establish and maintain a militia (Joint Intelligence Community 2006c, 2). In turn, the militia posed a direct challenge to the Iraqi military apparatus in providing

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<sup>125</sup> Researcher's Interview with Lieutenant General (Ret.) Daniel Bolger. 29 September 2017.

<sup>126</sup> Researcher's Interview with Michael Pregent. 17 July 2017.

<sup>127</sup> Researcher's Interview with General (Ret.) George Casey Jr. 7 July 2017.

their respective constituencies with a modicum of security (ibid). In this context, political-militia engaged in activities to advance and protect narrowly defined communal interests,<sup>128</sup> and became inimical to the emergence of an Iraqi identity. In the conventional Weberian state and according civil-military relationship, a clear division of labour exists between a national, state-sanctioned military tasked with defending all society and the political parties who are confined to matters of governance on the other. This division of labour indisputably failed to emerge in Iraq because politically-aligned militia developed into formidable forces that challenged the 'state' as the ultimate purveyor of force.

A prominent example of this highly problematic situation revolves around the Kurdish political organizations of the PUK and KDP with strong links to the Peshmerga. As a side note, the Kurdish Regional Government signed CPA order 91, compelling militia to integrate into the Iraqi Security Forces, yet Baghdad tacitly accepted the Peshmerga as the autonomous region's protection force. The Peshmerga adhered to the CPA order, and integrated fighters into the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, who remained beholden to the KDP, while the 4<sup>th</sup> Division with, tribal-bonds to the late President Talabani, were subordinate to the PUK.<sup>129</sup> This problem was highlighted in a 2006 MNF-I assessment that noted "half the units within the Iraqi Army's 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Divisions are re-badged Peshmerga" (Joint Intelligence Community 2006c, 2).

Consequently, those units demonstrated a stronger fidelity to the Kurdish political elite and the government of Kurdistan, as opposed to the Iraqi state. Indeed, as US Ambassador to Iraq, Khalilzad wrote in a cable, the mandate of the Peshmerga centred around "defending the unity of Kurdistan, its people, and its land from any aggression wherever it may originate."<sup>130</sup> The

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<sup>128</sup> Militia and Other Armed Groups in Iraq-Confronting the Sectarian Divide.

[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06BAGHDAD812\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06BAGHDAD812_a.html). Accessed 1 February 2017.

<sup>129</sup> Researcher's Interview with Lieutenant General (Ret.) Daniel Bolger. 29 September 2017.

<sup>130</sup> Ambassador Discusses Kurdish Peshmerga Force with Iraqi PM.

[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06BAGHDAD4128\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06BAGHDAD4128_a.html) Accessed 3 February 2017.

respective Kurdish political elite genuinely exercised considerable control over the mobilization and deployment of Kurdish soldiers serving in Iraqi battalions, and on occasion, refused to deploy those units.<sup>131</sup> From the mandate alone, the intentions of the Kurdish political-military elite appeared exceedingly clear; the Peshmerga would remain subordinate to the PUK and KDP and institutions of the Kurdish Regional Government. Beyond conjecture, the loyalties of Peshmerga soldiers persisted with the KRG and respective political leadership as opposed to Baghdad and the Iraqi Army chain of command. This is unsurprising, given the historical apprehensiveness of Erbil to genuinely contribute to an Iraqi state as a disenfranchised ethnic minority.

While ethnic-militia affiliations played a role in unit cohesion and loyalty as shown with regards to the Kurdish population, a 2007 JIC report acknowledged the role of sectarian parties within the ranks assessing at the time that a number of “army units contain individuals and groups who cooperate with either Sunni Arab insurgents or Shia extremists” qualifying that “the problem may be worse in largely Shia units” (Joint Intelligence Community 2007, 30). From the onset, the militia exacerbated sectarian tensions all the while gaining increasing prominence amongst IA units conducting operations in heavily populated Shia regions. Over time, sectarian militias succeeded in nurturing dual loyalties amongst the rank and file to the detriment of an all-embracing national Iraqi identity. Two prominent Shia-affiliated political militias such as the SCIRI-affiliate Badr Organization and Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) became the dominant non-state actors in the nascent stages of the new political and social order following the removal of President Saddam Hussein from power. The two-communal militia had a substantial presence within the division’s operating in and around Baghdad, while JAM fighters represented the bulk of the NCOs, and Badr Corps members comprised the officer class.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Michael Pregent. 25 April 2017.

The pronounced visibility of soldiers aligned to Shia militia provoked commanding officers to question the loyalties of subordinate Shia soldiers. For example, a pair of Sunni-Arab officers, stationed outside of Fallujah, expressed concern regarding this issue. The problem arose from the fact that, while Anbar Province is predominately Sunni Muslim, the ranks of the two IA divisions stationed there were overwhelmingly Shia.<sup>133</sup> This led one of the officers to state that if ordered to fight against JAM fighters, military “effectiveness would be compromised due to the perceived dual loyalties of their soldiers, or fear of retribution”.<sup>134</sup>

Similarly, a brigade commander in Anbar Province had “concerns about possible dual loyalties within his unit, adding that “the current sectarian composition of the government complicated matters”.<sup>135</sup> The problems of communal infiltration also proved problematic for other divisions with an area of responsibility in the Anbar Province. An IA Officer noted that “50-60 percent of their battalion’s soldiers have Shia militia ties” while an executive officer provided similar figures within his battalion.<sup>136</sup> Maj. General Abdul Ameer Commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> Division told a State Department Official “[t]he ranks [of the Iraqi Army] are filled with JAM and Badr Corps members, some who even turn on us during battles to change to the side of their militia.”<sup>137</sup>

Indeed, the city Basrah nestled in the Shia heartland, under the operational control of British Forces, epitomised the growing role non-state armed entities within Iraq’ budding security sector, illustrated by several militias operating in lockstep with political entities and wielding considerable military prowess. Within the city and surrounding areas, a durable insurgency formed of Shia militia alongside a less pronounced Sunni-jihadist and foreign fighter presence,

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<sup>133</sup> Iraqi Army Officers Discuss Internal Militia Influence, US Troop Levels.

[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07BAGHDAD136\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07BAGHDAD136_a.html). Accessed 5 February 2017.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Al Anbar: Iraqi Soldiers Discuss GOI, Sectarianism, Logistical Support; Hold Dual Loyalties?

[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06BAGHDAD4571\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06BAGHDAD4571_a.html). Accessed 5 February 14, 2017.

<sup>136</sup> Iraqi Army Officers Discuss Internal Militia Influence, US Troop Levels.

[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07BAGHDAD136\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07BAGHDAD136_a.html). Accessed 5 February 2017.

<sup>137</sup> ISF General on Security Situation in Baghdad.

[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08BAGHDAD1010\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08BAGHDAD1010_a.html). Accessed 6 February 2017.

constituting a key difference in the combat terrain with that of wider-Iraq where a predominantly Sunni-insurgency fought against coalition forces. For example, a local human rights activist Hasneen al-Safi told the State Department Regional Coordinator, Ken Gross, “that militia forces control the streets of Basrah”<sup>138</sup>. This exchange reflected the wider presence, influence, and role of non-state actors within the city.

At the time, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Republic of Iraq and The Islamic Virtue Party (Fadhila) wielded considerable political influence in and around Basrah. More importantly, both organizations exercised control over subordinate militia, who would come to disrupt the cohesion of the Iraqi Army and undermine security in the province. The influence exercised by non-state actors on the ‘streets’ permeated the structural composition of the local IA divisions. In a conversation with Mark Marrano, US Deputy Regional Coordinator, Iraq’s Basrah intelligence chief Majed al-Sari noted that the 10<sup>th</sup> Division of the IA with an area of responsibility in Basrah experienced infiltration and corresponding pressure exerted by Fadhila and the Badr Corps<sup>139</sup>. Such assessments underscore the broader issue pertaining to the influence of communally-aligned militia and ability to compete with state-based loyalties. The officers believed that their subordinate formations would refuse to fight if ordered to engage against members of their own communal militia.

The blending of political parties with associated armed, communal organizations completely impairs the fundamental substructure of the civil-military relationships and stymies the overall functioning of the modern state. Coercive power exercised by sub-state actors affords political elites and non-state actors the opportunity to elongate power across society to the detriment of the state, often filling a void and subsequently eclipsing central authority. With the

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<sup>138</sup> Militias in Basrah-Dirty Politics Personified. [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06BASRAH55\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06BASRAH55_a.html). Accessed 10 February 2017.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

case of Iraq, communal-political militia increasingly wielded considerable power across the political and military spheres.

Ultimately, these non-state actors offered alternative sources of security and means of violence separate from the central authority. This reality led a JIC report to conclude that sectarian militia competed “with the Iraqi state’s security forces to provide security and protection for their own communities.” (Joint Intelligence Committee 2006c, 1). Importantly, therefore, the communal-political militia exhibited the ability to capture and channel popular sentiment away from the central authority into sub-communal narratives, displayed through the infiltration of sub-state actors as opposed to effective integration into the structures of the IA.

The proliferation of militia and their ability to garner influence commensurate with the central authority illustrates the weak nature of the state and difficulty in rooting the loyalty of the military to a state underpinned by a conventional nationalism. More importantly, distinguishing a member of a communally-aligned political-militia and soldier was nearly impossible. Many divisions within the Iraqi military did not have soldiers of the state, but militiamen with loyalties to communally-aligned political organizations. This in turn highlights the degree that the monopolies of violence had sub-communalised around sectarian militia and ethnic armies.

#### The Sunni Conundrum

As illustrated, the Shia and Kurdish non-state actors formed the backbone of the emerging political-militia movement following the overthrow of President Hussein. This occurred as the Sunni political, economic and social standing crumbled following OIF and precipitously continued until the rise of ISI in 2014. Sunni resentment towards the Shia political and military class meant that the community remained alienated from the ongoing process of state and nation building and existed on the periphery as social pariahs. Baghdad failed to establish a government as durable and pervasive as the Baathist regime. This void precipitated a lack of internal cohesion



and motivated the strengthening of communal and ethnic loyalties, as discussed with respect to the Shia and Kurdish communities.

Understandably, the Sunni-Arab population combined into a durable and fanatical insurgency resulting in the rise of AQI and thereafter, the Islamic State franchise in Iraq. The militarization of the Sunni-polity united around a fervent jihadist organization and former regime elements, including former Baath Party functionaries and members of the old officer corps. Despite the disparate background of religious fundamentalist and seemingly secular Baathist adherents, the commonality focused on the dispossessed nature of the Sunni community and loss of political power, economic interests, and commensurate social status. In this vein, two disenfranchised constituencies previously incompatible politically and ideologically under the regime of President Hussein rallied around the desire to reinstate the dispensation of power situated on the Sunni population.

The January 2005 Parliamentary Elections introduced the Shia political rise and reinforced the Sunni desire to resist a newfound position of disadvantage. In this sense, the electoral outcome was noteworthy, because identity-driven, communal considerations informed political calculations of political elites and constituents as opposed to secular considerations. In other words, ethnic and sectarian affiliations morphed into the political determinant and served to reinforce communal identities. More importantly, the solidification of supra-national identities (political Islam focused on Shia and Sunni sects) immeasurably impacted the viability of fomenting a national Iraqi identity (Bengio 2008, 73).

In the interim, the decision to disband the IA and subsequently thin Baathist influence from the institution was perceived as a metaphorical dilution of Sunni power. Importantly, former senior-Baathist military officers and officials also had a measurable impact on the Islamic State of Iraq's organizational makeup. The majority were officers in former-President Saddam Hussein's

military, primarily the Air Force, Republican Guard, and Intelligence organizations. Some officers felt dishonoured and had no desire to join the emergent army coexisting alongside an occupational force, while other soldiers found themselves unemployed.<sup>140</sup> Fatwas issued by Sunni Clerics proved instrumental, as any Sunni who joined the new army faced a death sentence.<sup>141</sup> Moreover, as noted in the previous sections of this chapter, the Sunni population was under-represented within the newly formed Iraqi Army. This is important because the institution had historically been dominated by the Sunni population under Saddam but is more noteworthy because it provided the Sunni polity with an avenue for upward mobility. In contrast, in the post-2003 dispensation, the Sunni community was largely detached from the ongoing process of state-building, highlighted by the Shia domination of both the political and military institutions.

As Spencer argues, radicalization manifested into extremism in the primarily US-orchestrated detention centres, producing several of what MNF-I members referred to as ‘Pissed off Iraqis’ or POI’s (Spencer 2013, 213). Several of these detainees emerged as members of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the infamous leader of the Islamic State, is the most well-known detainee to undergo radicalization while in the custody of the Coalition Forces. Specifically, the US-maintained Camp Bucca served as a catalyst for radicalization, indirectly nurturing the ideological seeds and a foundation for recruitment into ISIS.<sup>142</sup>

For some, the relaxed environment, and not ‘torture’ or enhanced interrogation techniques facilitated the manufacturing of ‘pissed off Iraqis’. The detention centres transformed into hotbeds of radicalization because the detainees were permitted to intermingle and in turn, construct an organization that evolved over time into Al-Qaeda 2.0.<sup>143</sup> In this sense, a firebrand

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<sup>140</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Brigadier General (Ret.) Ismael Alsodani. 10 April 2017.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Vincent Alcazar. 14 April 2017.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

jihadist might radicalise a few detainees, but it was the ability to form a network and continue to operate as a network post-detention that proved invaluable in continuing the jihad. While the degree of adherence to Baathist and *Takfiri* ideology upon incarceration is disputable, several prominent detainees emerged from the detention facilities and went on to positions within the broader Islamic State organizational structure; their number two Abu Muslim al-Turkmani; Haji Bakr; senior military leader Abu Ayman al-Iraqi and Abu Lu'ay; Abu Qasim who directed the influx of foreign fighters and suicide bombers; logistical mastermind Abu Shema and Abu 'Abdul Raham (McCoy 2014, npn).

Aside from Camp Bucca, the infamous episode of detainee mistreatment at the Abu Ghraib facility proved instrumental as a symbolic tool for recruitment and a rallying point for radicalization. For example, a 2006 diplomatic cable notes "many Iraqi insurgents decided to fight against Coalition Forces after seeing images of detainee abuse in Abu Ghraib prison."<sup>144</sup> While the disregard for human rights at Abu Ghraib is the exception and not the norm concerning COFOR treatment of detainees, it illustrates the position of the detainee system as an epicentre for radicalization and pipeline feeding the recruitment of the ISI and larger Islamic State. Aside from this, it was increasingly difficult for Iraqi's of the Sunni faith to join the emerging military. This was made problematic by the ongoing sectarian fight between a Sunni insurgency and Shia central authority. At the end of the day, the Sunni community could not trust the Iraqi military nor its officers, so it was hard for them to join as a private soldier.<sup>145</sup>

Arguably, the Sunni population did not enjoy an army in the same sense the Kurdish population enjoyed the protection of the Peshmerga while the Shia felt somewhat secure under the sectarian regime of Nouri al-Maliki and Shia militias proliferating Iraq. While the tribal

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<sup>144</sup> Militias and Other Armed Groups in Iraq-Confronting the Sectarian Divide.  
[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06BAGHDAD812\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06BAGHDAD812_a.html). Accessed 5 February 2017.

<sup>145</sup> Researcher's Interview with Captain (Ret.) James Spencer. 22 March 2017.

battalions constituted and resembled a Sunni protection force, insurgency and rebellion emerged as the logical solution to rectify the perceived oppression at the hands of a sectarian government. Importantly, the Sunni polity was pitted against a society splintering into armed entities defined by communal solidarities that fashioned the army into a sectarian institution infiltrated by sectarian-militia and political organizations.

### Decline of The Military

While Iraq's elite counter-terrorism unit the "Golden Division" initially constituted the only unit free of influence and characteristic of Iraq's societal landscape, the broader army fell under the influence of non-state actors, and affiliated ethno-sectarian political parties. Non-state actors succeeded in altering the character of the army, from a national institution beholden to the state, into an institution beholden to certain sectarian, ethnic and political enclaves. For example, the predominantly Kurdish 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Divisions with operational responsibility for Eastern and Western Ninewa and Salah ad Din respectively were heavily influenced by the KDP and PUK. Furthermore, the SCIRI and Badr Corps gradually enjoyed control over the mostly Shia 5<sup>th</sup> Division based in Diyala, while the 7<sup>th</sup> Division operating in Anbar fell under the sway of the Iraqi Awakening Party, and the 8<sup>th</sup> Division in the Shia heartland became infiltrated by the Dawa Party.<sup>146</sup> Furthermore, by 2010, al-Maliki had managed to ensure that "Shi'a officers had taken control of all of the department and directorate level positions in the Ministry of Defence"(Rayburn & Sobchak 2019, 548).

Consequently, the encroachment of ethno-sectarian parties over the army divisions is perhaps the most pronounced obstacle that prevented the military from developing into a professional, cohesive, and unified national force. In addition, communally-driven, non-state

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<sup>146</sup> Researcher's Interview with Michael Pregent. July 17, 2017.

actors continually challenged the 'state' to consolidate control and influence over the military and political structures of the state.

It is certain that, by the beginning of 2013, the army had begun to suffer under the sectarian practices of Prime Minister al-Maliki and politicization of command appointments alongside the pronounced infiltration of non-state actors. Thus, while the components driving the structural erosion of the IA culminated over time, the first meaningful institutional cracks emerged around April of that year, when localised units operating in Kirkuk and the environs of Salah ad Din collapsed following a Sunni insurgency expounded by the reactions of local forces to the protest.

Shortly thereafter, the now burgeoning Shia-militia coalition began to augment the enfeebled army which ultimately fragmented in June of 2014. Nineteen IA brigades melted away centring on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> IA Division operating in Ninewa, alongside most of the Salah ad Din-stationed 4<sup>th</sup> Division and Kirkuk-based 12<sup>th</sup> Division and around 5 southern brigades re-deployed along the Iraqi-Syrian border. Importantly, apart from the tribal role examined in the preceding section, ISI stampeded into military formations officered by Shia and soldiered by Sunnis in predominantly Sunni areas.

The 'ease' in which ISI captured territory led many Iraqis to believe the Sunni soldiers simply allowed ISI fighters free passage and or melted into the terrorist organization.<sup>147</sup> Certainly, the trends preceding the dissolution of the military underscore the importance regarding the politicization and cultural dissonance on the institutional cohesion of the military, and the ultimate consequence of embedding alternative solidarities within the armed forces. Communalism and religious sectarianism, then, is one of many ailments which hamstrung the development of a cohesive military institution, and exacerbated the tensions created by ISI. The processes that resulted in the collapse of the Iraqi Army and certain divisions took shape over the

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<sup>147</sup> Researcher's Interview with a former Ministry of Defense Public Relations Officer. 10 August 2017.

preceding decade, and were intensified by Prime Minister al-Maliki, who weakened unit cohesion through the appointment of less-than competent commanders under a system that privileged communal and political loyalty.

The rapid territorial expansion of the Islamic State of Iraq ultimately dispelled any pretence of the Iraqi state upholding a monopoly of violence and a subordinate national army. Security operations and governance dissolved to the regional level with the central authority becoming reliant on tribal as well as sectarian groupings to augment the security vacuum following the collapse of the Iraqi Army.

### Conclusion

The practical analytical applicability of such an understanding are increasingly threadbare in the post-Arab Spring dispensation. Nowhere is this more evident than the case of Iraq, whereby the preferred institutional arrangements and relationships have failed to mature into the Western idealised type. The research aims to test the hypothesis of the tribal-sectarian nexus\_ to gain a better understanding of the 'state' in the civil-military relationship. Accordingly, this chapter illustrated the role and impact of sub-state actors and solidarities on military fragmentation, state coherency, and the dispensation of power. The application of the tribal-sectarian nexus\_ in this chapter has allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the 'state' component in the military nexus in Iraq. In a fully-fledged democracy, determining the civil-authority and thereby 'state' is an easy endeavour.

Ultimately, this chapter has demonstrated how the tribal-sectarian nexus\_ came to define the state in Iraq. This was evinced by the visible sub-communalisation of violence around ethnic, sectarian and tribal communities following Operation Iraqi Freedom. OIF and American forces caused the first fragmentation of the Iraqi military, while the succeeding period witnessed the institution fall victim to communal solidarities and the influence of armed, non-state actors. The entrenched nature of communal identities underscores the failure of Iraq to cohere as a nation

and the central authority to gain a monopoly of violence. This in turn illustrates how the tribal-sectarian nexus\_ is the state or an equally powerful force in direct competition with a fragmented central authority.

In this regard, Iraq accords with the nature of conflict unfolding across Iraq and the wider Middle East, denoted by 'varying combinations of networks of state and non-state actors', or 'new wars' (Kaldor 2013, 2). The battle lines are drawn around and perpetuated by communal identities, because within this setting, state fragmentation perpetuates the saliency of sub-state identities and commensurate fidelities. The nature of this reality accords with the fragmenting nature of the Middle East state into the tribal-sectarian nexus\_ and the sub-communalisation of violence and warfare around sub-state solidarities and interests. Consequently, "Iraq exists only as an idea, not a nation", as "The Kurds fight ferociously for Kurdistan; the Shiites have been fighting doggedly for their people while the Sunnis of the Islamic State are killing and dying for their cause. But nobody is willing to fight for Iraq" (Zakaria 2015, npn). The observation encapsulates the sub-communalisation of violence commensurate with the fragmentation of armies and deterioration of state institutions and thus placing tribe and sect above the national flag.

The collapse of the Weberian state into the tribal-sectarian nexus\_, and the commensurate sub-communalisation of violence highlights the lack of legitimacy conferred to the state of Iraq, where communalised non-state actors are vying for power. In turn, it is possible that one of the most important questions to ask is: are Shia willing to fight and die for Sunnis? Likewise, are Kurds willing to fight and die for Iraqi-Sunni and Shia? Unfortunately, the answer appears to be no.

In Iraq, feeble, state institutions co-developed alongside a similarly impotent discourse of the Iraqi 'nation' which was challenged by an array of societal actors. Amidst the spaces of the 'state' and 'nation' existed the Iraqi Army. Progressively, the army failed to maintain its own

corporate identity as a professional military force free of alternative solidarities. In turn, the military came to reflect the fragmented nature of Iraq's socio-political landscape and the domination of sectarianism as the dispensation of power.

Sectarianism and communal loyalties, with the case of Iraq, are rarely static, and following the ouster of President Hussein from power, sub-state solidarities experienced a marked degree of political mobilization and informed wider interactions of political association across Iraq. As the former CPA head, Paul Bremmer remarked, the military was plagued by the "centralization of power in the hands of an inner circle of Shia Islamists at the expense of the formal chain of command".<sup>148</sup> Over time, this practice became embedded within the structures of the state. This has been shown through increasing mobilization of politics along communal lines and the emergence of subordinate armed entities whom enjoyed a marked presence and influence within the security structures of the state and more so amongst the IA Divisions.

An additional malady revolves around the notion of divided legitimacy over security, whereby the militia and tribes on the one hand and the military on the other attempt to exercise some semblance of state-based functions as guarantors of security. Divided legitimacy denotes the inability of the al-Maliki government to provide or guarantee a modicum of security across Iraq's communal fault lines. Each respective community eventually formed their own respective 'armies' to safeguard communal interests.

Nonetheless, Zakaria's insight underscores the wider-failure of state and nation-building following the demise of President Saddam Hussein. The Iraqi security landscape devolved around communal lines. The reality also raises serious concerns regarding the perception of the military as a truly nationalist institution and the seemingly challenging task of disentangling political

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<sup>148</sup> Maliki Reshapes the National Security System.  
[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07BAGHDAD1593\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07BAGHDAD1593_a.html). Accessed 20 March 2017.



allegiances from sectarian loyalties as several political parties mobilised around sub-communal identities. To this end, a conglomeration of ‘armies’, and not an Iraqi Army emerged, whereby sectarian, tribal and political elite exerted measurable control over personal ‘fiefdoms’ of sub-communal armed, non-state actors dispersed into the structures of the conventional army.

Indeed, Ali Allawi believes the failures of the Iraqi Army, “reflect the overall inability of the political leadership, from 2005-onwards to build a viable state [...] so a lot of the ills the Iraqi military faced, are reflected in other parts of the government and state-building efforts”, concluding the collapse of the Iraqi Army in the campaign against the Islamic State is indicative of a wider failure of state-hood.<sup>149</sup> This in turn underscores the importance of those sub-state actors capable of exploiting state weakness and eroding the ‘civil’ power to the point where state-based nationalism or identity, power and legitimacy is supplanted and surpassed by sub-communal discourses focusing on the tribe and sect. In fragmented states, communal actors have come to wield the dispensation of power and exercise a monopoly of violence across the tribal-sectarian nexus\_. With the case of Iraq, it “exists as a state, and it is a state that has a very important centripetal force [central authority] that counteracts the many ethnic, sectarian, tribal, and political forces that are trying to pull the country apart”.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Ali Allawi. 15 April 2017.

<sup>150</sup> Researcher’s Interview with General (Ret.) David Petraeus. 29 August 2018.

## **Chapter 5: Military Relations in the Tribal Republic and the Patronage ‘Army’**

### Introduction

Yemen is a tribal political landscape, whereby the ‘state’, or the tribal-sectarian nexus, has come to be dominated by powerful tribes that have served to mediate the interactions between the central authority and the periphery. As noted in chapter 4, tribalism had been more pronounced in the North and other historically tribal expanses within Yemen, while less so in the urban areas of Aden or Taiz in the South of Yemen.<sup>151</sup> The British reduced tribal influence during their control over the Aden Protectorate, by attempting to introduce modern state structures which eroded the traditional influence of the tribal hierarchy. However, outside of Aden and in the Protectorates in particular, tribalism was still very strong. Nonetheless, the tribes, as a social unit and collective organization, will be shown to have dominated the institutional structures of the military and gained power in shaping the nature of the officer corps and cohesion of the military.

A fundamental problem with the contemporary analysis of the Yemeni Army (YA) is the perception that the central authority controlled an ‘army’ characterised in the Western institutional sense. On paper, the Yemeni Army appears to accord with the organizational structure of Western militaries, running a military academy, appointing staff officers, utilizing modern equipment, and guided by a blend of Western and Soviet military doctrine. Despite this façade, the YA never operated as a cohesive institution nor was the officer corps bound to the ‘state’ by notions of nationalism or constitutions as experienced in Western armies. This created an organization perceived by the central authority as an army in the Western institutional sense

To be sure, the foundational chapter on civil-military relations in Yemen highlighted the impressive degree of tribal influence and infiltration of government institutions, in addition to the

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<sup>151</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Iain Smailes and Nadwa al-Dawsari. 12 June 2017.

highly pronounced role of tribal elites situated within the political, economic and military arenas of the state. This impressive degree of influence led to the formation of ‘the tribal-military-commercial complex’. Importantly, the accumulation of tribesmen into the military transformed the officer corps into a tribalized institution whereby tribal allegiance superseded that of the nation and the state. As a result, the army came to reflect society itself, the nature of transient loyalties and patronage.

To this end, the army was fragmented very much like the central authority and existed as a conglomeration of tribally-based militia supported by networks of patronage to form a tribal army. Consequently, the loyalty of the ‘army’ was never to a fragmented central authority, but rather aligned with individual commanders, commercial interests or tribal leaders.<sup>152</sup> Even so, the nature of loyalties, as with an inherently tribal setting, vacillated in accordance with the pragmatic and opportunistic nature of Yemeni society.

This chapter will examine the structural nature of the Yemeni Army by highlighting the pronounced role of tribal affiliations within the institution and how Saleh’s rule meant that the officer corps was determined by tribal associations. Elite-tribal upheavals began to unravel the Yemeni state and played a fundamental role in the fragmentation of the regime and military. Therefore, this chapter will examine how tribalism impacted military cohesion and state fragmentation, alongside how it affected the nature of power in the tribal-sectarian nexus.

The chapter will also entertain the importance of sectarianism through the Houthi insurgency and bring into consideration the role of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and the impact on the civil-military relationship, following a discussion on the nature of the ‘tribal-army’. Prior to the 2011 uprisings and state dissolution, Yemen was already an incoherent political arena. The concurrent fracturing of the Yemeni state and the fragmentation of the military strengthened

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<sup>152</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Iain Smailes and Nadwa al-Dawsari. 12 June 2017.

the power and influence of sub-state actors and solidarities, which came to define the parameters in the tribal-sectarian nexus. Warlordism and a multiplicity of power centres came to be defining features of the post-Arab Spring dispensation in Yemen.

#### The 'Army' in Yemen

At the centre of the Yemeni civil-military nexus has been the historical power struggle over control of the armed forces between the tribes on the one hand and a weak central authority on the other. Attempts by Sana'a to consolidate control over Yemen was resisted by the tribal periphery whether regarding the centralization of state power or germane to this research, the monopoly of violence. Pointedly, the central authority has historically failed, in some respects, to establish "a monopoly over the means of violence based solely on rational-legal logics in any part of Yemen" (Clausen 2018, 561). However, as the upcoming sections will demonstrate, Saleh was able to use tribal and patron-client relations as a traditional method to control the armed forces and maintain the monopoly of violence.

Arguably, the ability of the state to exercise a monopoly of violence over its claimed territorial dispensation can be questioned on two grounds alone: Small arms flourish in Yemen, and the tribes are incredibly well armed. In 2001, tribesmen possessed approximately 5.6 million small arms, while prominent tribal sheikhs collectively held a further 184,000. These numbers outweighed the central authority's arsenal of 1.5 million (Miller 2003, 27). Non-state actors wielded considerable small arms and light weapons in comparison to the central authority. The assessment highlights the extent to which the state has historically failed to control the proliferation of firearms.

The armed nature of Yemen tribes meant that the government in Sana'a had historically failed to uphold a monopoly over the actual tools of violence in tribal areas such as Marib, Jawf and segments of Sa'ada. However, Yemen is a gun-loving culture, and thus weapons are held with high regard and the smuggling of weapons is also viewed as an acceptable job. More pointedly,

the gun-ownership and smuggling provided Saleh with a means to “dispense patronage and to gain and maintain the loyalty of powerful tribal leaders”.<sup>153</sup> This explains in part why the local tribes were consistently willing to provide fighters with no affiliations to the military in many of Yemen’s innumerable wars (Brandt 2014, 110). Moreover, it is extraordinarily important to point out that Yemeni “tribes do not oppose the central government. Yemen’s tribal law prohibits mobilizing fighters against the state, and for this reason, tribesmen rarely attack government facilities or soldiers (Al-Dawsari 2018, 17). Therefore, the tribes are not inherently opposed to the central authority.

The second and more marked point of contention centres on the resilient nature of the tribal order and proportionate influence within the military. In this regard, the Yemeni military has historically been plagued by “the deep penetration of tribal relations” (Droz-Vincent 2011a, 393). Indeed, the rise of President Ali Abdullah Saleh solidified the tribal-military relationship and witnessed the infusion of tribal influence across the army. Upon coming to power in 1978, President Saleh paid special attention to the appointment of tribesmen into the security structures of the state. Notably, the Yemeni leader favoured his clan of the ‘Afaash, from the Sanhan Tribe and the greater Hashid Tribal Confederation.

The formation of a patron-client relationship enabled tribal sheikhs within the officer corps to accumulate considerable power in relation to the central authority relative to the military. This relationship elevated and reinforced the power of tribal solidarities that “are stronger than their military allegiance, creating a military-tribal complex of patron-client relationships” (Fattah 2011, 82). Based on these assessments, tribal influence and military loyalties are more clearly understood by distinguishing the formations of the Yemeni military and focusing on the three ‘tiers’ of military units. This will also shed light on the ‘armies’ within an army, bound by networks

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<sup>153</sup> Combating Yemen’s Gray Market in Small Arms and Light Weapons.  
[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA269\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA269_a.html). Accessed 10 February 2017.

of patronage and tribal loyalties which underscore the lack of institutional cohesion and a distinct corporate identity within the Yemeni Army.

The first tier comprised the elite formations consisting of the Yemeni Special Operations Forces (YSOF), Counter Terrorism Forces (CTF), and the Republican Guard (RG). These elite units symbolised the only true ‘military’ formations in Yemen, in terms of training, doctrine, level of equipment, and degree of professionalism. The officer corps of these praetorian guards were entirely patrimonial in nature and thus commanded by members of the president’s ‘Afaash clan. On the other hand, the NCO corps originated from certain tribes within the Governorates of Sana’a, Dhamar and Amran, all of which are heavily populated by tribesmen notionally loyal to Saleh. The RG, commanded by Ahmed Saleh, also relied on the Sanhan tribes as a major recruiting artery and derived additional manpower from the same governorates as other first-tier formations.<sup>154</sup>

However, loyalties within the elite units were more nuanced than patrimonial, tribal and familial connections. Patron-client relations figured heavily in this regard. For example, an officer sheikh can be understood as a tribesman who was granted an officer’s commission by the state in order to absorb the individual into the patronage network and under the control of the regime. The officer sheikh in turn, might recommend a local man for officer training within the Republican Guard or other elite units.

Upon graduation and placement into a brigade, the young officer would be obligated to the officer sheikh for providing the opportunity, Ahmed Saleh, as the commanding general of the RG, the direct brigade commander and more importantly, the “wider loyalty including to the person who may not be in his chain of command but may be in a parallel chain of command”.<sup>155</sup> This

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<sup>154</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Iain Smailes. 19 April 2017.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

illustrates that, while tribal standing provides access into the military, loyalties are developed based on opportunism and a soldier's prospect for upward mobility within society as a military officer. Therefore, despite the tribal foundation of the elite formations, alternative networks of influence from parallel chains of command played an important role in understanding the loyalty and cohesion of the respective units. President Saleh, however, remained the central spine of this tribal-patrimonial network of officers and this provided him with command and control over the military as the paramount patron.

Militarily, Gen. Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar was the most important individual in Yemen aside from the president. He served as the Commander of the Northwestern Military District and exercised more influence than the regional governor and was the most politically influential of the five regional commanders.<sup>156</sup> At the 2<sup>nd</sup> tier, Ali Mohsen controlled the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Division. The roughly 70,000<sup>157</sup> strong "division" was institutionally detached from the conventional military and chain of command and existed as a tribal militia beholden to the General by an impressive network of patronage.<sup>158</sup>

Ali Mohsen controlled the necessary resources to ensure his private militia remained a strong coercive force, as noted by US Diplomats, who assessed that al-Ahmar controlled close to 50 percent of Yemen's military assets and resources.<sup>159</sup> His network of influence spanned the Northwest corner of Yemen and military units stationed in Hajja, Amran, Sa'ada, Hodeida, Mahwit, and al-Jawf,<sup>160</sup> in territory populated by the Hashid Tribal Confederation.<sup>161</sup> In the past, a tribal sheikh in the above areas might approach Gen. al-Ahmar with the desire to establish a

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<sup>156</sup> Will Saleh's Successor Please Stand Up? [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA2766\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA2766_a.html)  
Accessed 15 November 2016.

<sup>157</sup> Researcher's Interview with Lt. Colonel (Ret.) Bob Newman. 6 September 2017.

<sup>158</sup> Researcher's Interview with Ambassador Gerald Feierstein. 8 May 2017.

<sup>159</sup> Will Saleh's Successor Please Stand Up? [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA2766\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA2766_a.html)  
Accessed 15 November 2016.

<sup>160</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Iain Smailes. 19 April 2017.

<sup>161</sup> Will Saleh's Successor Please Stand Up? [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA2766\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA2766_a.html)  
Accessed 15 November 2016.

battalion, and the sheikh would proceed to mobilise the necessary manpower and would be provided financial assistance and the means to sustain the force.<sup>162</sup> The sheikh's battalion would subsequently be absorbed into al-Ahmar's larger patronage network. In turn, the soldiers of the 1AD were not much more than a tribal militia and owed their loyalty to the person of Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar.<sup>163</sup>

The conventional 'army' represented the third and final tier and operated in the periphery as a conglomeration of tribal levies.<sup>164</sup> The institution was organised under a command structure with an area of responsibility divided geographically into five regions. Four of the five regional commanders came from Sanhan, apart from the token Southern officer in charge of the Central Military District (Phillips 2012, 90). The regional commanders recruited predominately from local tribes,<sup>165</sup> which further empowered tribal bonds as a fundamental artery of manpower at the battalion and brigade level.<sup>166</sup> This method of recruitment in conjunction with structuring of the military into districts aided in the importance of regional affiliations and resulted in commanders overseeing regional fiefdoms.<sup>167</sup>

Below the regional commanders sat equally powerful mid-ranking officers. At the battalion level for example, a colonel might be allowed to raise a battalion and oversee recruitment. The subordinate soldiers in the battalion would extend loyalty to the colonel, as the commanding officer, but only if the colonel succeeded in delivering patronage.<sup>168</sup> This condition was predicated on the colonel having a strong relationship with his superiors in the chain of command who enjoyed access to resources.<sup>169</sup> A large portion of the higher-ranking officers exhibited personal

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<sup>162</sup> Researcher's Interview with Noel Brehony. 27 February 2017.

<sup>163</sup> Researcher's interview with Ambassador Gerald Feierstein. 8 May 2017.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Will Saleh's Successor Please Stand Up? [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA2766\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA2766_a.html). Accessed 15 November 2016.

<sup>166</sup> Researcher's Interview with Adam Seitz. 23 May 2017.

<sup>167</sup> Researcher's Interview with April Longley Alley. 22 November 2017.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.



loyalty to superiors, such as President Saleh or Gen. al-Ahmar, who were in a position to disperse forms of patronage down the chain of command.<sup>170</sup> In other instances, lower-level commanders operated 'autonomous', sub-networks of patronage that further fragmented the cohesion and the loyalty of the Army.<sup>171</sup> Again, the ability to operate mini networks of patronage was confined to privileged members of the officer class with a demonstrated loyalty to the regime. It was not a pervasive practice across the entire army, although the practise does highlight the importance of tribal bonds and access to patronage to retain the loyalty of subordinate soldiers. The patronage aspect is inextricably linked to relations in a tribal society, and accords with the nature of power in Yemen, whereby patron-client relations have historically characterised relationships and associations between the tribal elite and the central authority. Col. Randy Rosin, a former US Defence Attaché in Sana'a, intimated the foci of fidelity within the Yemeni Army: "primary loyalties are to their tribe and patronage network".<sup>172</sup>

This clearly indicates that while solidarities are rooted to the regime, loyalty is malleable and predicated on access to patronage and the ability of the officer class to disperse financial incentives to subordinates. However, President Saleh was "extremely careful to select commanders whose loyalty is ensured by tribal bonds".<sup>173</sup> Yemeni diplomat Waleed al-Rwaishan of the Khalwan tribe in the Sana'a Governorate provided additional insight regarding the composition of the regular army: "it is customary in Yemen that tribes hold ranks in the military without actually doing any professional military training. Some consider it as a legal corruption by the government which is draining the resources of the government from development to

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<sup>170</sup>Researcher's Interview with Noel Brehony. 27 February 2017.

<sup>171</sup>Researcher's Interview with April Longley Alley. 22 November 2017.

<sup>172</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Randy Rosin 25 May 2017.

<sup>173</sup> Will Saleh's Successor Please Stand Up? [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA2766\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA2766_a.html). 25 May 2017.

salaries”.<sup>174</sup> Consequently, “[s]ome sheikhs hold significant security positions, even though they work either not at all or seldom” (ICG 2013, 30) as a means to anchor tribes to the regime.

Militarily, the al-Ahmar clan of the Hashid Tribal Confederation wielded some power in terms of weaponry and force posture, in the sense that Sheikh al-Ahmar possessed the ability to mobilise around 100,000 militiamen if necessary.<sup>175</sup> An equally important point to note is that the elite special operations and counter-terrorism units tended to exhibit loyalty to “Sheikh Abdullah al-Ahmar, as much to [President] Saleh”.<sup>176</sup> This nature of dual loyalties originated from the fact that, despite being president, Saleh was still from a minor tribe within the Hashid Confederation and thus subordinate to Sheikh al-Ahmar in this regard. Moreover, the al-Ahmar clan received patronage (militarily speaking) through the placement of clan members as junior to mid-level officers within the army.<sup>177</sup>

Notwithstanding, as president and head patron, Saleh controlled this amalgamation of armies, aside from the 1AD. He proffered military rank to tribal sheikhs and or regular tribesmen that instantaneously elevated the sheikh to a colonel without the requisite military competencies or experience.<sup>178</sup> This method of patronage produced, by 2006, about 14,000 colonels throughout the army totalling more than any other commissioned officer rank combined (ICG 2013, 30). This is in comparison to the 3,990 Colonels in the US Army in 2018 (Department of the Army 2019, 16). The method provided the officers with a degree of status and a source of income. Additionally, the sheikhs were granted considerable leeway regarding the recruitment of soldiers into the tribal ‘battalion’ in accordance with the dynamics of President Saleh’s patronage.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Waleed al-Rwaishan. 17 April 2017.

<sup>175</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Noel Brehony. 27 February 2017.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Iain Smailes. 19 May 2017.

<sup>178</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Iain Smailes and Nadwa al-Dawsari. 12 June 2017.

<sup>179</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Noel Brehony. 27 February 2017.

Under the arrangement, such a sheikh received a stipend from the Ministry of Defence, and in turn, provides his 'battalion' with the necessary equipment such as weapons, rations and uniforms. In this process, tribal commanders traditionally recruited soldiers loyal to them, and or clan and tribal members.<sup>180</sup> The autonomy of recruitment resulted in the proliferation of ghost soldiers within the smaller brigades and battalions.<sup>181</sup> In other words, paper battalions constituted 30-50 percent of the conventional Yemeni Army.<sup>182</sup> Moreover, the loyalty of the tribal battalions remained nominally with the sheikh and not to the nation. However, the arrangement enabled President Saleh to reinforce his network of patronage and co-opt tribesmen into his circle of influence and fidelity. In total, Saleh co-opted more than 100,000 'officers' into his network of patronage.<sup>183</sup> The tribal officers were provided "not only salaries, but also petrol subsidies, uniforms and supplies" (ICG 2013, 30).

The organization of military districts provided Saleh an additional mechanism of patrimonial control, because four of the five districts fell under the command of Sanhan elite, while a token Southern officer technically controlled the Central District. The permeation of patrimonial connections ensured loyalty ultimately permeated horizontally to the Yemeni leader. Thus, President Saleh controlled the elite formations and enjoyed considerable dominion over the conventional army through the patrimonial networks and according to the dispersion of patronage. It proved a highly effective means of controlling the bulk of Yemen's security sector.

The three tiers of military formations illustrates that the fidelity of the Yemeni Army is best understood not as a single, cohesive chain, but rather a "web of loyalties".<sup>184</sup> In this sense, one way in which to understand the nature of cohesion and solidarity in the Yemeni Army prior to

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<sup>180</sup>Researcher's Interview with Nadwa al-Dawsari. 27 May 2017.

<sup>181</sup>Researcher's Interview with Noel Brehony. 27 February 2017.

<sup>182</sup>Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Iain Smailes and Nadwa al-Dawsari. 12 June 2017.

<sup>184</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Iain Smailes. 19 April 2017.

2011, is as an institution beholden to myriad political and economic centres of power underpinned by tribal allegiances. The military came to reflect those intra-elite rivalries and disputes occurring within society and thus not state power. This assertion falls back on the notion of competition between an increasingly fragmented central authority over the Yemeni military establishment for much of its modern lifespan.

The three discreet tiers and associated loyalties of military formations essentially trickled up to President Saleh. However, each tier hovered in an isolated manner within the broader patronage network that delineated the Yemeni 'state'. Thus, tribal-patron relations elucidate the cohesion of the relationship between the 'state' and the periphery. The power of patronage and role of the tribes meant "that the feeling of tribal allegiance inside Yemen's military is, at least, as equal to their military allegiance" (Fattah 2001,43).

#### Sectarianism and Rebellion

At the turn of the 21st Century, Yemen became increasingly beset by several security challenges revolving around a sturdy insurgency, powerful terrorist threat, and an increasingly active secessionist movement. To recall, the thesis examines the impact of sectarianism and tribalism in understanding military cohesion and fragmentation, in addition to identifying the frame's ability to understand the 'state'. Two prominent and seemingly sectarian movements featured prominently in the Yemeni security landscape: the Houthi rebellion and the Al-Qaeda franchise in the Arabian Peninsula. It is difficult to fully describe the nature of the socio-political order and military relationship of Yemen as underpinned by sectarianism. Religiously, Yemeni's adhere to the Zaydi (Shia) and Shafi'i (Sunni) Muslim faiths, although both sects lived in harmony and were never aggravated by sectarian tensions.

The Houthi rebellion, fought in several rounds against the central authority from 2004-2009, ostensibly pitted a Zaydi insurgency against a Shafi'i central authority. Arguably, political and not sectarian objectives motivated the movement. Infighting focused on political and

economic injustice as opposed to religiously motivated violence was a main impetus for the Houthi Rebellion. Ginny Hill, through extensive fieldwork, noted the Zaydi doctrine adhered to by the Houthi rebels, represented a political identity in Sa'ada, as opposed to a sectarian doctrine inherently at odds with the Sunni majority (Hill 123, 2017). Furthermore, the Bakil Tribal Confederation constitutes roughly 60 percent of the Zaydi population and Saleh "stopped paying attention to those guys", or allowing access to patronage, following unification in 1990.<sup>185</sup> In this context, the Houthi War's and the protracted nature of the Sa'ada conflict can be explained in part by a struggle over political power and resources, as opposed to being motivated by sectarianism (Hill 123, 2017). This assessment is not meant to assert religion was absent within the Sa'ada conflict, but that sectarianism existed as a societal undercurrent in comparison to more powerful forms of solidarity such as tribalism.<sup>186</sup>

Moreover, focusing solely on sectarianism denies the importance of tribes and the notion of the "deep-state" which these groupings have come to represent. To be sure, sectarian affiliations were not a factor in the political dispensation of power or as a determinant for placement into the officer corps and other important portfolios in the military-security apparatus. Although political power and sectarian identity became aligned under President Saleh, "there was less a sense of sectarianism".<sup>187</sup>

The Houthi War did, however, witness an intra-elite struggle emerge between the forces of the Republican Guard under Ahmed Saleh, and al-Ahmar's 1AD. The insurgency occurred in parallel with Saleh's consolidation of power around the Sanhan tribe and his own clan, the 'Afaash. In turn, these actions drew power and influence away from pre-existing power centres

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<sup>185</sup> Researcher's Interview with Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Bob Newman. 6 September 2017.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Researcher's Interview with Captain (Ret.) James Spencer. 22 March 2017.

such as Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar and the Hashid Tribal Confederation. Ali Mohsen had helped facilitate Saleh's rise to power and became a key political and military figure in his own right.

However, familial and patrimonial preferences played a more important role as time progressed. In 1999, Saleh removed Ali Mohsen's half-brother, Ali Saleh al-Ahmar, from command of the Republican Guard and Special Forces, and placed his son Ahmed Ali in charge.<sup>188</sup> Shortly thereafter, rumours abound regarding Ahmed Saleh as the presumptive heir the position of President. This prospect raised concerns over who within the regime would remain prevalent and continue to be a part of the patronage system. While it is unclear whether Ali Mohsen desired to be president, he at least wished to remain an indispensable cog in the machinery of the state, something that seemed increasingly unlikely given Saleh's actions at the time. Nonetheless, this shows that tribal and patrimonial disputes fuelled the conflict between Saleh, Ali Mohsen and wider-regime elite.

Ali Mohsen was pressured by Saleh to directly confront the Houthi insurgents using his forces, in the hopes that the General would become weakened and thereby no longer pose a political or military challenge to the political aspirations of Ahmed Ali. Thus, the most notable impact of the Houthi rebellion was the decline of Gen. al-Ahmar's military stature. President Saleh ensured the 1AD bore the brunt of the fight while the more elite units (under familial control) remained largely detached from the conflict. To this end, the internecine conflict constituted an arena of elite competition and enabled the Yemeni leader to clip the wings of Ali Mohsen.<sup>189</sup>

The spectre of AQAP indirectly impacted the civil-military relationship in Yemen. To recall, the shift from a remittance to oil-based economy altered the political settlement between the society and the regime which facilitated the emergence of patronage politics. Yemen reached

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<sup>188</sup> Researcher's Interview with Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Bob Newman. 17 June 2017.

<sup>189</sup> Researcher's Interview with Nadwa al-Dawsari. 27 May 2017.

peak oil in 2002 and from that point on, President Saleh's patronage network became under strain. US military and CT aid enabled the President to allocate these funds to elite units commanded by the 'Afaash clan. While the external rent could not supplant, or offset revenues derived from the export of oil, the influx of foreign cash assisted Saleh in maintain his grip on power and entrench patrimonial control over Yemeni military-security apparatus. Two Wars or multiple wars began to take shape in Yemen, whereby the regime engaged in one conflict with the American's. This is notable in terms of Saleh's need to tacitly support AQAP to remain relevant in the GWOT, while Washington and the Pentagon began to conduct drone strikes and other operations to target the terrorist network.

#### Elite-Fragmentation, The Military and The Parallel Revolution

On the eve of the 2011 mass-protests taking-hold in Yemen, the military existed as a contested and ostensibly fragmented institution along tribal, as opposed to sectarian lines. More pointedly, as the former British Defence Attaché in Sana'a, Col. Iain Smailes noted that, "in theory the military should be an organ of the state, here, it was just an extension of the Saleh family network", a patronage 'army' with a tribal edifice.<sup>190</sup> This was because historically, elite-tribal-military relations determined the relationship between the state and military, until Saleh absorbed tribesmen into the military through networks of patronage to suborn them. Thereafter, President Saleh exploited external rent and manipulated internal rebellion to constrict patronage and to elevate patrimony as a crucial factor for top tier military formations.

Tribal sheikhs, family members and powerful officers carved out segments of the military as their own domain and instituted patron-client relations to garner and sustain loyalty. Accordingly, a common theme of the three military formations was the visible role of tribal solidarity as a determinant of loyalty and the commensurate power of elites in patron-client

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<sup>190</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Iain Smailes and Nadwa al-Dawsari. 12 June 2017.

relationships. Amongst the elite, there was a noticeable division around Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, the al-Ahmar tribal dynasty and President Saleh's 'Afaash clan.

The inextricable marriage of tribal, economic and military forces meant that, "Yemen's reality defies the separation of the military, tribal, political and economic elites in all trajectories" (Fattah 2010, 41). Based on this assessment, one way in which to understand the concurrent fragmentation of the state and the military in the context of the tribes resides in the vast patronage network of overlapping clans, tribes and families that became absorbed into the intra-elite disputes. Initially, the intra-regime fracturing emerged over the succession of power and the economic loss experienced by other power centres during Saleh's shift to consolidate power around his family. Saleh gradually tapered the support base within the armed forces from the wider-Hashid Tribal grouping into a core group of [Sanhanian] officers, and more narrowly, the President's direct familial-blood relations. While the centralization of power didn't necessarily result in the 'Afaash clan enveloping the entire security sector, it did empower the Yemeni leader's immediate family members relative to other regime elites.

This process enabled the clan to command the praetorian guard and collect a disproportionate amount of financial resources to strengthen control over the respective formations. Prior to the 2011 uprisings, Saleh's son Ahmed commanded the RG while, his nephew's Yahya and Tariq controlled the CSF and PG. One half-brother served as Chief of Staff, General Command and another led the Air Force. Officers from Sanhan to include Mehdi Makwala and Mohammed Ali Mohsen who were charged with the Southern and Eastern Military Zones respectively. As noted in chapter 4, 31 of Saleh's immediate family members (cousins) were appointed to important military portfolios by 2005.

Consequently, the president's actions to consolidate power generated a schism amongst the intra-regime elites and caused a 'parallel revolution' tribal within the Hashid Tribal



Confederation concurrent with the 2011 uprising taking hold of Yemen. The intra-elite upheaval centred on the respective warlords who had historically determined the ruling bargain since 1978. The intra-elite struggle is best illustrated by The Sanhan tribe and associated military units (led by Gen. Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar), who sought to abandon the 'Afaash clan (who dominated the special operations community) and control the security structures of the state. In this regard, the tribal shift in power was as important as the actual 2011 uprisings and popular revolt against Saleh. The parallel revolution witnessed the president's clan struggle to retain power when confronted by Gen. al-Ahmar and the Hashid Tribal Confederation.

March 21st 2011 marked the initial fragmentation of the military and state. The defection of al-Ahmar effectively put to an end the thirty-two-year-old ruling-bargain. Militarily, the defection of al-Ahmar withdrew the support and corresponding loyalty of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Division from Saleh. More importantly, as Commander of the Northwest Military District, Ali Mohsen exerted considerable influence over the military forces situated within the historical region of the Hashid Tribal Confederation and the al-Ahmar tribal dynasty. The General and Sheikh Abdullah al-Ahmar enjoyed a close relationship until his death in 2007. The close relationship and continued after the Sheikh's son, Sadiq bin Abdullah al-Ahmar, became the paramount Sheikh.<sup>191</sup> Gen. al-Ahmar had historically attracted widespread support from the Yemeni officer corps and this admiration in combination with his network of patronage enabled Ali Mohsen to directly challenge the political dominance and legitimacy of Saleh. Consequently, a handful of high-ranking officers followed the actions of al-Ahmar and broke with the Saleh-regime. These officers included Eastern Region Commander Gen. Mohammed Ali Mohsen, Gen. Saif al-Baqri of the Sa'ada Region, former Defence Minister Gen. Abd'allah Ali Aliwa and several brigade commanders stationed under Gen. al-Ahmar (Stier 2011, npn).

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<sup>191</sup>Researcher's Interview with Noel Brehony. 27 February 2017.

The prominent role of the tribes during the uprisings is notable because “[a]nti-government fighting in Yemen during 2011 and 2012 *was almost entirely prosecuted by tribes*, which of course included a number of military personnel operating out of uniform” (Knights 2013, 230). There was a split within the Sanhan between Ali Mohsen and Saleh alongside the departure of the al-Ahmar tribe of the Hashid Confederation from the regime. However, Saleh gained support from tribes within the Hashid who did not recognise Sheikh al-Ahmar’s authority across the confederation.

This assessment depicts the fracture within the Sanhan tribes between Ali Mohsen and Saleh, alongside the broader decline in alliances within the Hashid Confederation. However, the al-Ahmar clan still managed to mobilise a large force of tribal fighters during the early stages of the revolts to storm Sana’a. President Saleh defiantly ordered loyalist units to obliterate the Sheikh’s Sana’a compound with heavy artillery (Day 2012, 286). Aside from the ability to marshal an impressive contingent of fighters, the al-Ahmar’s strengthened relations with Ali Mohsen, which enabled both parties to retain influence during the tumultuous period of renegotiating the political and military future of Yemen.

This fragmentation of the military and central authority contradicts conventional scholarly wisdom that argues patrimonial armies will remain beholden to the regime during periods of political and social upheaval. According to Belin, patrimonial armies are inherently connected to the regime by the nature of patrimony and patronage and will remain committed, as an institution, to the regime during periods of uprisings or revolutions (Belin 2004, 149). Yet, it discounts the ability of the elites to establish alternative power bases within the military and erect ‘mini’ patrimonial networks. The theory is thus flawed, because it presupposes that patrimonial militaries are cohesive institutions and will move accordingly in a unified manner. In the case of Yemen, elites cultivated power centres across the military that diluted the institutions union. This perpetuated a scenario whereby, “the loyalties of [the] military and tribal factions [...] are

impermeant and constantly renegotiable (Canton 2013, 104). Canton's characterization accords with the transactional and pragmatic nature of relationships in Yemen, that are often determined by patron-client relations.<sup>192</sup>

The nature of the relationship in Yemen, however, was called into question following the 2011 popular uprisings. In Yemen, tribal affiliations remain the norm for society and constitute "the fundamental reference point for a great majority of Yemeni's" (Petersen 2016, 117). This reference point and power of tribalism constantly challenged the central authority to envelop society with a state-driven nationalism. The proliferation of tribal forces within the military negated the emergence of a shared national identity of what it means to be a Yemeni and the ability to foment fidelity to the 'state' and nation capable of transcending the power of sub-state solidarities. The elite nature of the relationship should, therefore, not be discounted. The interrelated webs of patronage commanded by elites constituted the regime and bound together the 'state'. Based on this understand, the Yemeni Army signified the epicentre of the patronage networks in this case. As Noel Brehony observed, after 2011, "the regime split, and is still splitting, but the regime is still there."<sup>193</sup>

In Yemen, the Arab Spring therefore shattered the coherency of the Yemeni state and completely shifted the nexus of power around sub-state actors and solidarities and caused the fragmentation of the state. This resulted in the sub-communalisation of military power around elites. This shift altered the long-standing political order and introduced new forms of security interactions, and ultimately, a renegotiation of the civil-military relationship. Following the Arab Spring, the subsequent conflicts across Yemen became dominated by several armed, parallel coercive forces, with sub-state loyalties all engaged in a competition to gain control across the tribal-sectarian nexus. To this end, the environment in the wake of the Arab Spring accords with

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<sup>192</sup>Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Iain Smailes. 19 April 2017.

<sup>193</sup>Researcher's Interview with Noel Brehony. 27 February 2017.

the nature of competition amongst sub-state actors across the tribal-sectarian nexus. The Yemeni 'Army' and central authority dissolved into one of numerous actors contending for power and control over the 'state'. This understanding aligns with Migdal's assessment that "society is a mélange of social organizations" in which "the state is one organization among many" (Migdal 1988, 28) competing for resources and power across the polity. Accordingly, "the political order in Yemen is characterised by the systemic involvement of multiple non-state actors" (Clausen 2018, 561).

#### Warlords, The Armies and an 'Army'

The Gulf Cooperation Council negotiated a political agreement which resulted in the February 2012 elections, the removal of President Saleh from power, and the election of Abdrabbuh Mansour al-Hadi to the Presidency. It was hoped President Hadi could reach a settlement between former President Saleh and Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar. Constitutionally, Hadi appeared to be more than capable of seeing through this task. However, power in Yemen is derived from traditional as opposed to legal-rational authority as practiced in modern, Western states. The nature of fragmentation of the regime and collapse of the Weberian state meant that former regime-elites remained dominant personalities across the security sector and in the new order of the tribal-sectarian nexus.

Control across the military had been fragmented before 2011. Personal fiefdoms emerged under the control of powerful commanders, and on top of those powerful regional fiefdoms, a growing discrepancy soon became apparent between the regular army that was separated along a regional basis, and patrimonial units, headed by Saleh's son and nephews. The patronage networks that bound together the 'state' and provided a semblance of organization over the multitude of parallel armies remained following 2011, although in a slightly incoherent manner.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>194</sup>Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Iain Smailes. 19 April 2017.

However, the central network of the regime continued to exist because of Saleh, who had a more cohesive set of people around him than Ali Mohsen or President Hadi.<sup>195</sup>

Regime fragmentation that unfolded in 2011 reorganised those pre-existing patronage networks and relationships around former regime-elites turned warlords. This system is characterised by a leader with the ability to mobilise manpower for combat and the ability to exercise considerable economic and military strength with great autonomy relative to the central authority (Freeman 2015 179). Warlords are ascribed legitimacy from the population through their use of coercive might and ability to disperse resources in return for loyalty. Patron-client relations remained an important fixture in the post-Arab Spring order, because “wise warlords share the wealth to maintain personal loyalty” (Marten 2006, 58) and thus the dispersal of patronage was a factor that enabled these new warlords to remain politically and militarily relevant.

The advent of warlordism and the solidification of the tribal-sectarian nexus<sub>2</sub> reflects the frailty of the central authority, and the fact that ‘armies’ and not an army ascended following 2011. In this regard, the ‘state’ associated Yemeni Army was in fact “the failing army of the failing state [...] just one of the several warring sides in the country” (Barzany 2016, 34). In the new political environment of the tribal-sectarian nexus<sub>2</sub>, President Hadi was disadvantaged compared to other warlords because he lacked the tribal support, associated patronage structures and access to resources required to counter other warlords.<sup>196</sup>

With the above in mind, three cohesive centres of power constituted the post-revolutionary security landscape in Yemen aside from the tribal committees and the Houthi insurgents. Hadi nominally controlled around 20percent the Yemeni ‘Army’, while Ali Abdullah Saleh and Ali

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Nadwa al-Dawsari. 27 May 2017.

Mohsen al-Ahmar continued to have considerable control over various military units.<sup>197</sup> The loyalties of the 'army' were never clear after 2011 and discerning the web of loyalties in other formations is more difficult.<sup>198</sup> Certain units that underwent restructuring ostensibly fell under the command of President Hadi and Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, while innumerable soldiers shed their uniforms and returned to civilian life. Notionally, the fidelities that existed in 2011 to Ali Mohsen and President Saleh remained the same in the post-2011 political dispensation.

Neither Saleh, Ali Mohsen nor Hadi had genuine influence, in the command and control sense, over entire battalions, brigades or divisions within the army after 2011. Rather, they contained the loyalty of a network of officers that still represented their interests within the armed forces.<sup>199</sup> Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar initially retained the solidarity of the 1AD, while the patronage network solidifying relations between the former President and segments of the officer corps persisted. Equally so, tribal connections and patrimony ensured Saleh remained within the CT-Forces, YSOF and the Republican Guard.

This environment made it exceptionally difficult for President Hadi to reform the Yemeni security sector. To eradicate the influence of the warlords and revive a semblance of institutional stability, US Central Command (CENTCOM) developed a plan to modernise the military and establish a professional organization in a similar vein to Western armed forces. Starting in 2012, President Hadi issued a successive number of decrees to ease out Saleh loyalists within the Republican Guard divisions and replace the officer corps with loyalists. This initially focused on the replacement and rotation of commanders to loosen the networks of patronage and reinstate officers loyal to the state. However, these attempts by Hadi to upend the old order were met with munitions and protests within the military (Gordon 2013, npn). During a one-year period,

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<sup>197</sup> Researcher's Interview with Noel Brehony. 27 February 2017.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Randy Rosin. 25 May 2017.

twenty-two brigades and single battalion rebelled in protest over these security sector reform initiatives, including eleven brigades assigned to the elite Republican Guard, commanded by Ahmed Saleh, and the 314<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 1AD under the control of al-Ahamr (ibid).

The mutinies highlight the ability of the former president to retain the loyalty of soldiers and officers in the Yemeni armed forces and among the more elite formations. Furthermore, when President Hadi attempted to remove President Saleh's half-brother, Gen. Mohammed Saleh al-Ahmar, as Commander of the Yemeni Air Force, forces loyal to the General closed the Sana'a Airport (Al-Qadhi 2012, npn). This demonstrates that while Hadi became the President of Yemen, he failed to exert control over all the military institutions assumed to be under the domain of the 'state'. The mutinies and entrenched influence of multiple power centres indicate much of the Yemeni military was fragmented and outside the domain of the central authority. Saleh also remained "politically active, holding meetings, working the phones, and overall managed to maintain his position" of power.<sup>200</sup> In doing so, the former leader was able to sustain his informal networks of power and remain a key fixture in the political and military affairs across the 'state'.

Later in the year, the president disbanded the 1AD, deactivated its headquarters, and reassigned al-Ahmar to the menial role of defence advisor to Hadi. Under the restructuring program, Ali Mohsen was redesignated commander, Northern District which excluded the western port city of Hudaydah previously under his control, a forfeiture of an extremely lucrative illicit income stream.<sup>201</sup> These initiatives aimed to diminish Ali Mohsen's influence and provide the president with a seemingly loyal military force. However, Ali Mohsen remained "very influential within the military, maintaining extensive ties with units formerly under his command" (Kamrava 2014, 390). These ties would have been based on former officers from the 1AD and his cadre of followers from Sanhan. However, the division's deactivation meant that Ali Mohsen did

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<sup>200</sup> Researcher's Interview with Ambassador Gerald Feierstein. 8 May 2017.

<sup>201</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Randy Rosin. 25 May 2017.

not have the manpower to repel the Saleh-Houthi advance into Sana'a and prevent the eventual overthrow of the Hadi government on 21 September 2014.<sup>202</sup>

Politicization further strained the cohesion of the army while also reinforcing power within the Ali Mohsen and Hadi camps. Erica Gaston and Nadwa al-Dawsari noted that during the reform process, recruitment “had been based on party affiliation, largely in accordance with the power-sharing split, rather than on merit” while, “[t]hose appointed to senior positions tended to fill the lower ranks with their political allies and party members” (Gaston & Al-Dawsari 2013, npn). President Hadi favoured political and regional affiliations to establish a powerbase within the Yemeni ‘Army’, with officers from Abyan (the president’s home governorate) and 30,000 Islah members who replaced GPC commanders (ICG 2013, 24). While not a card-carrying member of the political organization, Ali Mohsen had patronage networks within Islah,<sup>203</sup> which allowed him to facilitate the incorporation of loyalist Islah members into the officer corps. In addition, at the time the pro-Islah Military Chief of Staff further empowered Ali Mohsen to indirectly exert pressure on President Hadi and recruit 10,000 Islah followers into the officer corps.<sup>204</sup>

The General had strong networks and influence which made him a counter balance to Saleh and this forced President Hadi to work with Ali Mohsen to curtail the former president’s influence.<sup>205</sup> Hadi did so despite the American ambassador advising him to steer clear of the General,<sup>206</sup> because Hadi could become embroiled in the middle of a larger power struggle between Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar and Ali Abdullah Saleh.<sup>207</sup> The lack of a strong patronage network

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Researcher’s Interview with April Longley Alley. 22 November 2017.

<sup>204</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Iain Smailes. 19 April 2017.

<sup>205</sup> Researcher’s Interview with April Longley Alley. 22 November 2017.

<sup>206</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Ambassador Gerald Feierstein. 8 May 2017.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.



to garner influence and the absence of a tribal support base compounded the president's problems.<sup>208</sup>

As a presidential protection unit, the Presidential Guard, was formed from the remnants of the Republican Guard. Hadi's son Nasser became the Chief of Staff and served alongside officers recruited from the Abyan Governorate and Salafist circles. The nature of recruitment meant it was one of the few formations that exhibited any degree of loyalty to the president. At the same time, the unit was not cohesive because Hadi had reassigned a considerable number of ex-Republican Guard soldiers into the unit. As a result, the former RG personnel continued to support Saleh and his son, not the incumbent leader.<sup>209</sup> Apart from the PG, the only other pro-Hadi forces were the Southern-officered, pro-Ali Mohsen units of the 5<sup>th</sup> Military District in Hadhramaut, that "facilitated a modicum of loyalty to the increasingly embattled president".<sup>210</sup>

Hadi failed to exercise control over the security sector commensurate with his position in control of the central authority. This resulted from the continued existence and entrenched nature of the tribal-sectarian nexus, in which the sub-communalisation became controlled by warlords. Consequently, the informal (non-state mediums of power and influence) are more important than the formal (conventional state-based mediums of power and influence).<sup>211</sup> An informal organizational chart of the post-Arab Spring military community would identify relationships increasingly based on tribal and patron affiliations as opposed to the fragmented central authority. Thus, by 2013, officers owed their allegiances to Saleh, Ali Mohsen, or a powerful tribal leader.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>208</sup>Researcher's Interview with Nadwa al-Dawsari. 27 May 2017.

<sup>209</sup>Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Iain Smailes. 19 April 2017.

<sup>210</sup>Researcher's Interview with Noel Brehony. 27 February 2017.

<sup>211</sup>Researcher's Interview with Adam Seitz. 23 May 2017.

<sup>212</sup>Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Randy Rosin. 25 May 2017.

The 2012 GCC initiative centred on restructuring the military, with very vague guidance regarding the implementation of this process (ICG 2013, 14). It did however envisage removing alternative loyalties within military to establish a nationally unified force (GCC 2011, 5-6). Yet, the reforms failed because the International Community believed it was possible to establish a strong military with allegiances to a fragmented central authority.<sup>213</sup> Western analysts falsely assumed “there was a viable state to be reformed, rather than competing patronage networks operating under the camouflage of weak and illusionary state institutions” (Hill 2017, 264). While the utility of Western notions of civil-military relations and Weber’s understanding of the state might have been applicable to Yemen, the 2011 uprisings precipitated the sub-communalisation of violence and laid to bare the networks of patronage which had historically camouflaged feeble ‘state’ institutions as Hill described. Therefore, the sub-communalisation of violence and rise of warlords reinforces the notion that models which believe in the centrality of the ‘state’ must be replaced by those which acknowledge the role and power of sub-state solitaries and non-state actors, key fixtures within the model of the tribal-sectarian nexus.

#### Popular Committees, Sectarianism, the Houthis, and the vengeance of Saleh.

Aside from the emergence of warlordism, the fragmentation of Yemen also necessitated the formation of localised, tribal security arrangements in the form of Popular Committees (PC’s). The mobilization of tribal forces is a long-standing practice in Yemen, partly because the central authority never fully captured a monopoly over the means of violence and was forced to augment military forces with tribal actors. In this regard, irregular tribal fighters played an important role in the 1962 Civil-War in the North and again during the various armed strife’s that occurred until unification in 1990. The Committee’s raised in the wake of state fragmentation were thus in

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<sup>213</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Nadwa al-Dawsari. 27 May 2017.

accordance with the longstanding tradition of tribesmen participating in the provision of collective security (Al-Dawsari 2013, npn).

PC's initially emerged as pro-government (Hadi) units to combat Ansar al-Sharia in the Abyan Governorate and achieved success against the Al-Qaeda affiliate in the area. Aside from performing conventional military roles, the PC's provided public order in society, by manning checkpoints, guarding important infrastructure and buildings, as well as protecting local markets.<sup>214</sup> A report by the Yemen Polling Centre noted the local population embraced the new role of the tribes in the Marib Governorate, which were "seen as a significant source of security (36percent)" and that "[t]ribes, tribal law and conflict regulation in many parts of the country serve as substitutes for a weak state with a limited reach" (Soudias & Transfeld 2014, 19, 40). Ostensibly, the tribal committees signified an important opportunity to provide security where the coercive tools of the state are unable to reach.

Despite their existence as 'state-sponsored committees', the tribal units are better understood as 'tribal-militia' who notionally cooperate with the 'central authority' yet remain autonomous from the coercive institutions of the state. For example, Popular Committees fighting under the auspice of the central authority received monthly stipends from a government fund bankrolled by Saudi Arabia (Barany 2016, 35-6). Furthermore, PC members often refused to fight without payment, and routinely "undermine the authority of local government institutions" (Ibid, 36).

The militia were therefore not subordinate to the state nor a legitimate tool of violence exercised by the state. At the same time, the 'central authority' under President Hadi lacked the institutional cohesion, legitimacy and monopoly of violence attributed to the ideal Weberian state. Rather, President Hadi's central authority and the tribal committees represented one of the

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

many 'power centres' vying for control over the tribal-sectarian nexus. Therefore, the overarching issue with state-sanctioned militia or other non-state armed entities is that such support hastens the disintegration of state-institutions such as the conventional military. Not only do sub-state armed entities detract man-power from the conventional armed forces but also provide an avenue of alternative solidarity. Moreover, government reliance on sub-state actors is evidence of the central authority's inability to fully enjoy a monopoly of the tools of violence and is a broader reflection of the nature of power and ability to use military force in the tribal-sectarian nexus.

Sectarianism emerged in the spaces of disorder formed in the aftermath of the Arab Spring in Yemen, with the most pronounced sectarian trend centred on the rise of the Houthi rebellion which captured the machinery of the state in 2014. Houthi insurgents capitalised on the fragmentation of the Yemeni Army and state into the tribal-sectarian nexus. Once Houthi forces advanced too far south into Amran Governorate, a government delegation led by a Directorate of Military Intelligence officer stated, 'this is the red line, don't come any farther' and eventually, the insurgency established a base in Amran before moving into Sana'a. In this sense, there was no reconciliation with the movement and the central authority proved powerless to stop their approach. Moreover, the Houthi movement is often assessed using a sectarian lens. This is apparent in the heavily Shafi'i populated areas in the South, where AQAP made considerable inroads with the Sunni tribal groups and thus explains the organizations predominance in Marib, Shabwah and Abyan (Barfi 2010,2). On the other hand, according to The International Crisis Group, the Houthi rebellion employed sectarian rhetoric conflating "Islah, Salafi groups, southern separatists and others with AQAP and IS, referring to all of them as takfiris, al-Qaeda or Daesh" while framing their advance south towards Taiz and Aden as a requirement to eradicate Daesh from the South (ICG 2017, 13).

Farea al-Muslimi also contends that “with the outbreak of the most recent round of conflict after the 2011 Arab Spring, sectarian discourse has become more heated, reorganizing Yemeni society along sectarian lines” (Al-Muslimi 2015, npn). As observed by al-Muslimi, the recent bout of religious sectarianism is linked to the regional sectarian conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia who became vested in the Yemeni conflict (ibid). Thus, geopolitical alignment and the mobilization of religion is a more pronounced example of sectarianism while the internal exercise of sectarianism in Yemen, while still prevalent, was aggravated by the introduction of foreign actors.

Importantly, however, while sectarianism has plagued the Yemeni landscape since the uprisings in 2011, understanding the current conflict requires acknowledging the “overlapping Zaydi-Shafi’i distinctions with tribal cleavages at the centre of Yemeni politics” (Potter 2013, 225). In other words, the fragmented nature of the Yemeni polity fosters an interplay which intersects around regional, tribal and sectarian lines. This interplay led former US Ambassador to Yemen, Stephen Seche, to assess that the movement placed greater emphasis on tribal loyalties, as opposed to religion “and attracts members based on political beliefs and grievances held by the community in which they have historically lived”.<sup>215</sup>

In this regard, the bi-polarization of sectarian identities cut across additional affinities centring on religion and more prominently that of the tribe. Pointedly, notwithstanding the discernible sectarian twinge of the Houthi rebellion following the Arab Spring, tribes such as the Bakil tacitly supported the rebellion and enabled the Houthi’s to continually consolidate territory on the advance into Sana’a. Therefore, while sectarianism became important in the context of the

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<sup>215</sup> Hizballah and Houthis: Different Goals and Ideology.  
[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09SANAA2079\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09SANAA2079_a.html). Accessed 16 March 2017.

conflict and decentralization of state power, tribalism remains an important social and political determinant and referent mode of identity.

The Houthi's represented one of the most powerful non-state actors following the Arab Spring and possessed between 100,000-120,000 fighters, making the insurgency more powerful militarily, than the armed forces serving Hadi. Importantly, the rebellion was attuned with the tribal eddies which enabled the rebellion to navigate towards Sana'a. Houthi rebels understood the nature of tribal politics and were able to make deals with the tribes to allow them to pass through the territory, capture local areas and marshal local contingents along the march into Sana'a.<sup>216</sup>

However, the rebellion would ally with Saleh to form a seemingly invincible political and military machine. At first the alliance appears to defy logic, but in Yemen, one takes a lot of strange bedfellows, and the move illustrated the classic acumen of Saleh to 'Dance on the Heads of Snakes'.<sup>217</sup> Saleh and the Houthis found common cause around destroying the standing of Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar and Sheikh Hamid al-Ahmar, although it remains unclear as to when the pact manifested and the actual drivers behind this alliance. Notwithstanding, Saleh still had a large following of personnel in the political and security structures of the state. Saleh's tribal allies and loyalist military units stationed in Sa'ada and Amran allowed Houthi forces to manoeuvre into Amran with either no resistance or tacit support. Saleh and his 'shadow network' within the Hadi Administration proved instrumental in facilitating the movement of the Houthi rebels from Amran into Sana'a, as cooperative, pro-Saleh officials in military intelligence provided some support for the movement and ensured the rebellion faced minimal resistance on the outskirts of Sana'a.<sup>218</sup> These members of the National Security Bureau, from Sanhan, also ensured the alliance

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<sup>216</sup> Researcher's Interview with Noel Brehony. 27 February 2017.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Iain Smailes. 19 April 2017.

knew the locations of prominent Yemeni officials who opposed the Houthi's. It is asserted that most of the 'Houthi' rebels descending from Amran into Sana'a in late September 2014 were in fact "Saleh's people" plain-clothed.<sup>219</sup> In this sense, the Houthi Rebellion became a trojan horse and coercive force for Saleh to regain the levers of power.

The final push into Sana'a, and reaction of the residual 'state'-affiliated military formation, is a microcosm of the dispensation of power and military fidelity in Yemen. Col. Rosin noted that once the Saleh-Houthi alliance stormed the Yemeni capital and President Hadi decided to deploy the Presidential Guard, who were predominately former RG, "everybody turned to their true colours, refused to act and the gig was up".<sup>220</sup> He concluded that "the [Yemeni military personnel] I worked with are all probably working with the Houthis right now".<sup>221</sup> This support, however, wasn't overt, but more clandestine. While some of the officer corps undoubtedly supported the Saleh/Houthi alliance, it is nonetheless difficult to obtain a clear or consistent understanding of those personalities involved.<sup>222</sup> Despite the inability to gain a concise picture, the repercussions are emblematic of the pronounced role of the tribes and patron-client relations in discerning the dispensation of power and nature of loyalty across the Yemeni security sector following the collapse of the state and the sub-communalisation of violence.

In turn, the nature of the tribal-sectarian nexus\_ and associated fragmentation of state power, legitimacy and loyalty accounts for Ali Abdullah Saleh's return. While no longer leader, Saleh rehabilitated himself as the *éminence grise*, due in large part to the continuation of his patronage networks and affiliated influence in the post-2011 political dispensation. This meant pro-Saleh elements remained embedded and entrenched within the security sector, because neither a 'military', nor an 'army' truly existed in Yemen. Accordingly, the coercive institution was

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<sup>219</sup> Researcher's Interview with Nadwa al-Dawsari. 27 May 2017.

<sup>220</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Randy Rosin. 25 May 2017.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

a Potemkin façade, and more fittingly described as “his [Saleh’s] patronage network”.<sup>223</sup> Based on the reality of the tribal-sectarian nexus\_ in Yemen, devotion to the regime and military cohesion is partly understood within the frame of tribalism and patron-client relations.<sup>224</sup>

### Conclusion

This chapter illustrated the role and impact of the tribe and religious sectarianism on military cohesion and shed light on the utility of the tribal-sectarian nexus\_ as the ‘civil’ component in the military nexus. Consequently, the chapter demonstrated that the practical analytical applicability of Western models to understand civil-military relations has become increasingly threadbare in the post-Arab Spring dispensation and fragmenting states. Nowhere is this more evident than the case of Yemen, where the preferred institutional arrangements and relationships have failed to mature into the Western idealised type of civil-military relations.

In turn, this chapter has allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the ‘state’ component in the military nexus in fragmented states. The Yemeni military became a key source of patronage for Saleh and enabled him to retain the loyalty of the institution. However, the constriction of the patronage network around patrimonial and familial affiliations generated an intra-regime schism. This was exacerbated by Saleh’s efforts to direct external rent into the praetorian guard commanded by members of the ‘Afaash clan and eventually fractured the ‘state’ and military into a new political field awash with non-state actors and the advent of Warlordism.

In Yemen, the tribal-sectarian nexus\_ ran parallel to the central authority until the 2011 uprisings, when state power dissipated, and the communalisation of violence coalesced around former regime-elites. Security sector reform failed because of the full-borne presence of the tribal-sectarian nexus\_ and associated power of patronage, tribal and familial networks make it nearly impossible to establish an army with fidelity to the state. The nature of conflict in the

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<sup>223</sup>Researcher’s Interview with Nadwa al-Dawsari. 27 May 2017.

<sup>224</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Captain (Ret.) James Spencer. 22 March 2017.



tribal-sectarian nexus has come to be characterised by non-state actors who have now eclipsed the power of the central authority. Lines are drawn around and perpetuated by identity politics rather than geopolitical interests, formal political ideologies or binary state competition. Within Yemen, state fragmentation perpetuates the saliency of tribal identities and commensurate fidelities and warlordism. This reality accords with the fragmenting nature of the Middle East state into the tribal-sectarian nexus\_ and the sub communalisation of violence and warfare around sub-state solidarities and interests.

Further, as noted by Potter, it has been shown that the political landscape in Yemen “lacks sharp sectarian divides and hostilities found in Iraq” (Potter 2013, 227). While sectarianism became more pronounced after 2011 and the unfolding of the Yemeni polity in the tribal-sectarian nexus\_, the saliency of sectarianism pales in comparison to the reality that tribal allegiances represent the basic determinant of the dispensation of power because Yemen “is fundamentally a tribal society and nation (Peterson 2016, 117). Therefore, as opposed to communal identities and religious sectarianism, tribalism and constituent loyalties enfeebled the institutional coherency of the military. Individual loyalty, particularly tribesmen in uniform, is vacillating in nature and often-times informed by tribal affiliations, access to patronage, or a combination of both.

Overall, the sub-communalisation of violence in Yemen and the fragmentation of the state created an environment of “of mini-states at varying degrees of war with one another and beset by a complex range of internal politics and conflicts, than a single state engaged in a binary conflict” (Salisbury 2017, 2). The dispensation of power has been fragmented into the respective mini-states largely under the domain of powerful ‘warlords’ whose militia are concerned with territorial consolidation and capturing resources. To this end, a conglomeration of ‘armies’ emerged, whereby sectarian, tribal and political elites exerted measurable control over personal ‘fiefdoms’ of sub-communal armed, non-state actors dispersed into the structures of the

conventional army. The deterioration of the 'civil' or state component underscores the importance of those sub-state actors capable of exploiting state weakness and eroding the 'civil' power. This continues to the point where state-based nationalism or identity, power and legitimacy is supplanted and surpassed by sub-communal discourses focusing on the tribe and sect. The chapter has illustrated the utility of understanding civil-military relations in fragmented states, where communal actors have come to wield the dispensation of power and exercise a monopoly of violence across the tribal-sectarian nexus. Consequently, the 'state' in Yemen "is not always ontologically distinct from non-state actors and, second, that the conflict in Yemen is better understood as a struggle over who controls the state, rather than as a conflict between the state and a non-state actor" (Claussen 2018, 561)

## Chapter 6: Corruption, Criminality and The Hallow Army

### Introduction

The previous chapter on Iraq examined the impact of tribalism and sectarianism on military and state fragmentation. It additionally highlighted the increasing prominence of the communalisation of violence along ethnic, sectarian and tribal lines. This chapter explores the role and impact of patrimonial economy on the nature of military cohesion and fragmentation. In particular, the chapter applies a specific understanding regarding the nature of a criminal activities and corruption: the manipulation of 'state' or public funds for personal enrichment. Moreover, the concept of patron-client relations and the economic relationships formed between the Iraqi tribes, the central authority and foreign partners will be examined to understand how patronage can influence tribal cohesion and the nature of tribal solidarities.

Overall, this chapter focuses on the repercussions of criminality, corruption on military cohesion and loyalty. To recall, military cohesion within the context of this study refers to "the bonding together of members of an organization/unit in such a way as to sustain their will and commitment to each other, their unit, and the mission" (Johns, et al. 1984, 9). To this end, as Gaub noted, a cohesive military is unified structurally, with principles enabling the facilitation of a common purpose amongst the soldiers resulting in an *esprit de corps* and ultimately, an institution with a high degree of operational and combat effectiveness. By contrast, a non-cohesive force will inevitably fragment during conflict (Gaub 2014, 18). Corruption in this context irreparably damaged the cohesion of the military and transformed the institution into a hallowed force.

Historically, the involvement of the Arab security sector in the civilian economy was tolerated by the central authority to establish political quietism and suborn the officer corps, in order to diminish the potential of a coup. In the same vein, regimes allocated material incentives across the officer class to root the fidelity of the military to the regime or ruling-elite. However,

there is a variation in the corporate encroachment of the military into the civilian patrimonial economy across the region. In some cases, such as Egypt, the armed forces became the predominant economic actor, while in other circumstances the officer class controls commercial firms through subsidiaries, or a faction of the officer class seizing a portion of the economy through illicit activities. Hafez al-Assad, for instance, provided his officer's opportunities for self-enrichment through defence contracts and smuggling (Cook 2004, 24-5). As with other Arab rulers, al-Assad did so to secure the loyalty of the officer class.

In general, these activities range from "Military Inc." or military economies, in which the officer corps in cases such as Iran and Egypt control sprawling business empires and retired officer elite manipulate regime connections to establish lucrative business structures, to the officer corps in Saudi Arabia and much of the Gulf Coast, who are successfully side-lined from avenues of economic enrichment because the dynastic regimes are firmly in control of the armed forces (Springborg 2011, 398). Despite the degree of economic penetration by the military or officer corps, such practices enable the regime or central authority to sustain the loyalties of the military through an indulgence in patronage and controlled corruption. Therefore, in certain circumstances, the penetration of the officer class into military industries constituted a factor underpinning military loyalty.

Under these conditions, the officer corps is faithful to the regime because it provides opportunities for economic enrichment and corruption as opposed to a constitution, legal principles or the notion of the 'state'. With the case of Iraq, competition over the economic levers of the state is illustrated by ongoing disputes among sectarian-political parties and affiliated militias, the tribal groupings and widespread corruption across the Iraqi Army. This represents a constant struggle to capture or in the least, steer the trajectory of the tribal-sectarian nexus. Political parties and aligned militia struggle for control over ministries and the financial or economic avenues of enrichment afforded to actors who control such institutions.

However, it is imperative to qualify that the broader-Iraqi military and officer corps exercised little control over the economy in terms of accumulating wealth from economic or commercial activities in comparison to other militaries in the region, notably in Egypt, Turkey and Iran. Throughout Saddam's leadership, the economy remained under the domain of the state and included the major military enterprises formed by him in the 1980s, grouped under *al-Tasni' al-Askari* (The Military Industries Commission) and the military did not run any businesses as such.<sup>225</sup> Following the onset of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the Military Industries Commission was dissolved, and its factories left to gather dust; thus, as Robert Springborg argues "little remains of it because whatever national economic power exists has been gathered into the hands of the country's sectarian leadership" (2011, 399).

Saddam governed Iraq through a neo-patrimonial system and maintained power with patron-client relationships as opposed to rational-legal authority, and thus secured political loyalty by distributing resources and benefits. Informal patrimonial loyalties were absorbed into the Baath Party and the state to include all economic enterprises and the officer corps. Saddam formed an intricate network of economic and security relations, that linked privileged party officials, select tribes and segments of the officer corps. It was a system of controlled corruption, arranged in a similar fashion to the organised crime structures of the Mafia. Hussein was the 'Godfather' who allowed corruption to exist, albeit in a very confined and controlled manner. It was organised crime but at the same time under the watchful eye of the regime.

Hussein's removal from power and the dissolution of old Iraq paved the way for the renegotiation and alignment of power centres across society. Pre-existing structures and institutions of ascendancy were swept-away and new modes of economic exchange appeared during this period of lawlessness and weak government oversight over institutions. As opposed

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<sup>225</sup> Researcher's Interview with Ali Allawi. 15 April 2017.

to organised patron-client relations, the post-2003 Iraqi Army and non-state actors engaged in corruption and parallel criminal economies that eroded the institutional coherence of the military. Consequently, the dissolution of conventional state institutions and central authority following Operation Iraqi Freedom presaged the decentralization of state-affiliated political and economic modes of activities into the tribal-sectarian nexus.

#### Money-Ties that Bind the Tribes

Saddam exercised a neo-patrimonial relationship with the tribes. However, tribal-state security relations took on a new form after a period of reconciliation following the end of the First Gulf War in 1991. Security deteriorated across the country and Hussein was forced to establish new relationships with tribesmen as a matter of regime protection. He purchased security from certain tribes through the distribution of weapons and provision of cash and other material incentives.<sup>226</sup> In turn, these tribal forces provided security within their local areas. However, Brig. General Alsodani cautioned that the arrangement only enabled Saddam to purchase tribal subservience and did not ensure the tribes would demonstrate steadfast devotion to the Iraqi leader.<sup>227</sup> Nonetheless, the relationship illustrated the ability the central authority to secure some degree of tribal subordination by dispensing patronage.

Such dynamics are imperative due to the drifting nature of tribal loyalties within the region. Iraqi tribes are protective of their own of kin in a demonstration of fiercely loyalty to fellow tribesmen. Based on this, tribes inherently desire some measure of autonomy from the central authority and prove willing to bear arms, yet often are unwilling to do so as integrated members of a national fighting force. However, this does not necessarily mean tribes are antithetical to the state and often overlap with government structures, as tribesmen are often lawyers, doctors, politicians and military officers. In this context, The Awakening Movement and affiliated SOI will

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<sup>226</sup> Researcher's interview with Brigadier General (ret.) Ismael Alsodani. 10 April 2017.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

be examined, because it represents the mobilization of Iraqi tribes for security purposes through a patron-client relationship with the United States.

While the Awakening might not represent a microcosm capturing the nature of tribal relationships within the entirety of Iraq, the principal factor pervasive across Iraq are the fluid nature of tribal solidarities and the necessity of engaging with the tribes in a patron-client relationship to assure the tacit subordination to the patron. Iraq's Sunni tribes had varying relationships with the post-2003 insurgency and foreign powers to include the United States and lastly, the central authority in Baghdad. As will be shown, the disorderly relationships were formed by the reality that "the tribes in Iraq are driven mainly by money, [and] the whole thing became a complex brew of patronage, trying to buy allegiances of certain tribes".<sup>228</sup> However, money in this sense must be seen within the context of patron-client relationships and thus, the impact of traditional forms of legitimacy on the sheikh's ability to control and provide for his tribe.

Tribes also have attributes such as norms and practices that regulate tribal affairs like a legal system. These tribal traditions regulate conflicts and intra-tribal disputes, providing a framework regarding interactions with the central authority. Sheikhs are responsible for providing their tribal community with protection and a basic level of economic well-being. As elected or consensus appointed leaders, sheikhs retain their position based on the ability to provide security to the tribe and solve common problems. A primary problem was economics, as the country had experienced an eight-year war with Iran, the First Gulf War and pursuant sanctions causing an economic downturn. Financial assistance allows the tribe to function as a system and permits the tribal hierarchy to provide for constituent clans and families.

The 2003-2004 period proved difficult for the American-led MNF-I to gain a foothold in Anbar Province, the former bastion of Baathist support, that had morphed into a stronghold for

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<sup>228</sup> Researcher's interview with Ali Allawi. 15 April 2017.

the emergent Sunni-insurgency. Austin Long argues AQI's initial successes resulted from the nature of tribal solidarities, in that "Al-Qaeda was able to turn clans and families from the same tribe against one another with a combination of carrots (money and other patronage) and sticks (threats of assassination)" (Long 2008, 79). Gradually however, the growing dominance of AQI altered traditional pillars of social and political power informing tribal exchanges. Specifically, Al-Qaeda in Iraq encroached upon traditional sources of revenue- to include smuggling, extortion and banditry -historically under the domain of the tribes. Professor Stephen Biddle captured the essence of the economic concerns informing tribal relations (Spada 2015, npn):

[t]he general problem confronting all the tribes in Anbar really, in this period, is al-Qaeda's local affiliate was viewed as a social upstart, as a usurper of traditional tribal powers, and as an entity that was going to take over traditional smuggling routes that the tribes had used for patronage networks that make up the heart and soul of tribal politics.

Supposedly, the campaigns of terror and intimidation by AQI to gain the acquiescence of the tribes proved too draconian to ensure their subordination in Anbar and elsewhere. Yet as Biddle argues, economic considerations must be weighed to understand the nature of tribal loyalty and power. For example, Colonel Peter Mansoor recalled Gen. Petraeus comparing the Tribes of Anbar to the fictional TV mafia family, Sopranos, stating that "[e]very sheikh has a trucking company, a construction company, and an import-export business" (Mansoor 2013, 125). To this end, the introduction of AQI to the Anbar province proved bad for business and thus economic incentives, to some degree, determined the alignment of certain tribes with the American-led MNF-I in the fight against the insurgency. This assessment is equally important when examining tribal relations with actors operating on the outside of the tribal periphery, such as foreign actors, and the central government to comprehend the terms of tribal-security agreements.

From 2005-2008, MNF-I mobilised the Sunni tribes of Anbar, Salah ad Din and Diyala Provinces in the campaign against the insurgency driven by the emergence of AQI. 2006 marked



the initial stages of a concerted campaign on the part of the tribes to militarily confront AQI, with Sheikh Sattar al-Rishawi of the Albu Risha playing a pivotal role in the fight. However, Sheikh al-Rishawi was a minor sheikh and had been involved in illicit activities that included smuggling and highway extortion, and previous ties to AQI. Yet, once the terrorist group encroached upon traditional avenues of enrichment, the savvy sheikh aligned with the United States. While Sheikh al-Rishawi was a minor force in the tribal environment, he was “propelled to this position [by] the Americans in 2006”<sup>229</sup> referring to the increasingly political prominence of the sheikh due to his close relationship with the American military. Importantly, US forces tended to cooperate with minor tribal figures and “made them what they needed to be in order to operate independently of the hesitant and stronger tribes”.<sup>230</sup> To this end the US, “empowered motivated sheikhs ahead of prominent ones that were hesitant,”<sup>231</sup> and potentially diluted traditional tribal hierarchies. The US military established inroads with sheikhs not only from the Abu Risha, but additionally the Abu Saif and Abu Azam tribes.

Over time, a certain patron-client relationship was formed to ensure the Awakening achieved full military potential. US forces distributed different assistance and financial packages to initiate tribal cooperation. One aspect included the provision of defence contracts to rebuild military and civilian infrastructure such as roads, schools and dilapidated military facilities, alongside direct financial support to tribal sheikhs. (Cigar 2014, 11). US political and military support empowered the local tribes and regenerated a patronage system akin to that under Saddam Hussein. Largely, opportunism informed the decisions of prominent tribal sheikhs to align with the US-led Coalition Forces. Tribal elites manipulated the benevolence of Coalition Forces

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Michael Pregent. 13 April 2017.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

either by diverting US funds allocated for the sustainment of tribal battalions or manipulating provisional reconstruction contracts for their own ends.

An important concept to understand throughout these patron-client relations was the notion of the US military developing into the 'biggest sheikh', or 'strongest' tribe. The process of tribal empowerment enabled tribal leaders to reassert or fortify social control within the tribal hierarchy. The ascendance of the American military as the 'biggest tribe' was made possible due to the nature of tribal loyalties, which had historically been receptive to a patron allocating a maximum degree of financial benevolence. Money was very important "to demonstrate commitment to the tribes" and moreover, "the money provided the sheikhs with the power to motivate and in some cases, punish tribal members for performance" in combat.<sup>232</sup> US forces also enabled the sheikhs to "radio if they needed help and within minutes they'd have air support and US combat power on the way" and these actions were "as important as the money - they had confidence and trust that we would be the muscle making them the strongest tribe".<sup>233</sup>

Commander's Emergency Relief Program (CERP) funding was an additional mechanism used by American forces to establish inroads with tribal leaders.<sup>234</sup> Civil-military affairs officers had to discreetly vet the tribesmen to understand who had legitimacy and therefore the ability to implement the Coalition's objectives.<sup>235</sup> These assessments were provided to military commanders in Anbar Province and other areas to inform the allocation of funding. However, CERP funding was discretionary and based on the commander's judgement of the battlespace and potential impact of tribal engagement. A commander would identify a tribal leader with the ability to achieve success expeditiously and distribute financial aid to facilitate this process. This was a

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> The majority of this funding came from the \$650 million discovered by US soldiers in Baghdad, while the DoD would allocate an additional \$4.1 billion to this initiative.

<sup>235</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Richard Welch. 15 June 2017.

form of tactical economics. However, in some cases, such individuals were prioritised over the traditionally prominent tribal sheikhs. Consequently, CERP funding elevated local level tribesmen beyond their normal tribal standing, which generated tensions between those with legitimate tribal authority and those who were active on the ground and able to achieve certain objectives. The situation of Albu Risha was the most obvious and created tensions within the Anbari tribal system and politically divided the province because some sheikhs refused to form a coalition with Albu Risha, and this caused disorganization within the Sunni political system.<sup>236</sup>

Nonetheless, US-Anbari tribal relations proved mutually beneficial as witnessed by the success of the Awakening and afforded COFOR's with a local partner who could collect intelligence on the enemy, fight the enemy and assist in stabilizing former insurgent-held territory. Throughout the period of the Awakening (2005-08) and the relationship with the Anbari Tribes, the US eclipsed the central government as the 'biggest tribe' and controlled, for a short while, the monopoly of violence within the province, as the dominate patron.

Prime Minister al-Maliki also established a relationship with the Iraqi tribes in a similar manner to President Hussein and the American military in Anbar Province. Baghdad tried to co-opt Iraqi tribes in various provinces not only to curry political favour but also wield power over a subordinate tribal battalion. The TSC's were one of the most visible relationship between the central authority and tribal periphery. To recall from chapter 5, the TSC's began to form in 2008, when al-Maliki funded and organised tribal fighters in Basrah to augment Iraqi Security Forces in combat operations. Soon thereafter, localised tribal battalions were formed in Baghdad, Babil, Karbala, Maysan, Dhi Qar, and Wasit Provinces. However, the relationship was viewed with scepticism because it provided al-Maliki with a mechanism to not only establish security but form a patronage network to ensure the political subservience of the tribes. While the TSC's were

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<sup>236</sup> Researcher's Interview with General (Ret) David Petraeus. 29 August 2018.

originally envisaged as a localised security force to aid in stability operations, councils in the Shia south enabled the Iraqi leader to 'buy' votes. Indeed, US Political Counsellor Robert Ford surmised in a cable to Washington the TSC's were developed "to buy political support for Prime Minister al-Maliki in advance of the provincial elections".<sup>237</sup> Similarly, US Ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker, noted in a separate cable that "the TSCs were set up to strengthen Baghdad's reach into the provinces, distribute patronage, and develop loyalty to Maliki".<sup>238</sup>

While the insurgency plagued the predominantly Sunni provinces, violence within the Shia environs of Basrah occurred between these groups engaged in a conflict to consolidate power over petroleum and thereby the ability to control the distribution and allocation of resources derived from such practices. For example, The Fadhilla Party won 21 of 41 seats in the 2005 Parliamentary elections, gained considerable influence within the Ministry of Oil and controlled the Oil Facilities Protection Forces. This positioning permitted the party to control oil smuggling activities in and around Basrah. At the same time, the Mahdi Army attempted to counter the power of Fadhilla and gain a piece of the oil smuggling opportunities. These activities are important because the non-state actors could rely on a revenue source autonomous from the central authority and utilise the money to fund subordinate militia. In additions the TSC's located in and around Basrah allowed al-Maliki to establish a political and military counter-weight against the rival political-militia, Jaysh al-Mahdi, the Badr Corps and Fadhilla.

Based on these assessments, we can draw a parallel between the rule of President Hussein and Prime Minister al-Maliki, regarding the reliance of the central government on the tribal groupings as security providers in the periphery during periods of weak state authority feeble nature of the state. Tribal power had been stymied by the autocratic hand of President Hussein

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<sup>237</sup> Assessing the Political Implications of Tribal Support Councils in Southern Iraq.  
[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BAGHDAD124\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BAGHDAD124_a.html). Accessed 4 April 2017.

<sup>238</sup> PM Maliki: Strengthened Center or Emerging Strongman?  
[https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BAGHDAD379\\_a.html](https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BAGHDAD379_a.html). Accessed 4 April 2017.

until the waning years of his rule. In a reversal of policy, President Hussein increasingly relied on the Iraqi tribes to bulwark his rule as economic sanctions and uprisings eroded his grip on power. The dissolution of the state provided a springboard for tribal identity and politics to materialise as a dominant force across the Iraqi landscape. As a result, Iraqi Sunni tribes occupied positions of political and military strength in relation to the central authority and possessed the ability to shift the political and security currents whether ensuring the eradication of insurgents from the Anbar Province, coalescing in anti-regime protests such as Fallujah or more recently, mobilizing militarily to dispel ISI from Iraqi territory.

Another critical issue regarding Baghdad-tribal relations centred on the localised nature of the conflict against AQI that uprooted the Anbar Province and its failure to translate into substantive reconciliation at the national level. American officials gently nudged the military component of the Awakening movement into the purview of the Iraqi government; yet Baghdad never fully embraced the tribal militia, nor the US-mandated reconciliation program with the aim of integrating the tribal fighters into the security structures of the state. Baghdad maintained a relationship with and tolerated the Awakening members because the US forces provided the salaries.”.<sup>239</sup> Aside from the 3,000 tribesmen under the command of Sheikh Ahmed Albu Risha<sup>240</sup>, Prime Minister al-Maliki reneged on an agreement to incorporate and provide employment and economic opportunities for the remaining 90-102,000 Awakening fighters. Again, tribes are “corrupt in the sense that they are about themselves” and at the time, Baghdad didn’t believe investing in the Anbari tribes was a good use of state resources.<sup>241</sup> While replicating Saddam’s approach was an option, the Iraqi leadership, for complex reasons, decided not to and this is now known to have been a mistake.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Michael Pregent 13 April 2017.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Lt. Colonel (Ret.) Craig Whiteside. 5 January 2018.

<sup>242</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Richard Welch. 15 July 2017.

Regardless of the motivates, al-Maliki's actions upended the inclusion of Sunni tribesmen into the military and dismantled the political and military gains established by US forces in the province. This meant that the Sunni tribes were left to their own devices because there was no longer US support nor state largesse. Inevitably, a portion of the tribesmen upset by Baghdad's decision became an opportune recruiting pool for Sunni insurgents. Four senior tribal sheikhs stated that beginning in 2010, AQI began to offer \$100 more than the average monthly salary of an Awakening members, which at the time, ranged between \$250-\$300 (Hendawi 2010, npn). This meant that even a relatively good salary for engaging in the insurgency or sectarian violence was "more appealing to military age males" (Watson 2007, 105). As a result, financial incentives were equally, if not more important than fervent ideological belief regarding the Sunni tribesmen alliance with AQI.

The economic role was inferred by US military officers who, after interviewing detainees and reviewing intelligence files, assessed that money and not a jihadist ideology motivated some Iraqis to join AQI (Oppel Jr. 2008, npn). While money and financial considerations were one of many factors that determined relations with the either the insurgency, government, or US forces during OIF, it nonetheless underscored the pivotal role of patronage and distribution of resources in dictating tribal alignment.

Consequently, the American-led CFOR's and subsequent Iraqi leadership gradually co-opted tribal battalions to achieve political and military objectives. The experiences of the Anbari tribesmen shows the difficulty in subordinating tribal units under a sustainable civil-military relationship envisaged by Western scholars, within a political environment where the periphery and non-state actors exercise considerable autonomy relative to the central authority. However, the failure for the ideal civil-military relationship to emerge is not necessarily a bane to security, so long as the tribes and central authority succeed in reaching an amicable agreement that sees the tribesmen play a productive role in security. Such an agreement it appears, resulted from

either coercion or the tribal groupings occupying a beneficial position within a certain patron-client relationship. This was exacerbated by the dire economic straits faced in Iraq following years of sanctions and the advent of OIF.

However, the nature of the relationship between external actors and Baghdad on the one hand, and Iraqi tribes on the other proved unpredictable. The relationships were difficult to confine to a solitary tribal policy. Rather, Baghdad and US forces engaged in a number of ‘tribal strategies’ that equated to “[a] vague game of musical chairs”.<sup>243</sup> It seems as if the music stopped when the tribes entered an amicable patron-client relationship with one of the many suitors. This is understandable, given the prominent role of patron-client relations that have been a historical fixture of tribal-state relations in Iraq and across the wider-Arab World.

#### Political Sectarianism and the Institutionalization of Corruption and the Hallow Army

Patronage, clientelism and corruption became intertwined within the political dynamics of post-2003 Iraq and formed along communal lines and reinforced the power of political parties in relation to the central authority. This process has taken shape since 2005, in which successive governments have functioned as national unity coalitions, whereby all political parties obtaining a seat in parliament are afforded the opportunity to consolidate control over certain ministries and bureaucratic functions.

This form of corruption, at the institutional level, meant that politicians and political parties treated state structures as prizes gained from winning elections. Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih (2006-2009) elaborated on the nature and impact of such an arrangement during a conversation with US Ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker, illustrating that “[t]he roots of corruption in Iraq is politics; corruption is the system of the country [...]. It starts at the top when Ministry X

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<sup>243</sup> Researcher’s interview with Ali Allawi 15 April 2017.

is given to Party Y".<sup>244</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, communalism emerged as the political determinant in Iraq, and these political parties often operated with a subordinate militia. This environment divided Iraqi politics along political-militia and communal territorial lines, with the Kurdish militia in the North, Shia militia in the South, and the Sunni's in between.<sup>245</sup> In an interview with Al-Jazeera, Iraqi lawyer and analyst Zaid al-Ali argued these sectarian and ethnic parties gained control over government ministries and "essentially established business empires for themselves" (al-Ali 2014, npn). Oversight and accountability of political practices was virtually non-existent, and this allowed politicians to pull the strings of the government purse as well as manipulate bureaucratic functions within several ministries. The lack of structure allowed political parties to increasingly accumulate the necessary power to "become a state", including economic power (ibid). The nature of corruption in Iraq came to resemble a criminal enterprise rife with illicit activities. Once a ministry was subsumed by a communally-aligned party, it becomes subordinate arm of the party and came to reflect the organizational structure of "a mafia cartel".<sup>246</sup>

The nature of this organised pillaging of state resources is directly associated with sectarian and political power struggles that took-hold in the post-Saddam era (Agator 2013, 4). Similarly, this pronounced power of political parties impeded the functionalities of the state, to include "maintaining a monopoly on the use of force and controlling the country's borders" (Boduszyński 2016, 117). In Iraq, these ethnic and sectarian parties factionally controlled the militarily, with the desire to weaken the coercive power of the institution relative to their own militia. The Iraqi political class in this sense understood the importance of retaining a coercive capability in order to exercise their own influence over the population.<sup>247</sup> Upholding a monopoly of violence through

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<sup>244</sup> Ambassador and Deputy PM Discuss Falling Oil Exports, Corruption, and Politics. [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08BAGHDAD4067\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08BAGHDAD4067_a.html). Accessed 10 April 2017.

<sup>245</sup> Researcher's interview with Ambassador Feisal Istrabadi. 4 April 2017.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Researcher's Interview with Brigadier General (Ret.) Ismael Alsodani 10 April 2017.



militia would provide the political parties with an opportunity to fulfil this core function of a state during the proverbial security vacuum. The political and security situation fortified the role of sectarian-based corruption and in some instances, patronage. It was nonetheless corruption and criminality based on sectarianism or communal consideration.

Ethno-sectarian motivated corruption was driven by communally aligned political parties who placed immense pressure on the Ministry of Defence to facilitate criminality and allow sectarianism to pervade (2018 284). The political dynamics which came to dominate the post-2003 political order therefore impacted the nature of civil-military relations in the burgeoning Republic. They succeeded in capturing the ability to distribute state-resources and as it will be shown in the next section, held a pivotal role in the patronage network as not only benefactors, but enablers of corrupt practices in the Iraqi Army. The practices partly ensured the fidelity of divisions and commanders to political considerations, in an arrangement of “pragmatic political sectarianism”.<sup>248</sup>

The transformation of the Iraqi military from a professional institution under Saddam, into one rife with corruption and illicit business enterprises began during the infancy of the MNF-I and under the authority of American forces. Rampant corruption within the security sector was initiated by the new political elites and appointed ministers. Under the Interim Iraqi Government, the Ministry of Defence and an entire political class pilfered the \$1.4 billion defence budget, while the CPA turned a blind eye. American officials “presided over the instillation of corrupt officers and practices for the sake of basically political reasons; [they didn’t] want to expose allies for what they are”.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Michael Pregent. 13 April 2017.

<sup>249</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Ali Allawi. 15 April 2017.

During the infancy of the post-2003 political order, a small clique of ministerial and political elites manipulated the military and defence apparatus for personal enrichment, yet over time, the officer corps enjoyed greater entrance to avenues of corruption as the practices became increasingly institutionalised, and subsequently “everyone tried to milk [the Ministry of Defence] for what it was worth” according to former Defence Minister Ali Allawi.<sup>250</sup> The group began under then-Iraqi Interim Government President Ghazi Mashal Ajil al-Yawer and Iraqi Transitional Government Deputy President Saad Bunnia alongside a handful of senior advisors and defence personnel involved in contracting and procurement capacities. This included the former Director General for Acquisitions and Logistics, Ziyad Tariq Ahmed Cattan, who served under the leadership of Defence Minister Hazem Shaalan (2004-2005). These officials constructed an elaborate scheme that enabled them to pilfer over \$1 billion worth of defence contracts in less than a year.<sup>251</sup>

As illustrated, corruption was very much condoned at the political level and would become entrenched with the introduction of procurement and contracting practices. These provided the most lucrative racket for personal enrichment due to “the lax standards or practices of purchasing and procurement” that creates “a culture of immensely corrupt organization and a hierarchy of increasingly corrupt officers to prevail in the command structure and field”.<sup>252</sup> For example, while the Iraqi government purchased hundreds of millions of dollars’ worth of helicopters from the Russian Federation, the helicopters were never delivered until a decade and a half later because the aircraft were never airworthy.<sup>253</sup> The most powerful actor in the Iraqi Army aside from the Divisional command would be the battalion officer in charge of supplies and logistics. A Divisional commander was relatively powerless to interfere with this individual officer “because the

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Researcher’s Interview with a former Senior Advisor to the Iraqi Minister of Defense. 4 December 2017.

<sup>252</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Ali Allawi. 15 April 2017.

<sup>253</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Vincent Alcazar. 14 May 2017.

individual in question was assigned to logistics for a reason”, meaning that his conduct was condoned at the elite level.<sup>254</sup> Aside from this connection, senior political and military officials ensured oversight over the supply and logistical process was intentionally weak to facilitate corruption. This indicates the rackets benefited multiple personalities within and without the formal military chain of command.<sup>255</sup>

Initially, US military advisors wanted to model the purchase and procurement process after the American system of logistical support that relied heavily on contractors to facilitate the acquisition and dispersion of supplies and logistical backing. However, because the system is susceptible to corrupt practices, Iraqi Defence Minister Qadir Obeidi (2006-2010) implemented a plan in 2006 to revitalise the Saddam-era method of self-reliance and sustainment, and allocated around 300 million Iraqi Dinars (194,925 pounds) to each unit with the intention of enabling commanders to procure and allocate resources as needed.<sup>256</sup> However, the project failed because “the 300 million dinars distributed monthly to the commanders” was pilfered, and it became “the biggest internal corruption of the Iraqi military”.<sup>257</sup>

Aside from a corruption within the supply and logistical process, ghost soldiers also presented another mechanism to accrue state-distributed resources intended for the armed forces. In the Iraqi Army, ghost soldiers are either fictitious military personnel assigned to a unit or real soldiers who receive a salary without working.<sup>258</sup> By the summer of 2014, four divisions with an on-paper strength of roughly 100,000 soldiers only had 50,000. The practice occurred according to an agreement between military commanders, the Ministry of Defence and political parties. A divisional commander is allotted 200 ghost soldiers for each unit and each ghost soldier

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<sup>254</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Michael Pregent. 13 April 2017.

<sup>255</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Ali Allawi. 15 April 2017.

<sup>256</sup> Researcher interview with Brigadier General (Ret.) Ismael Alsodani. 10 April 2017.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

affords the commander an extra \$200-500 a month in extra income to reward or incentivise his subordinates.<sup>259</sup> Where permissible in other circumstances, an NCO could forfeit around 50percent of his salary to remain at home.<sup>260</sup> A former senior advisor to the Iraqi Defence Minister recalled that following an audit of all Iraqi soldiers, it was discovered that 55,000 ghost soldiers permeated the Iraqi Army.<sup>261</sup> Often, officers inflated their force strength to garner more logistics and supplies to sell on the black-market and further enrich themselves. This in turn made it exceedingly difficult to quantify the actual numerical size of the IA.

The lucrative practices described above necessitated a unique phenomenon whereby an Iraqi soldier could 'purchase' an officer's commission. Ambassador Istrabadi mused, you have individuals "paying hard currency for senior commissions to become a general officer not just because you like having a 17-old year salute you".<sup>262</sup> In other words, an officer's commission offered a pathway for personal enrichment, essentially paying for access into an economically lucrative network of corruption. To be sure, the investment necessary to purchase an officer's commission "can be recovered in a matter of months,"<sup>263</sup> based on the ability to pilfer procurement contracts in addition to manipulating the existence of ghost soldiers. For example, a commander could requisition supplies for a force at battalion strength, when in fact the existence of ghost soldiers obfuscates the nominal troop numbers of a battalion, allowing for such supplies to be syphoned off and subsequently resold at a profit. Another lucrative position was in and around the Karkh district of Baghdad, situated along important transportation roads, officers in charge of checkpoints within the area could obtain \$25 per vehicle.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Researcher's Interview with Michael Pregent. 13 April 2017.

<sup>260</sup> Researcher's Interview with a former Senior Advisor to the Iraqi Minister of Defense. 4 December 2017.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Researcher's Interview with Ambassador Feisal Istrabadi. 4 April 2017.

<sup>263</sup> Researcher's Interview with Ali Allawi. 14 April 2017.

<sup>264</sup> Researcher's Interview with a former Senior Advisor to the Iraqi Minister of Defense. 4 December 2017.

Discerning exactly who benefited financially from corruption and criminality is difficult, because clearly defined networks of patronage and a hierarchy of corruption are not readily pronounced. However, what is clear is the role of the partocracy in the overarching patrimonial economy of the military and state. The partocracy shares many of the attributes of a drug cartel. Political parties and those politicians assigned to the Parliamentary Defence and Security Committees exercised considerable influence over military personnel promotions as well as appointments (as noted in chapter 5). Political sympathies and partisanship were irrelevant to committee members whom pulled the levers of power; rather, the procedures mandating appointments and promotions presented an opportunity for personal enrichment and consequently corruption.

A former Iraqi diplomat offered this assessment of the situation.<sup>265</sup>

[w]ell presume it's like a drug cartel, I don't know specifically, presume if I am a Defence Minister, I have the power appoint you as general, I in turn am appointed Minister of Defence by a political party. So, the Minister of Defence alongside certain politicians are allocated a percentage of the money.

Within the Iraqi Ministry of Defence, the Deputy Director as opposed to the Director received much of this money.<sup>266</sup> In this vein, several Sunni politicians headed the Ministry of Defence. Most did so and were willing to work with al-Maliki because he provided the officials with ample room and leeway for corruption.<sup>267</sup> This in turn illustrates how the Iraqi leader permitted corruption to retain the political compliance of Sunni ministry officials.

A critical evaluation of the Iraqi Army throughout the tenure of Prime Minister al-Maliki underscores an institution manipulated into a disorganised system of corruption and clientelism whereby loyal officers enjoyed prominent command positions and the potential to extract

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<sup>265</sup> Researcher's Interview with Ambassador Feisal Istrabadi. 4 April 2017.

<sup>266</sup> Researcher's Interview with Michael Pregent. 13 April 2017.

<sup>267</sup> Researcher's Interview with Ali Allawi. 15 April 2017.

considerable wealth from the coffers of the Defence Ministry. However, while the network of patronage technically penetrated across Iraqi institutions, it was “immature” and too weak to persevere once al-Maliki was removed from office in 2014 (Rayburn 2014, 47-8).

Indeed, the network failed to solidify as a “shadow state”, or durable power centre capable of ensuring al-Maliki remained politically and militarily relevant upon his departure from power, like the manner in which Saleh continued to exert influence over the Yemeni armed forces after 2012. While Al-Malik exhibited autocratic tendencies, he failed to establish a patronage network within the military capable of rooting the loyalty of the institution to his person, because he relied on sectarianism to capture the loyalty of the officer class. In this sense, he did not establish patrimonial rule with a strong emphasis on patron-client relations because sectarianism proved more valuable and readily manipulated to serve his interests. Nonetheless, the factors precipitating the expeditious fragmentation of the Iraqi Army during the summer of 2014 go to the heart of the problems faced by the state, with endemic corruption featuring prominently.

A former senior advisor to Iraqi Minister of Defence, Khaled al-Obaidi, believed corruption and criminality had the most devastating impact on the Iraqi Army in the lead-up to June 2014. He was directly involved in the internal investigative and auditing process that concluded moral and loyalty was non-existent prior to the Summer of 2014.<sup>268</sup> Soldiers proved unwilling to fight for individuals who had paid to become an officer because they felt the officer placed more emphasis on financial gain as opposed to his individual soldiers’ welfare. Across the board, this meant a deterioration in performance and fighting skills due to lacklustre training and a less than amicable relationship with the local population because certain officers were “busy harassing and blackmailing them”.<sup>269</sup> Corruption across the political system and armed forces became deeply

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<sup>268</sup> Researcher’s Interview with a former Senior Advisor to the Iraqi Minister of Defense. 4 December 2017.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

entrenched and this generated an environment of tacit acceptance so much so that the prevailing feeling became, “I can’t fight it, so let me see how I can manoeuvre within in”.<sup>270</sup> Overall, the ultimate impact of rampant kleptocracy and corruption resulted in an institution that on the outside “looked strong and fierce, [but] in reality [was a] very hollow and decrepit structure”.<sup>271</sup>

### Conclusion

On paper, the Iraqi Army appeared relatively strong and capable of conducting most of its responsibilities following the 2011 withdrawal of American forces. However, this utter failure against the Islamic State illustrated the corrosive impact of corruption and a patrimonial economy on a military’s effectiveness. Corruption in the procurement process, the existence of ghost soldiers and the political influence of the communal parties rendered it a paper tiger army.

Accordingly, this chapter applied a patrimonial economy framework that assessed the implications of criminality and corruption on the institutional cohesion of the Iraqi Army. The decimation of the Iraqi state generated an environment of lawlessness and political power centred around ethnic and sectarian affiliations. Weak institutions gave rise to a parallel economic system which was manipulated by these political parties and ministerial elites, who pilfered Iraq through acts of criminality and corruption. In this regard, corruption and criminality eroded the strict discipline and hierarchy instilled and implemented by senior officers.

An illicit criminal enterprise and rampant corruption diluted the prestige of the military as an institution and weakened the willingness of the soldier to fight and die for an organization rampant with graft, unless of course, the individuals are allocated financial or economic incentive to bear arms. This is not to say all IA officers are sectarian adherents and mercenaries beholden

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<sup>270</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Vincent Alcazar. 14 May 2017.

<sup>271</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Ali Allawi. 15 April 2017.

to the highest bidder, yet such problems are a fact and therefore must be addressed to understand the nature of civil-military relations in Iraq.

This was noted by Maj. General Eaton, who led the initiative to rebuild the Iraqi Army (2003-2004), “soldiers will perform well in really terrible situations if they believe that the guy to left and right and over him will be there. That is a given in the American military, it’s a fact. Not so in the Iraqi Army, the chain of command abandoned them, and al-Maliki abandoned them”.<sup>272</sup>

As highlighted, the Shia-dominated political apparatus succeeded in capturing state-resources and manipulating the bent of the officer class to some degree. Within such a milieu, a predominate authority fails to emerge at the centre and causes political infighting to secure the levers of violence amongst the political class-with affiliated and often subordinate militia-the central authority and the tribal groupings existing within the periphery.

The lack of oversight and accountability permitted by Prime Minister al-Maliki allowed loyal commanders at the battalion, brigade and certain divisional levels to manage the units as personal fiefdoms and extract state-based resources initially allocated for the affairs of the units. Sectarian favouritism as a way of defining the contours of power had been established, and thus sectarian-political affiliations served to determine the loyalty of the officer corps with direct access to the networks of corruption pulsating throughout the military.

As a result, sub-state actors emerged to seal the security void through military mobilization. Yet, the parallel nature of the tribal-sectarian nexus\_ inherently inhibits the emergence of a dominate authority to claim the monopoly of violence. Patrimonial economy is also important in that within this model, a somewhat amicable relationship exists between sub-state actors and the central authority in that the government channels resources to these actors or the actors are permitted to capture state-affiliated resources in return for subservience. What is clear with the

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<sup>272</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Major General (Ret.) Paul Eaton. 30 March 2017.



case of Iraq is that corruption and criminality gradually supplanted professionalism and therefore eroded away prospects for the institutionalization of the military. Notably, it appears individual units or commanders succeeded in capturing state-based resources through smuggling and racketeering projects as opposed to holding a discernible corporate or military economic role in comparison to other cases such as Egypt or the IRGC in Iran.

Nonetheless, in the case of Iraq, sectarian, tribal and communal affinities appear durable enough to secure the fidelity of individual officers as opposed to enabling the wholesale involvement of the military in the economy to direct the currents of fidelity. Notwithstanding this, the ultimate impact of rampant patrimonial economy and corruption was a military institution that “looked strong and fierce” on the outside, however the reality was that it existed as a “very hollow and decrepit structure”.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 7: Tribesmen in Arms, Warlords and the Yemen Military

### Introduction

This chapter will employ the concept of patrimonial economy, with an emphasis on the role and impact of patronage, criminality and corruption on the cohesion of the Yemeni officer corps. Chapter five introduced the notion of warlordism in order to understand the nature of power following the commensurate fragmentation of the state and military. In a tribal-sectarian nexus analogous to Yemen, competing factions emerged within the tribal-military-commercial complex in which “tribal and military entities have more control over their fiefdoms [...] and militias [...] than the government”.<sup>274</sup> Patrimonial economy in this sense will examine the nature of patron-client relations, the distribution of patronage, and the pervasive allowance of corruption within the Yemeni Army. State wealth and resources are controlled by the regime and distributed along patrimonial considerations in order to secure the subservience of the armed forces. In this regard, regime elites treat the state and its resources as private property. Once the ‘state’ and regime fragments, patron-client relations persist to dominate soldiers and subservient clients.

To recall, a warlord within this milieu signifies a societal actor or leader with the ability to mobilise manpower for combat, alongside the ability to exercise considerable economic and military strength over a greater territory or people when compared to the central authority. Individuals such as Hadi, Ali Abdullah Saleh and Ali Mohsen can be viewed as Warlords, based in part on their ability to utilise economic exchanges to maintain and elongate power. These former regime elites and other non-state actors gained the ability to mobilise manpower and collected enough economic strength to remain autonomous from the central authority (Freeman 2015 179).

The fragmentation of the patronage army and patrimonial state devolved power into the tribal-sectarian nexus\_ and vanquished any discernible ‘state’ associated forms of economic

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<sup>274</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Adam Seitz. 23 May 2017.

exchange. Therefore, the various warlords had to accrue resources to sustain or establish patron-client networks as a means to remain politically and militarily relative within this newfound political environment of sub-communalised power and violence. In this regard, “wise warlords share the wealth to maintain personal loyalty” (Marten 2006, 58), and by extension, retain the loyalty of militia.

Accordingly, this chapter will demonstrate how the fragmenting patronage networks within the army and regime coalesced around warlords who were able to sustain pre-2011 sources of income and develop new ones. This led to an environment whereby non-state actors can “exercise civil power at a local or regional level through their control of military factions and militias” (Seitz 2014, 66). The dissolution of state power, and the fragmentation of coercive might, assisted in the emergence of multiple power centres and caused the phenomenon of warlordism, which inherently flourishes in the absence of a strong central authority and its inability fulfil core state functions. Patrimonial economy and warlordism, therefore, provides a useful frame to understand why the military fragmented in 2011 and how this frame within the tribal-sectarian nexus can elucidate the ‘state’. In a patronage state such as Yemen, to discern loyalties, one must “follow the cash flow to unearth patterns of solidarity”.<sup>275</sup>

#### The “Tribal-Military Commercial Complex”

At the heart of the civil-military relationship in Yemen was the inextricable link between the military, the economy and an officer corps buttressed by a tribal milieu. Ultimately, as Yemeni analyst Nadwa al-Dawsari argued, “there is no military in Yemen, there is no army in Yemen there has never been a professional army, the army has been formed as a patronage to Saleh”.<sup>276</sup> Based on this, the elites within the army enjoyed exclusive access into the civilian economy and innumerable opportunities to advance monetary interests, in a patron-client relationship.

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<sup>275</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Captain (Ret.) James Spencer. 22 March 2017.

<sup>276</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Nadwa al-Dawsari. 24 May 2017.

A triumvirate was situated at the precipice of the burgeoning network, firmly placing President Saleh in charge of the 'state'; Sheikh Abdullah Al-Ahmar, head of the Hashid Tribal Confederation, manipulated his position amongst Yemen's tribal elite to secure the president's position; and Gen. Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, enjoyed growing importance within the Yemeni Army. Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar and Sheikh al-Ahmar were provided considerable latitude in which to run their own business affairs and informal private militaries, directly financed by Saleh.<sup>277</sup> Therefore, since the inception of the Republic, a patrimonial economy formed the bedrock of the elite pact and the contours of power.

Importantly, military commanders tended to recruit blood relatives or tribal cohorts, in a process that resulted in many military formations being formed around the tribe and patronage.<sup>278</sup> As Spencer noted however, loyalty is as "much a combination of tribal and financial loyalty to commanders and that is very clear".<sup>279</sup> Initially, while tribal bonds (tribal-military) represented a crucial element of solidarity, economic considerations and access to patronage (tribal-patronage-military) became equally important in assessing the cohesion and loyalty of the Yemeni military. This cohered the military, tribal, and commercial elites into an almost indistinguishable institution of tribal-businessmen in arms. Over time, the army came to constitute an integral component of the patronage network as Yemen experienced steady economic growth and the military and officer corps became key fixtures within the civilian economy. Initially, patronage extending from President Saleh represented a fraction of the larger-patrimonial economy, with the remittances derived from Yemenis working in Gulf states constituting the main form of patronage. However, the transition from a remittance to oil-based economy altered the existing dynamics of patronage. Domestic oil production alongside diesel

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<sup>277</sup> Will Saleh's Successor Pease Stand Up? [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA2766\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA2766_a.html). Accessed 25 May 2017.

<sup>278</sup> Researcher's Interview with Nadwa al-Dawsari. 24 May 2017.

<sup>279</sup> Researcher's Interview with Captain (Ret.) James Spencer. 22 March 2017.

subsidies permitted Saleh to envelope state-based resources within a wider-patronage network that become integrated within the tribal-military nexus. The convergence of tribal influence within the military and its pronounced role as an economic actor formed the tribal-military industrial complex.

Five elite groups benefited the most from corruption and the nature of the Yemeni patrimonial economy, however, the two most important groups: (USAID 2006, 5).

are also the two with the most overlap: tribes and the military-security establishment. Leaders of key tribes constitute the lion's share of top military and security officers. A similar pattern is found in the security forces. Yemen's military controls an extensive array of commercial activities, some legal and some extra-legal.

To be sure, the Yemeni military and officer elite increasingly enjoyed greater access into an array of economic activities nominally under the domain of the civilian economy. The military gained a heavy presence in the civilian-economy through interests and positions in The Yemen MECO and after 1999, the YECO. Historically, MECO emerged in the 1970's during the period of laissez-faire economics as the primary supplier to the Yemeni armed forces (Dresch 2000, 159). The consortium rapidly expanded into the economic affairs of the state, establishing business interests in pharmaceuticals, tourism and the lucrative oil industry.

YECO's portfolio expanded exponentially following the 1994 civil-war and covered southern oil, international aid contracts and the sale of real estate confiscated from the old South. While YECO had a civilian leader, the deputy was from the military or a retired officer and a YECO military representative was stationed amongst the various governorates.<sup>280</sup> In turn, the proliferation of the officer elite within the consortium "ensured the wealth stayed within the patronage network"<sup>281</sup> and resulted in "soldiers with civilian jobs in uniform".<sup>282</sup> The process

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<sup>280</sup> Researcher's Interview with Adam Seitz. 23 May 2017.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Researcher's Interview with Captain (Ret.) James Spencer. 22 March 2017.

transformed the officer corps into businessmen in arms with the ability to distribute patronage through the chain of command and thus secure to some extent the subservience of subordinates.

Smuggling constituted one of the most lucrative sources of income and patronage enjoyed by the officer corps in Yemen. Goods ranging from cigarettes and alcohol, to diesel and weapons transited through southern ports, notably Hodeida Aden and Mukalla into Yemen. The trafficking of small arms and light weapons (SA/LW) permeated the formal and informal economies in Yemen. At the state level, the regime of President Saleh manipulated weapons procured from the international community and arms acquired by the Ministry of Defence as a mechanism in which to secure loyalties. Saleh and high-ranking officers “use SA/LW as a currency to supplement personal fortune, dispense patronage to tribal leaders, compensate government officials, reward supporters, and appease potential contenders for power”.<sup>283</sup> Yemeni arms dealers negotiated the legitimate acquisition of arms and ammunition in excess of the Yemeni armed forces capacity. In turn, the excess purchased merged into the patronage network as an effective currency to maintain loyalty and ‘buy’ tribal leaders. According to the US Embassy in Sana’a, a staggering 75percent of small arms and light weapons purchased under end user certificates were distributed as patronage to “high-level MOD officials, powerful generals, field commanders, and a multitude of tribal sheikhs”.<sup>284</sup>

Apart from the formal network of weapons trafficking, a certain segment of the officer class enjoyed direct access to arms deals. For example, Col. Smailes recalled that in 2013, a Yemeni Maj. General “[went] out to negotiate an arms contract with the Russians, worth \$500 million dollars’ and it was rumoured he was taking a 10percent cut”.<sup>285</sup> While the size of this kickback was

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<sup>283</sup> Combating Yemen’s Grey Market in Small Arms and Light Weapons.  
[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA269\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA269_a.html). Accessed 1 June 2017.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Iain Smailes. 16 May 2017.

unusual, the anecdote nonetheless illustrates the ability of the officer corps to informally garner a sizeable portion of defence contracts.

Historically, oil and gas represented the ‘lubricant’ of the patronage system and therefore opportunist officers sought to seize a portion of the lucrative trade by illegal transporting and selling the black gold. US Ambassador to Yemen Thomas Krajeski noted that “oil is the main source of state patronage (accounting for 80 percent of national revenues) and thus is vulnerable to corruption”.<sup>286</sup> One Yemeni politician believed that President Saleh’s kin, “Amaar and Yehia Saleh [were]making millions working the diesel smuggling and black market along with Ali Mohsen”,<sup>287</sup> with the assistance of National Security Bureau and Central Security Forces equipment and personnel into Saudi Arabia. Oil however, occupied a prestigious position within the patronage network and therefore indulgence in the practice appeared to be compartmentalised by the elite class of the tribal-military-commercial establishment. Again, the elites such as Ammar and Yehia were able to direct profits procured from oil smuggling into the units under their command and retain the loyalties of their men because they are providing a supplemental source of income beyond the ‘state’ sanctioned salary.

Lastly, the practice of ghost soldiers presented a further avenue of economic enrichment for the officer class. A commander, for example, reports a battalion of 1,000 soldiers on paper, when the actual strength is 400 men. In turn, the command could use the excess of supplies salaries from the 600 ghost soldiers in a variety of ways. However, he would often “distribute the money to the officers below [him] who would basically do the same thing”.<sup>288</sup> While the precise

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<sup>286</sup> Yemen Seeks to Jumpstart EITI. [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07SANAA1138\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07SANAA1138_a.html). Accessed 25 May 2017.

<sup>287</sup> ROYG Insiders Increasingly Frustrated with Saleh Clan. [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA1352\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA1352_a.html). Accessed 25 May 2017.

<sup>288</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Ambassador Gerald Feierstein. 8 May 2017.

number of 'ghost' soldiers is impossible to ascertain, one Yemen watcher believes around 30percent of the Yemeni Army was at one time comprised of 'ghosts'.<sup>289</sup>

More important than fictional soldiers, however, was the existence of 'ghost' battalions denoting the sheer magnitude of the practice. In certain circumstances, a tribal sheikh fabricated the number of soldiers recruited into a 'battalion' to benefit from the government-allocated salaries.<sup>290</sup> In other instances, Saleh or al-Ahmar agreed "with the tribal sheikh that there should be a battalion and the sheikh would then recruit the men for it and be provided with money and means to keep it going".<sup>291</sup> Due to this scheme, many of the "smaller brigades and battalions [were] in effect ghost battalions or ghost soldiers".<sup>292</sup> While, the 1AD and the Special Forces practiced normal recruitment patterns in comparison to Western armies, the method of recruitment outside the aforementioned forces afforded an officer-sheikh considerable latitude in battalion and brigade formation and therefore the potential to engage in avenues of self-enrichment.

However, President Saleh increasingly constricted access to patronage around the Sanhan elite and direct family members to the detriment of other long-standing powerbrokers to include military strongman, Gen. Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, and the al-Ahmar tribal dynasty of the Hashid Tribal Confederation. Importantly, the tribal-military commercial complex came to represent the amalgamation of these three separate entities into a unified structure that encompassed the elites from the three respective tiers. This in turn resulted in an economic alignment or alliance amongst the tribal military and commercial elite who were often one and the same.

'Military Inc.' is a fitting phrase for the armed forces once it became enveloped within the civilian economy. Officers and opportunist sheikhs arguably viewed the institution as a business

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<sup>289</sup> Researcher's Interview with Captain (Ret.) James Spencer. 22 March 2017.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Researcher's Interview with Noel Brehony. 5 April 2017.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid



opportunity as opposed to a profession. This had inherent repercussions on issues ranging from force readiness, training cohesion and loyalty. In these terms, membership in the military and holding the title of officer meant vast opportunities for economic enrichment. It became a component of the rentier state and a means to root segments of the population to the regime. This increasingly resulted in the title of colonel surpassing that of sheikh in terms of social standing and access to resources.<sup>293</sup>

#### A Family Business and the Collapse of the Military-Patronage-State

While the military writ-large had been a key fixture in the Yemeni economy and a source of financial affluence, President Saleh gradually implemented policies aimed at coalescing power around a smaller familial-based coterie beginning in the 1990s. Prior to the 2011 uprisings in Yemen, Saleh ruled through a neo-patrimonial system and governed and maintained power through patron-client relationships as opposed to rational-legal authority and secured loyalty by distributing benefits in return for political loyalty. In Yemen, informal patrimonial loyalties were absorbed into the state. For example, political parties, civil-organizations, the parliament, business and the military-associated with the modern state-were manipulated by Saleh in his patron-client networks.<sup>294</sup>

However, the shift to neo-patrimonial rule was assisted by an influx of foreign counterterrorism aid under the spectre of Al-Qaeda, a threat President Saleh willingly manipulated to accrue substantial foreign aid. Saleh tacitly enabled the terrorist organization to fluctuate within the bounds of constituting a threat to the regime and broader international community, to ensure he could extract maximum CT aid from Western donors. Frances Guy, former UK Ambassador to Yemen (2001-04) remembered that while the International Monetary

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<sup>293</sup> Researcher's Interview with Adam Seitz. 23 May 2017.

<sup>294</sup> Researcher's Interview with Nadwa al-Dawsari. 21 April 2017.

fund continually urged the British government and other Sana'a-based embassies to provide the regime with balance of payment support, such monetary transactions never came to fruition because the Foreign Commonwealth Office and diplomats in Sana'a "didn't trust the government, didn't trust them [President Saleh] not to do that (direct monetary assistance as patronage)".<sup>295</sup> However, the YECO manipulated 'soft' counter-terrorism aid distributed by the international community and non-governmental organizations to win the proverbial 'hearts and minds' to mitigate circumstances that drive the local population into terrorist organizations. Importantly, by the late 1990s the leadership of the consortium rotated among President Saleh's brothers, nephews and cousins benefited, signifying a shift towards and consolidation of power around family.<sup>296</sup> President Saleh succeeded in manipulating 'hard' US CT aid revolving around train and equip missions in addition to the provision of hardware utilised to combat terrorism. Astutely, President Saleh either reorganised Yemeni counter terrorism or special force units around family members or established new forces to capture the entirety of anti-terrorism funding, such as the Central Security Forces and the National Security Bureau.

President Saleh's actions generated fissures among the regime elite that developed into rivalries in the early 2000s, specifically because he had been reallocating rents and resources around his tribe and family.<sup>297</sup> Consequently, the redirection of foreign patronage impacted to some extent on the economic positions of Gen. Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar and the al-Ahmar dynasty of the Hashid Confederation. This was also part of Saleh's broader goal to sideline the General, and to smooth the way for his son Ahmed's succession to the Presidency. However, the General continued to have good relations with Saudi Arabia, who continued to provide a considerable

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<sup>295</sup> Researcher's Interview with Ambassador Francis Guy. 19 April 2017.

<sup>296</sup> Researcher's Interview with Adam Seitz. 23 May 2017.

<sup>297</sup> Researcher's Interview with Noel Brehony. 5 April 2017.

amount of financial assistance to the General and thereby allowing him to continue to distribute patronage.<sup>298</sup>

Importantly, CT aid and the benevolence of foreign donors accelerated the constriction of the patronage network and wider-armed forces around the president's kith and kin. Moreover, Saleh's son and heir apparent, Ahmed, sought to reign in the sale of oil and wrestle control of the lucrative assets from other entities within the patron-client nexus. In 2009, Ahmed Saleh established an interagency committee as a mechanism to conduct foreign oil sales away from the Ministry of Oil. In doing so, the committee eroded "Hamid al-Ahmar's long standing monopoly over the process" with the nascent oil sales mechanism complicating "Yemen's web of tribal rivalries and presidential patronage networks".<sup>299</sup> At one level, the Sanhan tribes captured the state and "effectively did it's best to absorb most of it",<sup>300</sup> while in actuality, the president's 'Afaash clan came to form the core of this emerging power-shift instigated by President Saleh.

Corruption along with the shifting nature of patronage access and distribution impacted the nature of loyalties across the security sector. The entrenched nature of a patrimonial economy represented a seemingly insurmountable problem when attempting to establish a more professional and accountable armed forces. In this environment, "it was never clear where the loyalty of the armed forces would go in certain circumstances" and there was always a lingering "question of where people's [military] loyalty lay, whether it was just because of patronage when push came to shove, they would join AQ or other organizations".<sup>301</sup>

Moreover, as commanders of the elite units, Ahmed Saleh and his cousins Tariq, Yahya and Ammar retained "the loyalty of their men only by providing opportunities for corruption".<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Iain Smailes and Nadwa al-Dawsari. 12 June 2017.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> Researcher's Interview with Captain (Ret.) James Spencer. 22 March 2017.

<sup>301</sup> Researcher Interview with Ambassador Francis Guy. 19 April 2017.

<sup>302</sup> ROYG Insiders Increasingly Frustrated With Saleh Clan.  
[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA1352\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA1352_a.html). Accessed 25 May 2017.

This was facilitated by alternative patronage provided by Western donors such as the United States. This process encapsulates the broader nature of corruption and patronage in securing loyalty in exchange for indulgence in illicit economic endeavours. Speaking broadly, Noel Brehony outline the loyalties of the soldiers in the military. “would be to the colonel in charge of that unit if that colonel had the respect and the loyalty of the people above him, the colonel may have recruited these people [subordinates] but he still has to deliver”.<sup>303</sup> As a hierarchy of corruption, the patronage system, Col. Smailes noted, “was multifaceted and it means that you have a very cohesive organization but very inefficient”.<sup>304</sup> The intricate and multifaceted nature of fidelity arises from solidarities. These are implanted within the formal chain of military command, in addition to parallel chains of societal command, resulting in “a web of loyalties”.<sup>305</sup>

The 2011 departure of President Saleh from power caused the fragmentation of the armed forces and commensurate dissolution of the regime and the patronage network that had bound together the state. In this regard, once the state and network of patronage collapsed, patrimonial elites devolved back into an unstructured political environment that resulted in Warlordism.

#### The Fragmenting Patronage Armies

Prior to the emergence of the tribal-sectarian nexus\_, the state in Yemen was best understood as an interconnected set of patronage networks under the domain of Saleh and embraced by the tribal, business and military elite.<sup>306</sup> Based on this assessment, the commensurate fragmentation of the ‘state’ structures (patronage networks) and the military (bulwark of patronage) into the tribal-sectarian nexus\_ devolved in accordance with the patrimonial economy and economic considerations. Warlords, businessmen in arms, and a myriad

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<sup>303</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Noel Brehony. 5 April 2017.

<sup>304</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Iain Smailes. 16 May 2017.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid.

<sup>306</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Noel Brehony. 5 April 2017.

of tribal opportunists emerged as power brokers once Yemen fragmented into para-states. Despite this, the central patronage network established by Ali Abdullah Saleh remained relatively intact.<sup>307</sup> This meant that Saleh retained all the resources and sources of financial support to sustain his network of loyalist.

Ali Abdullah Saleh enjoyed the continued loyalty of the elite units and swaths of the broader officer corps in the conventional army because he managed to maintain control over the General People's Congress and other forms of patronage.<sup>308</sup> Col. Smailes' assessment regarding the dispensation of power supports the observations of a former US Ambassador to Yemen who mused that Saleh remained relevant because "he had managed to steal billions and billions and use the money to pay off a lot of people" because money "will take you a long way in Yemen".<sup>309</sup> More precisely, in 2015, a United Nations panel concluded that Saleh amassed up to \$60 billion over his 38 year rule (Browning 2015, npn). This financial backing, in conjunction with other forms of patronage, would enable the former Yemeni leader to exercise control and influence over the military and wield political influence. Apart from this network, several other power centres continued to exist within the military and security apparatus after 2011. As President, Hadi retained nominal control of the 'army', while the Saleh family retained influence in the Republican Guard, and smaller, less coherent network forged around Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar.<sup>310</sup>

Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar was severely weakened during the 2013 reorganization of his 40,000-man strong 1AD. However, the General enjoyed considerable financial support from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and distributed the funding to uphold and further patronage networks in and around Marib, Amran, Hajj and Sa'ada. These areas had conventionally been under the Northwestern Military District and thus under the command of Gen. al-Ahmar for decades'

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<sup>307</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Iain Smailes. 19 May 2017.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid

<sup>309</sup> Researcher's Interview with Ambassador Gerald Feierstein. 8 May 2017.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid

past.<sup>311</sup> However, the GCC initiative weakened the General's power base, as noted in the previous chapter, by disbanding the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Division and removing the General from command of the forces in the port city of Hodeida.

The fractured nature of the post-2011 Yemeni armed forces was soon evident in the splintered nature of control exercised over the institution. Neither Ali Abdullah Saleh, al-Ahmar or any other prominent military officials exercised full command and control over the Yemeni military in the post-Arab Spring order. Rather, the former president and Gen. al-Ahmar enjoyed the loyalty of a network of officers that still represented their interests. Loyalties in this environment were best understood along the lines of an informal organizational chart centred on tribal and patronage bonds. Officers demonstrated allegiance back to Ali Mohsen, Saleh or a powerful tribal leader, as opposed to a conventional chain of command leading to the central authority.<sup>312</sup> In short, Ali Mohsen and Ali Abdullah Saleh retained the loyalties of officers and soldiers previously engulfed within their respective spheres of influence.<sup>313</sup>

Thus, patronage was an historically important factor in defining the contours of power and understanding the fidelity of the Yemeni armed forces. Consequently, the incumbent president, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, faced considerable opposition from those competing patronage networks to dominate the political and military landscape. The unabated influence of Saleh, and to some extent Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, deeply troubled the international community and President Hadi. As a result, an overhaul of the 'civil'-military relationship was deemed necessary in terms of 'normalizing' the relationship in accordance with Western practices and, more pointedly, the desire to uproot the patronage systems and thereby dilute the pressure and leverage of non-state actors over the military.

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<sup>311</sup> Researcher's Interview with Noel Brehony. 5 April 2017.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

Based on the 2012 GCC restructuring program, the US CENTCOM became the lead player in the transformation process of the Yemeni armed forces. While CENTCOM focused on assisting the military in becoming more proficient at core functions such as logistics, operations, sustainment and maintenance, the focus remained upon disconnecting the Yemeni military and security complex from networks of patronage, thus supplanting personal loyalties with fidelity to the state.

From the beginning, however, defence personnel stationed in the British Embassy in Sana'a observed that President Hadi was "too oblivious to what was going on, he didn't understand it".<sup>314</sup> Moreover, the Chief of Staff of the Yemeni armed forces (a member of Islah) alongside al-Ahmar ensured the president was side-lined from the process, despite the US Ambassador advising President Hadi to distance Ali Mohsen from the reform initiatives.<sup>315</sup> The core of the resistance emanated from the entrenched nature of patronage networks. For example, The Yemeni Military Committee was comprised of fourteen senior officers and constituted the primary organization tasked with the reconstruction and reformation of the armed forces. However, the committee was inherently fragmented because it comprised officers "associated with Saleh, some with Ali Mohsen and others with Hadi" (ICG 2013, 15).

Thus, certain officers ostensibly harboured mixed emotions towards the initiatives of security sector reform, depending on how the changes impacted their position in relation to the wider-network of patronage. Indeed certain members aligned with Saleh attempted to impede the restructuring program because they continued to benefit personally and financially from either Saleh's networks.<sup>316</sup> Further, according to Col. Smailes, senior committee members "had no intention whatsoever of undergoing reorganization".<sup>317</sup> The cadre of senior officers

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<sup>314</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Iain Smailes. 19 May 2017.

<sup>315</sup> Researcher's Interview with Ambassador Gerald Feierstein. 8 May 2017.

<sup>316</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Iain Smailes. 19 May 2017.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

understood external actors and robust oversight mechanisms would inevitably disturb their access to patronage.

The special forces and praetorian guard units continued to demonstrate loyalty to the Saleh family, and therefore, the reform initiatives failed to bring the Republican Guard and broader Yemeni Special Operations Community under government control. Despite the removal of Ahmed Saleh from command, and the rotation or retirement of other senior officers, much of the Republican Guard officer corps continued to show loyalty to the Saleh family and remained loyal to Ahmed Saleh.<sup>318</sup> Again, patronage and the ability of an individual to provide material incentives in exchange for personal loyalty provides some understanding as to why the Saleh family remained prominent within the military in the aftermath of the 2011 popular uprisings. Like other formations in the military, loyalty was predicated on traditional forms of legitimacy as opposed to rational-legal structures, such as laws and constitutions, which is an integral component of civil-military relations in the Western world.

Ambassador Feierstein noted the failure of President Hadi to exceed the influence of Ali Abdullah Saleh and al-Ahmar resulted from the fact there was a strong central authority and government leadership.<sup>319</sup> In other words, the central authority was exceedingly weak when compared to the tribal-sectarian nexus. The power of the tribal-sectarian nexus also meant that London failed to establish a situation whereby Hadi exerted enough power and influence to effectively impose change across the military and political spheres.<sup>320</sup> Both examples illustrate that the central authority failed to subvert the military under government control and dislodge alternative solidarities, when directly challenged by the tribal-sectarian nexus.

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<sup>318</sup> Researcher's Interview with Ambassador Gerald Feierstein. 8 May 2017.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

<sup>320</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Iain Smailes. 19 May 2017.



These problems arose because the Informal instead of formal power is more integral in Yemen and indeed, the tribal-sectarian nexus. Adam Seitz provides an understanding of Yemen and the contours of power in a patronage system. He stressed the importance of informal relationships, in that “even under [President] Hadi, the security forces were controlled by Saleh, the informal is more important than the formal” because “even though these guys [soldiers or officer corps] essentially report to [President] Hadi some of them are still loyal to Saleh”.<sup>321</sup> The formal Seitz refers to denotes the conventional institutions and structures of the ‘state’, whereas the informal constitutes the patronage networks and actual nature of ‘power’ and the ‘state’ in the post-Arab Spring order that became the tribal-sectarian nexus.

The restructuring program eventually floundered because, while commanders were reshuffled, it is difficult to uproot the loyalties of brigades or individual soldiers rooted by patronage.<sup>322</sup> As Col. Smailes—who remained in Sana’a following the Houthi seizure of power—stated, Hadi “may well of changed titles [in the military], he may well of mixed up the units, but the patronage system remained intact”.<sup>323</sup>

The assessments provided by Brehony and Col. Smailes explain the interplay between the formal (state institutions) and informal (societal actors) over the dispensation of power and power-politics characterizing the tribal-sectarian nexus. This assessment accords with the nature of power and the way it flows in Yemen. Power resides with sub-communal actors as opposed to the central authority, which exists not in the capacity of a Weberian state, but rather as one of many power centres competing within the tribal-sectarian nexus. In this context, President Hadi failed to accumulate the necessary amount of power required to restructure or reform the armed forces, because Yemen is a political field whereby informal relationships and structures outline

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<sup>321</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Adam Seitz. 23 May 2017.

<sup>322</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Noel Brehony. 5 April 2017

<sup>323</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Iain Smailes. 19 May 2017.

the dispensation of power.<sup>324</sup> However, as ‘president’ of the internationally recognised Yemen, Hadi was able to utilise foreign aid meant to alleviate the country’s economic woes and save the country from a financial meltdown. For example, Saudi Arabia gave the Hadi government \$2 billion from 2012-14 (Salisbury 2014, npn). Ultimately, Hadi failed to exert the influence to erode the immense patronage networks Ali Abdullah Saleh and other elites had established during their time in the former regime.<sup>325</sup>

### Rise of Warlordism

The struggle over control of the tribal-sectarian nexus\_ between the periphery and central authority increasingly morphed into an environment of perpetual infighting over the resources of the state and the armed forces. Infrastructural power and resources are required to establish a base of support through the dispensation of patronage and thereby establish a modicum of control over the military. Col. Rosin observed that in Yemen, “the state resources turn into the currency of maintaining power and position”.<sup>326</sup> The struggle is illustrated by the fragmentation of the regime and devolution of power around warlords. In turn, the proliferation of warlords and other substantive sub-state actors reflects the inability of the ‘state’ to establish power and legitimacy into the periphery and wholly penetrate society. The picture is obfuscated due to the incorporation of tribal, military and economic elites into a situation whereby all actors “have their hands in each other’s pockets”.<sup>327</sup> Distinguishing commercial, tribal, political and military elites in such an environment is increasingly difficult due to the overlap of roles.

A substantial number of corporate interests enabling warlordism and access to sources of wealth remained untouched following the departure of President Saleh from power, ranging from ghost soldiers, smuggling and other illicit engagements. One widespread practice focused on the

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<sup>324</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Adam Seitz. 23 May 2017.

<sup>325</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Nadwa al-Dawsari. 21 April 2017.

<sup>326</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Randolph Rosin. 25 May 2017.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

manipulation of government-allocated funding intended for unit cohesion during the restructuring process. For example, a commander received funding from the government to run the battalion or brigade, to include training, purchase and acquire other supplies. The commander would also have additional sources of wealth that would “facilitate the loyalty of subordinate soldiers and establish your own little patron system”.<sup>328</sup> This instance demonstrates the importance of corruption or an informal economy in terms of securing the loyalty of armed actors during the absence of a ‘state’ or central authority in which to pledge allegiance.

The American and British Embassies in Sana’a were fully apprised of the rampant corruption and illicit activities within the officer corps and attempted to diminish this practice as part of a wider-military reform program. Notionally, the central authority under the command of President Hadi continued to distribute salaries to members of the armed forces. However, payment was allocated to unit commanders, who in turn distributed the money to individual soldiers. Efforts were made to provide direct payment to the soldiers and remove commanders from the equation. For example, British advisors constructed a program meant to circumvent salaries directly to soldiers through mobile phone transactions. Similarly, the US Embassy sought to implement a direct debit payment scheme meant to remove the commander from the payment plan.<sup>329</sup> However, these efforts failed, as Col. Rosin had observed, because “we tried to attack that system, but we knew it wouldn’t be popular because that’s how commanders earn scraps [money]”.<sup>330</sup> In this regard, salaries were being paid by the central government to members of the armed forces. However, payment was allocated to unit commanders who in turn distributed money to loyal subordinates, or ghost soldiers.

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Iain Smailes. 19 May 2017.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

Consequently, a joint effort was made to institute a biometric registration of the military was introduced to blunt this practice and the presence of ghost soldiers. In 2014, Hadi introduced a direct payment program whereby soldiers rallied at designated military bases to be salaried. Unsurprisingly, the initiatives were all met with resistance from the officer corps. This is precisely because the conflict precipitated a robust war economy whereby the warlords “understand the struggle for scarce resources and the government doesn’t have a monopoly on the use of force” and sub-state actors will attempt to profit from this process as much as possible,<sup>331</sup> whether in terms of capturing resources or securing a position of military importance with the potential for financial gain.

The rise of warlordism brings into question as to whether the Yemeni tribes are still the main means to dispense. Conventionally, the decline in both state power and influence propels the emergence of sub-state actors and solidarities, as the central authority increasingly fails to deliver core state functions. In the case of Yemen, Capt. James Spencer conveyed such a depiction of tribal power, arguing that, as the state can provide less than it used to, the role of the tribe increases.<sup>332</sup> Conversely, Nadwa al-Dawsari firmly believes the Hashid Tribal Confederation’s power is “because of Saleh’s patronage not because of the tribe itself” and during the rule of President Saleh, it was not the tribe of the Hashid or the Confederation that controlled the state, but rather Saleh who gradually used patrimonial economy to incorporate tribes into the state and military apparatuses as a means of patronage.<sup>333</sup>

This understanding of tribal power in Yemen aligns with the fact that the “Sahan tribe captured the state and effectively did its best to absorb most of it”.<sup>334</sup> Tribalism was strong during the rule of Saleh because he incorporated tribesmen and powerful sheikhs into his network of

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<sup>331</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Adam Seitz. 23 May 2017.

<sup>332</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Captain (Ret.) James Spencer. 22 March 2017.

<sup>333</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Nadwa al-Dawsari. 21 April 2017.

<sup>334</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Captain (Ret.) James Spencer. 22 March 2017.

patronage to solidify his rule. Saleh aided in the elevation of tribal power and entrenchment of the tribes into the patrimonial economy that defined the nature of his rule. The decline of the system clearly impacted the social, political and economic currency of the tribal groupings. The Hashid tribal Confederation was powerful because of its advantageous position within the patronage network, not because the tribe was itself inherently powerful.<sup>335</sup> Thus, the fracturing of the patrimonial economy and sub-communalisation of violence, and the dispensation of power, diminished the long-standing power wielded by the tribes prior to 2011.

Moreover, as demonstrated, tribal bonds were initially the key factor regarding recruitment into the army, and the formation of patron-client relationships. However, the marriage of the officer corps to the civilian economy meant that over time, military recruitment and patronage “was less about tribal bond, and more about what can you do for me” within a financial and economic context.<sup>336</sup> It therefore had increasingly more to do with access to resources, as opposed to a Yemeni’s tribal affiliations. This would become more pronounced with the advent of warlordism and fragmentation of state power. Tribes retained power; however, the power of tribalism would be eclipsed by warlordism.

Yet, undoubtedly, Yemen remained a tribal state during the start of the Arab Spring, but the decline of the tribe in terms of power emanating from the patrimonial economy of war was long in the making. To this end, the Yemenis experienced a transmutation of traditional tribal power, with commercial interests increasingly overshadowing conventional tribal solidarities.

The tribes were absorbed into the neo-patrimonial state established by President Saleh and became important factors in the patron-client relationship. In turn, many sheikhs migrated into the capital of Sana’a and other urban areas to advance business and commercial interests. In the

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<sup>335</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Nadwa al-Dawsari.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid.

process, the tribal leaders became detached from their tribal periphery and experienced a decline in traditional influence as sheikhs. In certain circumstances, regional military commanders managed to usurp the traditional influence of sheikhs by providing tribesmen with alternative sources of patronage.<sup>337</sup> Again, this was based on the gradual integration of the officer corps into the civilian economy, which provided officers with money that could be used for the allocation of patronage in return for loyalty. To some extent, tribal leaders became less relevant because tribesmen were provided an alternative source of income or employment from powerful officers.

In similar circumstances, a colonel or general from a local tribe will accumulate considerable wealth while serving in the military, and return with enough resources to emerge as the tribal patron.<sup>338</sup> Randy Rosin described Yemen as an “interesting society because [the situation is] almost as if they don’t hate each other. [The situation is similar] to a mafia, “it’s not personal it’s business”.<sup>339</sup> The officer highlighted the nature of patrimonial economy in that “relationships are so dynamic that you can’t really hate somebody personally” as “you never know if tomorrow you might be part of his patron-client network”.<sup>340</sup> The dynamic relationships and similarity to a mafia organization underscores the fundamental role of patrimonial economy and an almost transactional manner of forming and sustaining associations. Consequently, Nadwa al-Dawsari noted:<sup>341</sup>

the biggest power brokers in Yemen were the traditional actors and people tend to say tribal when they talk about Ali-Mohsen and Saleh, but they don’t represent the tribes they are from a small tribe and you have a lot of tribes in Yemen and they don’t really have that much influence on these tribes. Tribes have been affected by patronage system.

Nadwa highlighted the fact that the traditional actors (regime elites) now warlords, are the real dispensation of power within the tribal-sectarian nexus\_ that is Yemen. Therefore, the Hashid

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<sup>337</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Adam Seitz. 23 May 2017.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Randolph Rosin. 25 May 2017

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

<sup>341</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Nadwa a-Dawsari. 21 April 2017.

and Bakil are partially irrelevant when comprehending the dispensation of power across Yemen during the long-standing rule of President Saleh. Therefore, the fragmentation of the patronage state around warlords led to a decline the power of tribes and tribalism.

Despite this, Yemeni tribes remain a constant across the tribal-sectarian nexus. The decline is most notable in terms of tribal solidarity as a platform in which to mobilise manpower.<sup>342</sup> The historically powerful tribal clans such as the al-Ahmar's remained economically relevant and provided security and close protection to foreign oil consortiums and installations. In Marib, concessions were allocated to the al-Ahmar clan, who in turn, contracted out protection details to favoured associates. This established "a business link between the security man in Marib and the person who is providing the service support for the oil business".<sup>343</sup> This example illustrates the more pronounced role of an informal economy operating outside the reach of the central authority. However, warlords are surpassing the tribal sheikh as the purveyor of power during a period in which commercial and economic interests are increasingly forming the contours of the dispensation of power across the Yemeni tribal-sectarian nexus. In this regard, money and access to resources are required by Warlords to sustain their mini-armies in the protracted conflict that has enveloped Yemen since the uprisings in 2011.

### Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the Arab Spring highlighted the weakness of state coherence in the Arab World. The Arab Spring not only highlighted the fragile nature of the 'state' in fragmented societies such as Yemen, but additionally showed the equally feeble nature of the armed forces. Such realities have called into question the applicability of Western civil-military relationship, not least in Yemen, where a professional armed force had never emerged independent of tribal influence and a patrimonial economy under the rule of President Saleh.

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<sup>342</sup> Researcher's Interview with Adam Seitz. 23 May 2017.

<sup>343</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel Iain Smailes. 19 May 2017.

A patrimonial economy approach has shown that, In the case of Yemen, President Saleh morphed the military into an indispensable appendage of the patronage network. In doing so, he anchored the loyalties of the officer corps and tribal sheikhs to the regime through the distribution of patronage and providing for the indulgence in the civilian economy evident in the so-called tribal-military-commercial complex. Irrespective of the militaries' encroachment into the civilian economy or ties to networks of patronage, a state or regime epitomised by nepotism, cronyism and kleptocracy produces a coercive institution equally beleaguered by such malignant practices and thus fails to not only conform with the more normative notions of civil-military relations, but also impedes the emergence of genuine governance over the security sector because loyalty is not rooted to the state or nation, but to the individual ruler or other prominent elites.

Accordingly, President Saleh established a loyal following across the officer class by allowing the institution to engage in economic and commercial activities, in addition to corrupt practices which provided the officer class and other opportunists with illicit streams of income. The officer corps gained admission into the wider-Yemeni economy through their involvement in the Military Economic Corporation and thereafter, Yemeni Economical Corporation. Equally, select military elites, such as Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, enjoyed an autonomous and unconstrained ability to engage in rampant corruption. For example, prior to 2011, the General accumulated considerable economic wealth from commercial activities taking place within Hodeida Port. Apart from this practice, and a prominent role in the Yemeni Economical Corporation, Ali Mohsen absorbed a considerable amount of land and real estate during his military career. The combination of assets provided the General with his own source of patronage which he used to retain the loyalty of soldiers within the 1AD.

However, President Saleh gradually constricted elite access to supplemental forms of income aside from military salaries. In doing so, Saleh distanced other longstanding regime elites from the most lucrative sources of patronage, in a move that necessitated an intra-regime rivalry



between the dominant power centres of Ali Mohsen, the al-Ahmar tribal dynasty and the Saleh family. In practice, the patronage network was a very cohesive organization, yet equally inefficient at the time because it relied on the cooperation of the most powerful elite to remain intact. Saleh's actions, in some respects, recalibrated economic power around his own tribe, and this angered the conventional power centres. In turn, Ali Mohsen., the al-Ahmar tribal dynasty and other elites no longer felt the need to bulwark Saleh as protests began to erupt in 2011, because they had effectively been pushed out of the core sources of patronage.

In addition to other elites, President Saleh secured loyalty through the distribution of financial assets in return for political subservience. However, with regards to the armed forces, this relationship erodes the individual soldier's or battalion's solidarities to the state and nation, and instead, firmly connects them to personal loyalties around commanders, tribal sheikhs, or the regime. In this regard, the nature of military solidarities in Yemen is a "complex web"<sup>344</sup> enabling for the emergence and proliferation of parallel forms of loyalty.

Based on observations as Defence Attaché in Yemen, Randy Rosin noted that "people get into the institutions [to include the armed forces] as an economic proposition as opposed to any patriotic one", "primary loyalties are too their tribe and patronage network, [the situation] is an individual thing".<sup>345</sup> As the regime and military collapsed, new modes of economic transactions occurred with the advent of warlordism. Similar to the pre-2011 dispensation, warlords continued to command loyalty and power through the access to resources and dispersion of patronage.

Loyalty in this regard is artificial, or at least derived from a desire to remain financially and economically empowered, and therefore any solidarity to the state or nation is secondary to economic considerations. The nature of loyalties and importance of patronage enabled

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<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

<sup>345</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Randolph Rosin. 25 May 2017.

warlordism to rise from the ashes of state fragmentation. While the regime fragmented, pre-2011 patronage networks remained cohesive in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. The 'state' and military collapsed along those patronage lines and around former regime elites. Others, such as the al-Ahmar clan of the Hashid Tribal Confederation still had access to resources and were able to retain some semblance of cohesion and influence, although this diminished as Yemen collapsed into innumerable para-states.

More importantly, incumbent President Hadi failed to control a patronage network similar to the scope and strength of those networks overseen by other elites such as Ali Mohsen or the wider-Saleh family, nor was he a major fixture within the patrimonial economy. As a result, the rule and legitimacy of President Hadi faced consistent challenges at the hands of alternative power centres conditioned by networks of patronage and economic exchanges between elites and subordinates. The situation following 2012 paved the way for nascent and competing power structures to vie for control over the dispensation of power and a monopoly of violence.

## **Chapter 8: External Actors, Militia, and the Paper Tiger Army**

### Introduction

This chapter will evaluate how external actors manipulate the civil-military nexus and aid in the formation of the 'state', and thereby impact not only the civil authority, but the emergence of the tribal-sectarian nexus. External actors directly impacted the cohesion of the Iraqi military and state. The United States sought to rebuild the Iraqi military and establish an institution representative of society and beholden to the principles enshrined within the Iraqi constitution and to the state. However, the efforts gave rise to a dispensation of power within the political and military spheres underpinned by communalism. The newfound dispensation of power around a core of growing Shia politicians, military officers and communally aligned militia afforded the Islamic Republic of Iran an opportunity to entrench their interests within the developing security and political landscape, and consequently gain a noticeable degree of power.

US and Iranian actions within Iraq might be viewed as a competition to determine the development and privilege of power within the evolving political and military order. To this end, Washington preferred to impose a Western style system of governance on the one hand, while the IRI desired to mould the Iraqi state around a Shia core of power and guarantee the subjugation of the Sunni polity from the military and political classes. The breakdown of US security sector reform in tandem with an insensitivity regarding the applicability of a Western framework rooted politically-affiliated militia within the security sector and in turn, provided an opening for Iranian control across the security institutions. Along the way, Iran revived old relationships with political and militant bodies, to make sure it had access to the inner workings of the state. The process of 'communalisation' refers to the gradual integration of the Shia polity and associated malignant armed actors into the Iraqi Army and segments of the security sector. This in turn further compartmentalised the Sunni Arabs and Iraqi Kurds, because the process resulted in an openly communalised institution with the dispensation of power entrenched in a sub-communalised

framework. This meant that engaging with political parties and affiliated militia provided a more convenient and effective mechanism to exert control over the Iraqi security sector as opposed to establishing traditional relationships with the central authority. External actors in turn exacerbated any already frail state and hastened the fragmentation of Iraq into the tribal-sectarian nexus.

#### The Early Years of Reform 2003-2007

Saddam's once strong state began to decline in the wake of debilitating economic sanctions. He was forced to shift away from Baathism towards a sturdier foundation to bulwark his rule and settled on rejuvenating the reputation of Iraqi tribes as the eve of his demise drew nearer. Operation Iraqi Freedom fractured this already enfeebled political field of the Iraqi state, precipitated the downfall of the central authority, inspired the dissolution of the army and ushered in the superiority of communal politics. These events would have a profound impact on Iraq and incapacitate the civil-military relationship. Thereafter, American policymakers and officials proved influential in contributing to the nascent development of political and military institutions, and shaping the bedrock of the 'state'.

Col. Peter Mansoor emphasised an immediate problem faced by Washington and Pentagon planners in the immediate aftermath of the invasion: when "you depose the dictator in Iraq what do you put in his place?".<sup>346</sup> Historically, Iraq had existed under the Ottoman Caliphs, followed by British Rule, a Monarchy and autocratic governance under President Hussein. Not only had democracy been absent from Iraq's historical political development, but it had also led to a broken national identity. To remedy this situation, democracy was touted by the Bush Administration as a panacea to the ailments of Iraq and presented an opportunity to mould the institutional constructs of the new state in the mirror image of the West.

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<sup>346</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Dr. Peter Mansoor, 17 May 2017.

This inevitably meant establishing a similar political system to create a strong central authority and a 'Western' styled military that would emulate the idealised civil-military relationship. However, Col. Vincent Alcazar noted the inherent flaw of this assumption given Iraq's storied history. Specifically, democratic systems of governance and a professional armed force subordinate to the state works well in theory, yet the Iraqi population<sup>347</sup>

had never worked inside a democratically elected government or setting of a republic, they could not think in that institutional sense because that's what it takes to build a military inside a republic that doesn't dominate the republic, doesn't take it over, and doesn't become a tool of republic conquest.

Ostensibly, introducing a military and central authority underpinned by Western principles and practices would prove difficult, if not impossible based on the inherent historical differences between Iraq and the Western world. The colonel's statements in turn highlight the fact that, US "decision-makers were not attuned to Iraq's vibrant history and desired to establish a new historical chapter of the state following 2003" and attempted to transplant "incompatible western political and security models and values on Iraqi society."<sup>348</sup> Paul Bremer, head of the CPA, spearheaded this policy. Bremmer, under the mandate of the Office of the Secretary of Defence, caused the first fragmentation of the Iraqi Army and central authority, and thus collapsed Iraq into the tribal-sectarian nexus.

Specifically, Bremmer and the US reconstructed the Iraqi state through the enactment of CPA Orders 1 and 2. These directives disbanded the army and eradicated the institutional machinery of the state, by dissolving the military and eliminating all former 'Baathist' who would be required to run the country. The orders re-orientated the basic organizations responsible for facilitating the distribution of public goods and security, which precipitated the fragmentation of Arab and Kurdish Iraq. Because the policies eroded the foundations of the state, they inherently

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<sup>347</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Vincent Alcazar. 14 May 2017.

<sup>348</sup> Researcher's Interview with Ali Khedery. 18 June 2017.

left “tribe and sect” as the strongest social, political and military forces in the country, a fact which the United States failed to acknowledge at the time and continues to deny to this day.<sup>349</sup>

A weak central authority and lack of state-centric military and police functions caused a security vacuum to emerge, only to be filled by non-state actors and sub-state coercive forces. Immediately therefore, US policies “gave a boost to the parties that had militia including the Kurds, and Badr in Baghdad, ISCI, SCIRI at time”.<sup>350</sup> Accordingly, US policies ensured that “proxies, in the form of armed, non-state actors, defined the new security order after 2003”.<sup>351</sup> Within Arab Iraq, Sunni and Shia communities participated in a prolonged bout of sectarian driven conflict driven by the desire of the Sunni’s to retain the foundations of the ancien régime. Equally, the Shia polity fought to uphold the community’s newfound predominance. Over the next eight years, the US-led Coalition struggled to resurrect the Iraqi state in accordance with democratic structures of governance and corresponding civil-military relationship.

The formation of the 36<sup>th</sup> Commando Battalion, Iraq’s first post-2003 military unit, was a microcosm for the sub-communalised nature of violence and political power in Iraq. Members of the Iraqi Governing Council (July 13, 2003 to June 1, 2004)-Iraqi National Congress, Iraqi National Accord, Kurdish Democratic Party, Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq-all nominated party members into the new military formation. This inaugurated the scenario whereby tribe, sect and political party came to define the bedrock of Iraq. On a larger scale, CMATT Commander Maj. General Paul Eaton was tasked with the objective of establishing the Iraqi Army in the model and ethos of the American Armed Forces.<sup>352</sup> According to the Maj. General, the Pentagon had envisaged developing the new force into a model for the entire region to emulate; an apolitical organization, competent in its professional occupation,

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<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Ambassador Feisal Istrabadi. 4 April 2017.

<sup>351</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Ali Khedery. 18 June 2017.

<sup>352</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Major General (Ret.) Paul Eaton. 29 March 2017.

inclusive of Iraq's societal landscape and exercising the preferred relationship with civilian masters.<sup>353</sup>

Beyond this vision, however, there lacked a clear directive from Washington regarding how this process would unfold. Despite a lack of guidance, Maj. General Eaton and four others took the initiative to organise, “the man, train and equip of the ISF.”<sup>354</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> Divisions were the first to be formed, and would emerge as truly national formations, in terms of their proportional representation of society and appeared to align with the desired path towards building a ‘national’ Army. On the Iraqi side, the incumbent Minister of Defence, Ali Allawi, began to formulate a doctrine and process of structuring the army that accorded with a constitutional democracy and could maintain the historical sense of pride and prestige of the institution.<sup>355</sup> Defence Minister Allawi additionally acknowledged the need for an ethno-sectarian confessional balance in the emergent army, with a strong commitment towards the nascent Iraqi state and political order. At the same time, the Defence Minister unequivocally believed of the need to “prune the Iraqi Army from its dangerous doctrines of the past and to create a new responsive military”.<sup>356</sup> While the old army was viewed with certain reverence, the Sunni population enjoyed disproportionate representation in the officer class. Upward mobility in the military, as with other state institutions, was broadly restricted to officers of the Sunni faith and those non-Sunni officers who displayed personal loyalty to Saddam Hussein.

In this vein, nation-building through the military could provide an opportunity to wear down the negative aspects of the Iraqi Army and foster the formation of professional and nationally inclusive institution. Maj. General Eaton drew inspiration regarding the practical role of the military in nation-building from a conversation with a Jordanian officer. The officer related to the

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<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> Researcher's Interview with Ali Allawi. 15 April 2017.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid.

Maj. General that within the Jordanian Armed Forces, “Jordan is first, the nation-state of Jordan is before tribe, ethnicity, religion, and Imam. The military is governed by the constitution of Jordan with loyalty to the nation-state of Jordan and the King”.<sup>357</sup> Clearly, the Americans hoped for an institution free of alternative loyalties and beholden to the state, and to the constitution. Indeed, the first three divisions of the ‘new’ Iraqi Army provided a measure of hope that the reformed Iraqi Army would become a national institution and vehicle to drive the birth of a democratic nation-state.

However, the ‘even’ numbered divisions (2,4,6,8 and 10) were amalgamated from the Iraqi National Guard formations, and consequently experienced a bottom-up formation based on regionalised recruitment. Consequently, the even numbered divisions were more homogenous in terms of ethnic and sectarian composition. This meant that the NCO’s and officers were recruited from, stationed, and operated within the same area. For example, the 2<sup>nd</sup> division in Ninawa contained Sunni Arabs alongside Turkmen and a discernible Kurdish contingent from the KDP. Similarly, the 4<sup>th</sup> Division was initially a Kurdish organization heavily influenced by Jalal Talabani and the PUK. The 6<sup>th</sup> division within Baghdad recruited mostly Shia soldiers with a substantial Sunni element and some Kurds, while the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Divisions, garrisoned in central and southern Iraq, were predominantly Shia.<sup>358</sup> Based on this assessment, and from very early on, half of the Iraqi Army was established with undertones of communal affiliations and quotas across the NCO corps and the officer class. Along the way, this mishap would lend the respective divisions vulnerable to communal strife and the political penetration of communally aligned parties, as discussed in chapter 5.

Once CMATT transitioned into the Multinational Security Transition Command-Iraq (MNSTC-I) in June of 2004, Multi-National Forces-Iraq Commanding Gen. George Casey Jr., tasked

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<sup>357</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Major General (Ret.) Paul Eaton. 29 March 2017.

<sup>358</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Lieutenant General (Ret.) Daniel Bolger. 29 September 2017.



MNSTC-I commander Lt. General David Petraeus to re-evaluate the American initiatives concerning the reform of the Iraqi Army. Secretary of Defence Rumsfeld ordered the evaluation because he “didn’t have a good feeling that we had made the right assumptions when building the Iraqi Army” and the path wasn’t “where it needed to be”.<sup>359</sup> In May 2005, the even-numbered divisions merged with the odd-numbered divisions to form the new Iraqi Army. During this period, American and Iraqi officials closely monitored the intake of soldiers to ensure the officer corps remained a mosaic of Iraqi society.<sup>360</sup> Importantly, the interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi (2004-05) was dedicated to building a national army that was representative of society.<sup>361</sup> Moreover, the embryonic nature of Iraqi institutions insulated the military for the most part from political or outside interference.

However, according to Lt. General Brims, the new military demonstrated problems of coherence when thrust into combat. While one or two formations were well developed and could be trusted to perform within their area of responsibility, other units demonstrated questionable loyalties. In some units, soldiers would be willing “to go into the fight if the fight was politically acceptable to them or tribally acceptable to them”.<sup>362</sup> To recall from chapter 5, tribesmen in Anbar Province were unwilling to fight outside of tribal territory. Again, this problem stemmed from the localised nature of recruitment and area of responsibility for the even-numbered divisions. More broadly, the Lt. General’s assessments highlight the precarious nature of the military at the time, given the seemingly intractable problem of eliminating political, tribal and other distributive forces from ruining the cohesion of the institution.

Concurrently, the Iraqi state faced a growing Sunni insurgency that compelled the Coalition forces to expedite the reconstruction of the Iraqi Army (2006-7) to assist in counter-insurgency

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<sup>359</sup> Researcher’s Interview with General (Ret.) George Casey Jr. 17 July 2017.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid

<sup>361</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Ali Khedery. 18 June 2017.

<sup>362</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Lieutenant General (Ret.) Robin Brims. 2 August 2017.

operations. This desire to accelerate the rebuilding process altered the ethno-sectarian composition of the institution and represented the point in which the “effort to make the army nationally representative broke down”.<sup>363</sup> Indeed, the rapid mobilization and deployment placed “all kinds of pressures upon a young Iraqi soldier” and fostered an environment that corroded the allegiances of military formations.<sup>364</sup> Gen. Casey Jr. transitioned command of MNF-I at the end of 2007 to Lt. General David Petraeus with an Iraqi Army consisting of around 325,000 men with relatively stable loyalties yet an unresolved political crisis in Baghdad.<sup>365</sup> On paper, a 325,000 strong force is impressive, and ostensibly capable of conducting military operations. However, the expedited nature of recruitment and training and conducted by MNSTC-I, “meant that you created the mirage of an enormous force. It was quantity” that mattered most.<sup>366</sup>

To be sure, as the 2007 surge approached, the Iraqi Army remained a work in progress, while communal discord caused Iraq to consistently teeter on the brink of an internecine conflict. The surge itself managed to reduce the level of violence in Iraq to an all-time low and ensured that most of the militia had either been militarily defeated or cast underground by 2008.<sup>367</sup> This opened the window for political reconciliation based on the reduction of violence and because, Sunni-Shia relations, at the political level, became more amicable based on the surge.

However, the surge of US troops in Iraq relieved the Iraqi government of any ownership or necessity to reach a political solution in order to erode the sectarian violence. It did temper down tensions but was only a temporary success as opposed to a long-term strategy geared towards stability that centred on problems of cultural dissonance.<sup>368</sup> Army Chief of Staff Gen. Casey Jr. presented this issue to President Bush, and argued that further troop escalation would have a

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<sup>363</sup> Researcher’s Interview with General (Ret.) George Casey Jr. 17 July 2017.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

<sup>366</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Lieutenant General (Ret.) Robin Brims. 2 August 2017.

<sup>367</sup> Researcher’s Interview with General (Ret.) David Petraeus. 29 August 2018.

<sup>368</sup> Researcher’s Interview with General (Ret.) George Casey Jr. 17 July 2017.

localised and temporary impact on the political and security landscape, and that unless the administration worked to solve the political issues in Baghdad, the Iraqi government would be unable to sustain the gains from the surge.<sup>369</sup> Gen. Casey Jr. based this assessment on his time in Bosnia and deduced from this instance that, “when you get down to the hard deals, everybody reverted to their sectarian background”.<sup>370</sup>

Consequently, while the surge managed to quell the insurgency, it failed to facilitate genuine long-term political reconciliation because a prolonged US military presence afforded Baghdad the luxury of postponing these problematic decisions.

#### The Solidification of a Communal Military and Iranian Influence 2008-11

The Iraqi Army remained far from the idealised institution envisaged by the US as the surge subsided. The ease in which Iran destabilised conventional civil-military relations and the increasing communalisation of the Iraqi Army is reflective of the failure, on the part of the United States, to effectively provide the foundation for genuine governance of the security sector. This goes back to the communal foundation established by the CPA that effectively enabled the communally-aligned political parties to nominate ethnic or sectarian allies into the officer corps.<sup>371</sup> The ethno-sectarian quota of assigning command positions enabled communally-aligned “political parties to impact on assignment and denomination of the commanders” which “negatively impacted on the military”.<sup>372</sup>

The American-devised ethno-sectarian power-sharing agreement empowered a majority community through a system that the US deemed satisfactory based on the notion of proportional representation of Iraqi society. Over time, the Shia polity accumulated a disproportionate amount of power and became the political class and eventually dominated the security sector. Ultimately,

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

<sup>371</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Ambassador Feisal Istrabadi. 4 April 2017.

<sup>372</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Brigadier General (Ret.) Ismael Alsodani. 10 April 2017.

the policy, according to Council of Representatives Member, Fadhila Shia Party Nadim al-Jabiri, provided a “precedent for subsequent Iraqi politics by leading parties to define themselves by *sect and ethnicity*”.<sup>373</sup> Consequently foreign actors benefited from such an arrangement imposed by Washington, because America ensured communal identities dictated politics. In turn, Iran either rekindled old or established new relationships with Shia allies across the political and security sectors.

Misguided American policies meant that Iran emerged as the “principle victor of Operation Iraqi Freedom” which was “obvious before Daesh arose”.<sup>374</sup> From the onset, the Islamic Republic engaged with a subtle albeit complex agenda to influence the development of the political and security institutions. Iran therefore emerged as the clear winner in the aftermath of OIF in terms of not only enjoying a close political relationship with the certain elements of the emergent Shia order, but more pointedly, securing ties and influence amongst the myriad militia vying to dominate the security. This was hastened by the fact that non-state actors wielded considerable power relative to the central authority.

Following the invasion, Tehran incrementally spread its network throughout the Shia community and began to impose itself within the foundations of the military and political structures.<sup>375</sup> Iranian agents, spearheaded by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force (IRGC-QF), materialised on the ground in the aftermath of the invasion and succeeded to position allies within “both inside government formations and outside in the paramilitary and militia”.<sup>376</sup> While Tehran initially sought to stymie American efforts to erect a stable and democratic Iraq, over time, Gen. Casey Jr., witnessed “Iranian influence increase significantly and they exercised

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<sup>373</sup> Iraqi Politician Discusses Efforts to Form “National Front” to Solve Iraq’s Political Crises. [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07BAGHDAD452\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07BAGHDAD452_a.html). Accessed 10/3/2017.

<sup>374</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Ambassador Feisal Istrabadi. 4 April 2017.

<sup>375</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Ali Allawi. 15 April 2017.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid.

their influence three ways”<sup>377</sup>: revolving around support for militias, economic packages to aid in development. In the process, Tehran exercised the most pronounced level of political influencing by contributing to Iraqi political organizations.<sup>378</sup>

Therefore, the solidification of the Shia community as the newfound political class afforded Iran many allies within Baghdad and the emerging structures of government, rooted in the US imposed ethno-sectarian political system. A predominant trend revolved around the growing Iranian efforts to gain a foothold in the fledgling democratic process. Col. Richard Welch, as a Special Forces and Civil-Military Affairs liaison officer, witnessed “from the first election in 2005 we knew they were pumping money, hundreds of millions [of dollars], into the political parties on the Shia side buying votes and supporting candidates”.<sup>379</sup>

Tehran’s meddling in Iraqi politics frustrated Col. Welch, who lobbied for Washington to bolster the standing of certain politicians to which he was told, “we can’t interfere or support even moderate candidates who might be good”.<sup>380</sup> In this sense, the United States was the only foreign actor that treated Iraq as a sovereign entity, despite an obvious military and diplomatic presence, Washington desired for the democratic process to remain an ‘Iraqi’ affair. While the socio-political elites of Iraq and Baghdad initially criticised Iranian encroachment, over time, Iraqi socio-political actors increasingly viewed their interests, notably the Shia politicians and parties, align with the Iranian regime more so than Baghdad.<sup>381</sup>

The actions of MNSTC-I inadvertently continued to fuel the importance of ethnic and sectarian affiliations. Under the command of Gen. David Petraeus, the sectarian composition “of the divisions remained healthy, at around 55 percent Shia [and] 45 percent Sunni”.<sup>382</sup> The

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<sup>377</sup> Researcher’s Interview with General George Casey Jr. (Ret). 17 July 2017.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid.

<sup>379</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Richard Welch. 15 June 2017.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

<sup>381</sup> Researcher’s Interview with General George Casey Jr. (Ret). 17 July 2017.

<sup>382</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Michael Pregent. 12 July 2017.

seemingly healthy balance disguised an emerging trend of disparity exacerbated by the introduction of militiamen into the Iraqi Army. For example, US Ambassador Khalilzad wrote a year earlier that the “ISF are thoroughly infiltrated by EGAGs [Extra-Governmental Armed Groups] such as Badr Corps and Jaysh al Mahdi (JAM) members, and there is widespread suspicion that these EGAGs are loyal to Iran”.<sup>383</sup> This situation favoured Tehran, because the IRGC-QF had good relations with JAM leader Moqtada al-Sadr and Badr Corps commander, Hadi al-Ameri.

By 2007, the sectarian composition shifted dramatically to 90 percent Shia and 10 percent Sunni. Defence Intelligence Agency contractor Michael Pregent discovered during a conversation with MNSTC-I Commander Lt. General James Dubik (2007-08), that MNSTC-I only inquired as to whether the recruit was an Iraqi citizen and not the individuals ethnic or sectarian leanings.<sup>384</sup> Because Pregent was tasked with monitoring malign Iranian influence and the overall development of the army, he understood the implications of haphazardly incorporating soldiers and officers without a clear picture of how they would impact the force composition and overall cohesion. Pregent had observed first-hand that “al-Maliki asks them if they are Sunni or Shia and when they are Sunni they get kicked out and if they are Shia, they get to stay”.<sup>385</sup>

While the Shia community proliferated the machinery of the state and managed to determine the sectarian composition of the officer corps, this process occurred in a disorganised manner in the sense that it wasn't just the Shia as a whole, but certain actors and organizations within that population. State Department Political Minister Robert Ford noted the disunity amongst the Shia polity in 2009: “intra-Shi'a rivalries over policies, power *and the identity of the Iraqi state persist*”.<sup>386</sup> Ford astutely detected the seemingly feeble nature of an ‘Iraqi’ identity

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<sup>383</sup> Iraqi Intellectuals Want Strongman, U.S. to Solve Militia.  
[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06BAGHDAD275\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06BAGHDAD275_a.html).

<sup>384</sup> Researcher's Interview with Michael Pregent. 12 July 2017.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.

<sup>386</sup> Iraq 201: Shi'a Political Landscape Colored By Internal Rivalry.  
[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BAGHDAD731\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BAGHDAD731_a.html). Accessed 1 October 2017.

cohering the 'state' at the time and that the disunity within the Shia polity meant there was not a concerted effort to completely monopolise the security sector as a sect.

More precisely, a portion of officer class and NCO corps remained politically and ideologically divided along lines underpinned by ethno-sectarian militia a half-decade following the invasion. Part of this was caused by the nature of recruitment, but also the American-led program of demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) of the militia, a part of the wider-reconciliation program. The initiative was designed to erode allegiances towards sectarian affiliated militia in favour of a more formal and 'state' centric loyalty to Iraq, by introducing militiamen and young Iraqis into a framework of constitutions and military discipline. In this sense, the policy was informed by the very same practices and values introduced to young American cadets entering the United States Armed Forces. The militia themselves, and not the actual Shia polity became the key victors of the US designed DDR program. As Chief of the Reconciliation Program, Col. Welch developed an acute understanding of Iraq and the logic compelling militia infiltration into the armed forces:<sup>387</sup>

"if we [militia-allied to political parties] can take senior positions in the military and through the demobilization program, if we can come in, take positions and control the security apparatus than we have the legitimacy of the government behind us. You know, we are acting with legitimacy.

Col. Welch expressed additional frustration over the program, as it essentially disarmed the Sunni militia and failed to rectify the growing clout of the Shia sub-state actors. Part of the problem rested on the immeasurable power of the Shia militia, who often exercised close relations with the political parties in power.<sup>388</sup> This made it politically difficult to target Shia militia for demobilization. As outlined in previous chapters, the political-militia succeeded in infiltrating the Iraqi Army and diluting cohesion to the Iraqi state. Importantly, "Badr and JAM, *these groups*

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<sup>387</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Richard Welch. 15 June 2017.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

*were all sort of dropped intact into the army units”* and thus, it is “not a stretch of the imagination saying that their loyalties lay not with their formal commanders [nor the state] but with the militia leaders”.<sup>389</sup>

Arguably, part of the issue resulted from the official belief that if militiamen were integrated into “a military structure nothing can go wrong”, because “you integrate the militia and put a uniform on them” and with a legal mechanism akin to the “UMCJ they will toe the line, but it didn’t fucking work”.<sup>390</sup> Coalition planners and US military staff officers genuinely believed this process could transform militiamen into soldiers in the same manner a US citizen goes through the soldierization process upon entering one of the US military services.

In addition, Ambassador Khalilzad articulated the appeal underpinning the popularity of the militia and difficulty in eroding their influence, “rather than disband their militias, Shia and Kurds have depended on them to protect their interests”.<sup>391</sup> This is a direct result of the initial decision to disband the army and the pursuant security vacuum that as than filled by militia, in particular the Shia militia arose to protect their community from the Sunni insurgency. It was “an excuse to bear arms and turn that into power on the street” and emulate the ‘Hezbollah model’ and prominence of other non-state actors who directly contested the power of the central authority.<sup>392</sup>

Importantly, and with reference to the Ambassador’s comments, Deputy Political Counsellor Robert Gilchrist added, not only the role of the political-militia entities in the provision of security, but more pointedly, politically organizations “include a militant element that tries to

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<sup>389</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Ambassador Feisal Istrabadi. 4 April 2017.

<sup>390</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Michael Pregent. 12 July 2017.

<sup>391</sup> Militias and Other Armed Groups in Iraq-Confronting the Sectarian Divide.  
[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06BAGHDAD812\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06BAGHDAD812_a.html). Accessed 1 October 2017.

<sup>392</sup> Researcher’s Interview with General (Ret.) David Petraeus. 29 August 2018,



maintain a monopoly on violence”.<sup>393</sup> This situation led American diplomats in Baghdad to note that by 2009, the Iraqi-provincial level leadership viewed the ISF as highly politicised.<sup>394</sup> In this regard, progressively and under the auspice and direction of American security sector reform, apart from the predominantly Sunni 7<sup>th</sup> Division with an area of responsibility in the Anbar Province, the remaining divisions became directly tied to Shia political organizations or other political parties.<sup>395</sup> Indeed, most loyalties of the Iraqi Army were “never to the constitution and too the state in the Western sense that we know, loyalty was always to party bosses or sect”.<sup>396</sup> Part of this resulted from the ability of the political-militia apparatus to influence appointments to key command posts and other positions.<sup>397</sup>

Despite this fact, one should understand this did not mean that “political parties infiltrated and had cells among the military personnel”, but the policy of recruitment and ethno-sectarian appropriation meant the institution was not immune from ‘political’ influence.<sup>398</sup> Further, a former public relations officer for the Popular Mobilization Forces additionally stressed the delicate nature of the relationship between the political organizations and the armed forces. The officer noted the “troops themselves are political by nature and look to parties for advice, which gives the parties a soft control over the divisions” equivocating that despite the existence of such a soft power, entities such as Dawa, SCIRI and Badr are unable to mobilise wholesale divisions unlike Kurdish counterparts in the KDP and PUK whom are organised along tribal lines.<sup>399</sup> The

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<sup>393</sup> Baghdad: Militants Takeover Where Government Fails.

[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07BAGHDAD2834\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07BAGHDAD2834_a.html). Accessed 1 October 2017.

<sup>394</sup> The U.S.-Iraqi Relationship in 2009: The View from The Provinces.

[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BAGHDAD559\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BAGHDAD559_a.html). Accessed 6 February 2018.

<sup>395</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Michael Pregent. 12 July 2017.

<sup>396</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Ali Khedery. 18 June 2017.

<sup>397</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Lieutenant General (Ret.) Daniel Bolger. 29 September 2017.

<sup>398</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Brigadier General (Ret.) Ismael Alsodani 10 April 2017.

<sup>399</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Popular Mobilization Forces Public Relations Officer. 9 October 2017.

nature of penetration varied based on the officers in command at the battalion, brigade and divisional level and came down to the professional nature of these officers.<sup>400</sup>

Nonetheless, the overarching framework and Western-centric process of rebuilding the Iraqi Army ultimately failed to remove alternative solidarities from the Iraqi soldiers in favour of a feeling of “Iraqiness”.<sup>401</sup> Politically, Baghdad was also directly responsible for enabling an environment which privileged communal affiliations above loyalty to the state and failed to foster an inclusive government that was seen as above the communal fray. Brig. General Alsodani firmly believed, had national political parties comprised the political elite, the government and political apparatus would “have built state institutions based on national interests”.<sup>402</sup> Politics and the armed forces therefore failed to coalesce around a nationally unifying project. From the beginning, “there are no political institutions in Iraq, the only political party that existed was the communist party, the rest were ethno-sectarian gangs”.<sup>403</sup>

Because of this, Iran penetrated or made use of pre-existing ties with the politically-aligned militia that allowed them to wield considerable influence over myriad Shia political parties. In turn, Tehran was able to channel that influence to concertedly pressure senior officials in Baghdad to “to appoint or promote certain generals within the military”.<sup>404</sup> Tehran “was able to create a growing core of political allies, people beholden to them and individuals even entire units infiltrated into their own command structures”.<sup>405</sup> Washington inadvertently smoothed the movement of individuals allied with Tehran into the Iraqi security sector through a flawed process of reform and integration compounded by the ethno-sectarian framework imposed in the wake of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

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<sup>400</sup> Researcher’s Interview with General (Ret.) David Petraeus. 29 August 2018.

<sup>401</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Brigadier General (Ret.) Ismael Alsodani 10 April 2017.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

<sup>403</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Bob Newman. 6 September 2017.

<sup>404</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Michael Pregent. 12 July 2017.

<sup>405</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Ali Allawi. 15 April 2017.

From 2003-2006, and the election of Nouri al-Maliki, the development of the Iraqi Army and wider-security sector transpired by and large in accordance with American desires. However, “by 2007-2008 the military came to reflect his own [al-Maliki’s] desires and prejudices”.<sup>406</sup> From the 2008 Operation Charge of the Knight and until his removal from power, al-Maliki “viewed himself as the state and central authority”.<sup>407</sup> This is important, because Saddam Hussein shaped modern Iraq and Nouri al-Maliki considered himself to be the modern Shia version of Saddam.<sup>408</sup>

Al-Maliki aggressively formed the institution into a force that emulated the legacy and perception of the Iraqi Army and transformed an historically Sunni force into a Shia one.<sup>409</sup> However, this process took place slowly, and even in the summer of 2008, the Iraqi military was developing into a competent institution, in terms of counter-insurgency, which at the time, was its major task.<sup>410</sup> From 2009-10, American officials also retained the necessary force posture, directed telescope and the purse strings to stop the impulses by al-Maliki alter the structure of the officer corps.<sup>411</sup> As Commander of 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division in Baghdad, Lt. General Bolger observed attempts by al-Maliki to sideline the more competent officers such as Aboud Qanbar who headed the Baghdad Operations Command.<sup>412</sup>

Notwithstanding, the 2010 elections constituted a watershed by some measure regarding the development of the political and security environment of Iraq. Prime Minister al-Maliki clung to power, despite the electoral process peaceably moving Ayad Allawi’s political bloc, Iraqiyya, into power by a vote of 91-89 against the incumbents State of Law Coalition. In spite of the

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<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

<sup>407</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Ali Khedery. 18 June 2017.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

<sup>409</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Ali Allawi, 15 April 2017.

<sup>410</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Peter Mansoor. 17 May 2017.

<sup>411</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Lieutenant General (Ret.) Daniel Bolger. 29 September 2017.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

outcome, Christopher Hill, the top American diplomat in Baghdad, “went all in for Nouri al-Maliki and allowed him to validate the elections in 2010.”<sup>413</sup> The Ambassador convinced the White House that al-Maliki could be contained, with the logic that while “al-Maliki was a son of a bitch, he was our son of a bitch”.<sup>414</sup>

Unequivocal support from Washington amid a contentious election cycle emboldened al-Maliki to further centralise political power and hasten the promotion of sectarian affiliates into the officer corps. Notably, Ambassador Istrabadi recounted a conversation with an American official in the summer of 2010, recalling “that the US government was fully aware Maliki was coup proofing the army, the administration took no steps to counter that”.<sup>415</sup> Thus, Washington not only validated the election of Prime Minister al-Maliki, but also tacitly provided him carte to position loyalist throughout the machinery of the security apparatus.<sup>416,417</sup>

During this period, al-Maliki began to sideline other militia such as JAM and Badr corps to position Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, Kata'ib Hezbollah, and Dawa as his go to militias. Badr and JAM officers in the IA were progressively reassigned to more mundane positions at headquarters element of the Land Forces Component Command as means to diminish their power.<sup>418</sup> More notably, al-Maliki agreed he would forcefully lobby the US to renew the Status of Forces Agreement, following close consultation with Iran, in exchange for sustained support from the Islamic Republic.<sup>419</sup> By 2011, President Obama implemented his campaign promise to withdraw from Iraq. The dispensation of power rest firmly in the hands of the Shia community, a myriad of communally-aligned political militia, and Tehran.

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<sup>413</sup> Researcher's Interview with Ali Khedery. 18 June 2017.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

<sup>415</sup> Researcher's Interview with Ambassador Feisal Istrabadi. 4 April 2017.

<sup>416</sup> Researcher's Interview with Lieutenant General (Ret.) Daniel Bolger. 29 September 2017.

<sup>417</sup> Researcher's Interview with Ali Khedery. 18 June 2017.

<sup>418</sup> Researcher's Interview with Michael Pregent. 12 July 2017.

<sup>419</sup> Researcher's Interview with Ali Khedery. 18 June 2017.

Within the White House and increasingly the Pentagon, senior officials began to question the logic underpinning the Bush Administrations desired outcome for Iraq. While serving in the Pentagon J5, Vincent Alcazar recounted the perception of failure in Iraq. Specifically, “this whole notion of a republic [not only a President at the political helm, but the democratic process in which the leader ascends to power] in the Middle East, this was a failed vision that had been discredited it was intellectually failed, it was practically unattainable.”<sup>420</sup> To be sure, success remained elusive, despite the nearly decade long struggle to establish and nurture the Iraqi security sector along the path towards -military relationship.

Col. Alcazar further reflected that in an idealised civil hindsight, on the eve of withdrawal from Iraq, “we now know we had just started to build institutions that were too weak to bear the load of the demand placed upon them [...] and to withstand the sort of tempest of internal politics inside Iraq”.<sup>421</sup> In other words, the problem with the political-military foundation established by the United States deepened political fragmentation along communal lines. The ethno-sectarian dispensation of power in Baghdad gradually emerged within the Iraqi Army.

Additionally, the Pentagon relied on a flawed framework ass the Iraqi military prior to the 2011 withdrawal. Essentially, the metrics employed to gauge the competency of Iraqi Army were moulded to comport with what the December 2011 withdrawal strategy had mandated.<sup>422</sup> Part of this problem was based on the reliance of quantitative factors to evaluate the army. Such factors meant that the number of soldiers and tanks outweighed the qualitative aspects concerning issues of unit cohesion, loyalty, force readiness or logistical and intelligence capabilities. The see no evil, hear no evil outlook guaranteed the problems of communal disunity

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<sup>420</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Vincent Alcazar. 5 April 2017.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

within the army remained overshadowed by the desire to implement the December 2011 withdrawal date.

The withdrawal also weakened the American's 'directed telescope', or the Pentagon's ability to have "American eyes down to battalion and company level reporting back, which assisted US and Iraqi leadership in building an Iraqi Army".<sup>423</sup> Hundreds of thousands of 'HUMINT' collectors provided a continuous flow of information, ranging from intelligence, insurgency strength and the overall readiness and posture of the Iraqi Army. The loss of this insight turned off an important tap of information and undermined the Pentagon's capability to accurately measure the institutional development of the army. By the start of 2012, American officials lacked the capability to verify the veracity of information emanating from the corridors of power in Baghdad. At this juncture, the Iraqi military and political leadership perfected the art of bullshitting and become very "good at telling you what you wanted to hear so you wouldn't ask any questions".<sup>424</sup> As a result, by 2013 and 2014 when the sectarian crisis gained steam, Prime Minister al-Maliki could replace competent officers with loyalists absent from American oversight.<sup>425</sup> To recall from chapter 5, prior to the emergence of ISI, al-Maliki had restructured command positions across the 14 divisions. 11 of these divisions were led by Shia officers, while two Sunnis and a token Kurdish officer command a division.

Washington could no longer grasp the precise nature and competency of the Iraqi Army from 2012 until Daesh rolled into Fallujah through Ramadi and remained "ignorant of the decrepitude that the Iraqi Army had slipped into precipitously, not gradually, precipitously".<sup>426</sup> The Iraqi government did exert some efforts to keep the armed forces faithful to Iraq and the constitution. However, the political-militia apparatus largely hindered these efforts because a

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<sup>423</sup> Researcher's Interview with Major General (Ret.) Paul Eaton. 29 March 2017.

<sup>424</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Vincent Alcazar. 5 April 2017.

<sup>425</sup> Researcher's Interview with Michael Pregent. 12 July 2017.

<sup>426</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Vincent Alcazar. 5 April 2017.

national, unified Iraqi Army was at odds with the ethnic and sectarian ambitions and interests of the political-militia system.<sup>427</sup> In addition, Prime Minister al-Maliki had demonstratively eroded the cohesion of the Iraqi Army in pursuit of power, based on sectarian tendencies.

To reiterate, the failure of security sector reform exacerbated the strength of non-state actors and enabled the Iranian government to gain more influence, which would reach an apex in 2014. Militarily, Tehran had established inroads with not only the militia, but the Ministry of Defence, which “created this bifurcation, I felt like they (the Iraqis) were seeing Americans in the morning and Iranians in the afternoon”.<sup>428</sup> Iran aspired to subordinate the Sunni Arab polity in Iraq and promote the standing of the allied, political and military actors within the Shia community. The heart of the problem rests on the fact that Iran never desired a strong and unified Iraq as a neighbour. Tehran ensured this by aligning with the Shia elite and political-militia who utilised cash payments to keep politicians in their pockets and directly influence key militia to destabilise Iraq and to establish a security blanket.<sup>429</sup>

Although Tehran emerged stronger and more influential across the political and security sectors of Iraq, the rise of ISI and collapse of the army constituted a point of reflection for policymakers in Washington regarding the application of security sector reform. The rise of Daesh caused American policymakers and officials to recognise “what the Iraqi military really wasn’t and that’s when we understood everything that we had to do in 2015 and 2016 to rebuild institutions that had never been built correctly at the outset”.<sup>430</sup> The US precipitated the collapse of the central authority into the tribal-sectarian nexus\_ and failed to reconstitute a strong army and idealised

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<sup>427</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Brigadier General (Ret.) Ismael Alsodani. 10 April 2017.

<sup>428</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Vincent Alcazar. 5 April 2017.

<sup>429</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Peter Mansoor. 17 May 2017.

<sup>430</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Vincent Alcazar. 5 April 2017.

civil-military relationship. Ultimately, the Americans built “the largest military paper tiger force on the ground from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean”.<sup>431</sup>

### Conclusion

This chapter examined the role and impact of external actors on the formation of the Iraqi security sector and impact of such actions on the nature of the ‘state’ component in the civil-military nexus. Importantly, the United States caused the first fragmentation of the Iraqi military and dissolution of the central authority. American-led Coalition Forces attempted to reconstruct a national military loyal to the state of Iraq. However, US policies recalibrated the political settlement, enabled the sub-communalisation of violence, and aided in the rise of non-state actors. These factors assisted Iran in becoming a key player within the Iraqi political and security spheres. External actors further entrenched the importance of communal identities in both the body politic, and the Iraqi military. A feeling of ‘Iraqiness’ thus eluded the post-2003 dispensation, while the Iraqi Army suffered from the deep penetration of ethnic, sectarian and tribal solidarities.

The failure of security sector reform meant that the ‘sectarian’ culture of the old army migrated into the post-2003 institution and a Sunni organization under Saddam Hussein transformed into a Shia institution under Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. As a result, “the unspoken ethno-sectarian divisions effectively masked before [during the Presidency of Saddam Hussein]” became pervasive in the aftermath of the US invasion.<sup>432</sup> This environment occurred because Washington removed Saddam from power and eliminated the structures of governance associated with the old regime. Thereafter, successive American policies laid the foundation that enabled sub-state coercive forces and communal solidarities to play a prominent role in determining the dispensation of power that came to define the development of the Iraqi state.

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<sup>431</sup> Ibid.

<sup>432</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Ali Allawi. 15 April 2017.



While the Iraqi Army possessed an institutional memory of its former self, Col. Alcazar witnessed through successive tours in Iraq, that the new Iraqi Army failed to exhibit “a sense of who they were right at that moment; that’s subtle but its fundamental to a military to have that identity which is a bedrock”.<sup>433</sup> He also pointed out that, “while an identity is not the fundamental component for a military institution, the notion is nonetheless a foundation we build the notions of consciousness on”.<sup>434</sup> The ailments of the Iraqi Army “reflect the overall inability of the political leadership, from 2005-onwards to build a viable state” and the collapse of the Iraqi Military is indicative of a “general failure of statehood” or more pointedly, the failure of the United States and direct impact of external actors on the civil-military relationships and formation of a coherent central authority.<sup>435</sup> Non-state actors and sub-state loyalties penetrated the military based on these failures and plagued its institutional cohesion.

An important lesson from the US experience in Iraq, however, centres on the application of a ‘Western’ framework to reconstruct the armed forces and facilitate the process of state-building. That is too say, the ultimate objective focused on ensuring the military progressed towards an ideal type of a Weberian state and according civil-military relationship. Lt. General Brims lauded the ability of the Iraqi recruits in comparison to some other Arab soldiers and commended the soldiers for exhibiting a willingness to fight. Nonetheless, the retired Lt. General iterated that a primary concern in his opinion centred around the question not “that they wouldn’t fight, but it was who they were going to fight for”.<sup>436</sup> Issues of loyalty became “very visible right from the point of when you go back to the decision to disband the Iraqi Army”.<sup>437</sup>

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<sup>433</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Vincent Alcazar. 5 April 2017.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid.

<sup>435</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Ali Allawi. 15 April 2017.

<sup>436</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Lieutenant General (Ret.) Robin Brims. 2 August 2017.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid.

Indeed, the CPA and successive Iraqi governments implemented a framework of institutional building which applied an ethno-sectarian quota system to determine bedrock of the political and security structures. In turn, the forming backbone of the security and governance institutions came to be determined by communal apportionment. By reinforcing the saliency of sub-state actors, the entire reconstruction effort ensured that “armed, non-state actors, defined the new security order after 2003”.<sup>438</sup> A lack of “Iraqiness” made it much easier for the Sunni, Kurdish and Shia polity to become ensnared in communal dispute to gain ascendancy. The battle over the predominance of the state is epitomised within the institutional fabric of the Iraqi Army. Ethnic and sectarian discord frustrated the appearance of coherent security sector governance and was instrumental in sowing the seeds of disharmony within Iraq following Operation Iraqi Freedom and the subsequent dissolution of the state.

The rise of the Shia and non-state actors enabled Tehran to establish a foothold in this vacuum and bolster relations with the Shia political and military community. Iranian influence was most notable amongst the increasingly powerful politically-aligned militia, which the US introduced into the ranks of the Iraqi military through the ill-guided DDR program. Once the army collapsed and the tribal-sectarian nexus was laid bare, Iraqi fighters reverted to the Arab way of fight. That is to say, “lacking any strong institutions to compel them to join their army or police, these guys resorted to what their fathers, grand fathers and great grandfathers did, which is you grab your firearm and get into the Toyota pickup truck and go and do business”.<sup>439</sup> Bolger’s opinion is noteworthy, because it encapsulates the inherent fighting nature of the Arab world, which is well-versed in the art of warfare and capable of engaging in unconventional (in the Western sense) military operations. Therefore, while Arabs can fight, it is dissimilar to the structured nature of Western warfare.

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<sup>438</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Ali Khedery. 18 June 2018.

<sup>439</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Lieutenant General (Ret.) Daniel Bolger. 29 September 2017.

Overall, it appears an overarching Iraqi nationalism failed to manifest and subsequently envelope the 'state' and more importantly, the Iraqi Army. As a result, the institution remained vulnerable to the penetration and influence of Shia ideologies which served to pollute the cohesion and loyalties of the Iraqi Army. Perhaps in this regard, the dispensation of power was never destined to fall firmly within the Shia polity, rather, the actions of external actors ensured the nascent development of the Iraqi Army into an institution with a demonstratively transient loyalty. This failure resulted from the belief that Western practices are inherently transferable to and amenable with other societies. Lt. General Bolger, who trained both Iraqi and Afghan forces, illustrated the failure of this Western-centric approach and thereby the applicability of Western civil-military relations in Iraq:<sup>440</sup>

Why do we go into these countries and try to reorganise them around our model when that is not something they want? I don't understand. They will tell you that's what they want, but they really don't, and this goes back to tribal vs modern organization.

For Iraq to regain a semblance of stability whilst ascending towards the Western proscribed ideals of the 'state' and armed forces, it will require a transformation of the political system and the emergence of a coherent national vision.<sup>441</sup> However, external actors, and the United States in particular, were directly responsible for the fragmentation of the Iraqi military and the formation of a 'state' in which communal solidarities informed the dispensation of power. Brig. General Alsodani illustrates the detrimental impact of the US invasion on the internal cohesion of the Iraqi state, witnessing throughout his tenure in the army how sub-state solidarities surfaced in the aftermath of the US-instigated institutional collapse<sup>442</sup>

The current era, loyalty has been divided due what has happened after 2003 when the state institutions had been collapsed like domino effects, people tried to protect themselves by seeking protection from either their ethnic group or tribe. Therefore, the loyalty to the state and constitution had been always questionable.

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<sup>440</sup> Ibid.

<sup>441</sup> Researcher's Interview with Brigadier General (Ret.) Ismael Alsodani. 10 April 2017.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid.

## **Chapter 9: External Patronage, Domestic Strife and the Decline of the Elite-Military Relationship**

### Introduction

Broadly, the research engages with the larger task of understanding the 'state' component in the military nexus, whilst attempting to understand the fidelity of the military to the regime alongside the notion of a cohesive and national army in a predominately tribal state. This chapter will examine how external actors manipulate the dispensation of power and impact military cohesion, thereby having a role in the fragmentation of the armed forces and resultant dispensation of power. The United States, Islamic Republic of Iran, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) were among the most influential foreign actors within Yemen.

Following the ascendancy of Ali Abdullah Saleh to power, a patronage network emerged around the armed forces underpinned by tribal solidarities. Increasingly, President Saleh indulged the officer corps in commercial enterprises and endemic corruption as a mechanism for the regime to sustain the loyalty of the officer class. Adversely, the patrimonial economy of fragmentation demonstrated a shift away from solidarity with the regime-elite towards vested financial and economic interests as the Arab Spring swept across Yemen and the military experienced dissolution.

The dispensation of power across Yemen throughout the rule of President Saleh emanated from a patronage network situated around the tribes and military. The contours of the state to this end are very much outlined by the network of patronage orchestrated by the Yemeni leader and lubricated with oil and other measures of financial aid. To this end, President Saleh increasingly depended upon the benevolence of external patronage, notably foreign donors, to not only bulwark his political rule but, more importantly, to ensure predominance across the wider Yemeni security sector. As a result, the Yemeni elite increasingly lost influence and financial predominance across the security sector in favour of kith and kin considerations. In turn, external

actors necessitated an apparent shift in power and assisted the fragmentation of the army in 2011 as foreign donors.

Yemeni analyst Nadwa al-Dawsari succinctly articulates the true nature of the political field in Yemen: “there was never a state in Yemen, there was a regime made of Saleh’s patronage”.<sup>443</sup> Traditionally, remittances accrued from Yemeni labourers abroad in addition to the export of oil ensured the patronage network and tribal field remained a financially stable endeavour. However, the avenues that are relied upon to maintain the system of patronage gradually diminished, and President Saleh sought out alternative channels of monetary support to bulwark his political grip over the state and control of the armed forces. Apart from the more traditional mediums lubricating the patronage system, foreign donors and thus external patronage became enmeshed within the Saleh patrimonial economy of control and alter the nature of the ‘state’ in the military nexus.

However, a fundamental distinction between support from Riyadh and Washington, rests on the fact that “Saudi Arabia understands stability and political power in Yemen rather differently to the way that Western governments and donors tend to understand it”. (Phillips 2011, 76-77). Specifically, the KSA grasps the importance of the tribes and power pulsating within the informal structures of Yemeni society. They engaged with the tribes and informal networks of powers of power, as opposed to engaging with the formal and more conventionally state-based institutions as seen with the case of Washington and wider international community.

Nonetheless, the nature of the patronage state in Yemen and rise of the tribal-sectarian nexus\_ meant that external actors could use financial and material support to recalibrate the nature of power. This varied from direct monetary support to certain elites, restructuring the armed forces, or providing weapons and supplies to non-state actors. Again, the central authority

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<sup>443</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Nadwa al-Dawsari. 24 May 2017.

in Yemen was always weak, but the 2011 uprisings shattered the military and fragmented the regime into the tribal-sectarian nexus\_ and cause the 'state', or formal institutions of power, to become irrelevant in favour of non-state actors and the sub-communalisation of violence.

#### Rebellion, Terrorism and External Patronage (2004-2009)

Security emerged as the primary concern for the international community as Yemen teetered on the edge of internecine conflict in 21<sup>st</sup> century. Western logic determined the most optimal policy was to bolster the anti-terrorism structures within the Yemeni military. Consequently, the localised conflicts assisted elites in manipulating Western uncertainties to advance personal interests and power. On the other hand, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia "focused on supporting the networks that constitute the informal state to maintain the status quo" (Phillips 2011, 77). The Houthi rebellion in conjunction with the GWOT presented a channel to extract external assistance and patronage from foreign donors. President Saleh desired to perpetuate perceptions of fear, which in turn kindled an unending war economy ensuring the elites were afforded access to external streams of income.

In the immediate aftermath of unification in 1994, President Saleh initiated a path to consolidate control over the political and security sectors under the office of the President and increasingly familial connections. As former US Defence Attaché to Sana'a Lt. Col. Bob Newman recalled, around 1999, Ahmed Saleh was elevated to Commander of the Yemeni Special Operations Forces and four years later, took command of the Republican Guard.<sup>444</sup> The move fomented resentment amongst Republican Guard members and Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar "because there are issues with perceptions of his competence and obviously his youth and maturity".<sup>445</sup> Ahmed Saleh remained in command and the move arguably served as the initiation for Ahmed to succeed his father as president in the future. Apart from Ahmed Saleh, The Presidents nephews

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<sup>444</sup> Researcher's Interview with Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Bob Newman. 8 September 2017.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid.

inherited control over the Central Security Forces, Presidential Guard and the National Security Bureau, and therefore by the early 2000's the states elite special operations and security units fell under the domain of familial rule.<sup>446</sup> The consolidation of power around kith and kin enabled the President to blunt the prowess of Yemen's military strongman Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar and whittle away the influence of the al-Ahmar familial dynasty.

Moreover, the constriction of the patronage network and regime around familial rule gained considerable steam in the wake of the USS Cole Bombing in October of 2000 and the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 as confronting a growing terrorism menace developed as a top policy priority for Washington and entailed the dispersion of fiscal aide and weapon systems to foreign partners. Thus, while President Saleh paved the foundation for familial control of the security sector, external patronage ensured Saleh solidified the dispensation of power around patrimony and away from traditional epicentres of power centring on the tribe and military. US counter terrorism funding to Yemen therefore accelerated the patrimonial shift and predominance of kith and kin across the officer corps during an epoch in which Yemen reached peak oil around 2002 calling into question the sustainability of President Saleh's patronage network and by extension, the viability of the 'state' and military framework.

As Her Majesty's top diplomat in Sana'a (2001-2004) Frances Guy noted the positioning of "direct relatives into the important counter terrorism, intelligence and special operations capacities".<sup>447</sup> Once in position, President Saleh allocated the CT aid, equipment, and training into the portfolios commanded by kith and kin. For example, the Yemeni Special Operations Forces, alongside the Republican Guard, under the command of the president's son and nephews, received a disproportionate amount of counterterrorism aid and equipment amongst the

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<sup>446</sup> Researcher's Interview with Nadwa al-Dawsari. 24<sup>th</sup> May 2017.

<sup>447</sup> Researcher's Interview with Ambassador Frances Guy. 21 April 2017.

burgeoning anti-terrorism forces.<sup>448</sup> Essentially, the Pentagon earmarked and directed aid for counter-terrorism projects within the Republican Guard and other Yemeni units with a counter-terrorism mandate and in turn, the units under command of those kith and kin amassed considerable weaponry in addition to technical expertise, morphing into a praetorian guard or elite parallel army. The introduction of external package disconnected Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar and the Al-Ahmar clan of the Hashid Confederation from an increasingly important avenue of patronage and disrupted the longstanding tripartite agreement informing the political ruling bargain in Yemen.

Increasingly, President Saleh attempted to navigate Yemen into a top priority for Washington in the GWOT at a time where Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom remained at the forefront of US national security. Saleh embellished localised threats to further entrench patrimonial aspirations and consolidation of the security sector, in addition to extracting money by positioning Yemen as an integral battleground within the broader-GWOT. For example, in 2006, 33 high profile Al-Qaeda operatives ‘escaped’ from a Yemeni prison and while speculation centred on allegations of government collusion, the president manipulated the breakout to court additional counter-terrorism support.<sup>449</sup> American officials were acutely aware of Saleh’s desire to embellish the threat posed by AQAP. US Ambassador to Yemen Thomas Krajeski (2004-7) observed that President “Saleh has sought to balance domestic political equities while ensuring that he extracts maximum benefit from the U.S.”<sup>450</sup>

Furthermore, President Saleh continued to juggle the twin threats of a Houthi Rebellion alongside a durable Southern Secessionist movement in addition to AQAP. In a meeting with

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<sup>448</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Adam Seitz. 23 May 2017.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

<sup>450</sup> Yemen GWOT Assessment. [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA916\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA916_a.html). Accessed November 1, 2017.



Deputy Director of Central Intelligence Agency Stephen Kappes (2006-10), Saleh initially downplayed the significance of AQAP in comparison to the rebellion and secession movement before quickly retracting and framing AQAP as the paramount threat, a move interpreted by Ambassador Seche (2007-10) as “almost certainly taken with his USG interlocutors in mind”.<sup>451</sup> Moreover, President Saleh persisted that foreign conspirators motivated the machinations of the domestic maladies plaguing Yemen and without the necessary external support, Yemen faced dissolution, again a move interpreted “to elicit the necessary level of political, economic and military assistance to forestall Yemen's collapse”.<sup>452</sup>

In this vein, however, the collapse of Yemen constituted the demise of the Saleh patronage network. As a practical matter, President Saleh sought to erect a façade of cooperation all the while ensuring ‘terrorism’ remained a constant source of trepidation for Washington to maintain the stream of patronage. While not a card-carrying member of the Jihadist organization, it behoved the Yemeni leader to remain in contact with the organization to counteract other domestic insecurities and challengers.

The failure of the 2009 Christmas Day Airplane Bombing propelled Yemen into the “too big to fail” category in the wider-GWOT. The Joint Special Operations Command in tandem with the Special Activities Division of the Central Intelligence Agency invigorated a drone campaign aimed at decapitating the AQAP hierarchy. In addition, defence aid expanded to \$100 million in 2010. In that same year, CENTCOM Commander Gen. David Petraeus promised to include a \$45 million train and equip package to assist the expansion of the Yemeni-CTU airborne capabilities in return for more expansive strike authorities with regards to the drone campaign.<sup>453</sup>

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<sup>451</sup> Saleh Sees Foreign Hand Behind Yemen's Internal Woes.

[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09SANAA1015\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09SANAA1015_a.html). Accessed 1 November 2017.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid.

<sup>453</sup> General Petraeus' Meeting with Saleh on Security Assistance, AQAP Strikes.

[https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/10SANAA4\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/10SANAA4_a.html). Accessed 1 November 20, 2017.

At the same meeting, President Saleh attempted to solicit train and equip funding for three additional Republican Guard Brigades stressing the gesture “would reflect upon our true partnership”.<sup>454</sup> The meeting illustrates Saleh’s desire to manipulate American CT assistance into military formations in an effort to strengthen the shift into patrimonial rule. The shift in the source of funding for the patronage network was desired by President Saleh to further consolidate power and remain the predominant military actor. Further, that same year, the Pentagon considered implementing a 5-year \$1.2 billion military assistance package to bolster military capacities.<sup>455</sup> If enacted, the Pentagon might have further aligned with the president and familial coterie, who increasingly consolidated control over the security sector to the detriment of the old guard.

Aside from hard-funding, certain non-traditional forms of counterterrorism aid emanated from the international community and into Yemen, albeit with a similar impact as the allocation of resources to strengthen state-led anti-terrorism capabilities. Such projects were aimed at diluting the localised circumstances compelling the domestic population to engage with the Al-Qaeda franchise. Efforts focused on winning the hearts and minds occurred through development projects, headed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), resulted in the issuance of contracts to local firms to include YECO and directly to the government who exercised the prerogative to distribute the contracts. President Saleh intentionally allocated contracts away from Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar and Sheikh al-Ahmar in addition to other intra-elite rivals in favour of family members and vested business interests.<sup>456</sup>

Despite President Saleh’s attempt to manoeuvre power away from Ali Mohsen, American officials estimated in 2005 that the General still maintained control over nearly half of the military

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<sup>454</sup> Ibid.

<sup>455</sup> US looks at bolstering funding for Yemeni military. <http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=41067>. Accessed 17 November 2017.

<sup>456</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Adam Seitz. 16 May 2017.

resources<sup>457</sup>, while continuing to enjoy the financial benevolence of Saudi Arabia and a lucrative smuggling racket. Ali Mohsen at that period retained the necessary streams of income to maintain a discernible and subservient network of patronage. Yet, as the Arab Spring shook the political and military foundations of Yemen, President Saleh, assisted by American counter-terrorism aid, enjoyed predominance over a durable and robust anti-terrorism and special operations empire under familial domain. Furthermore, President Saleh manipulated the Houthi insurgency to dilute the power of the military strongmen, while at the same time navigating the domestic insurgency to extract supplemental support from foreign donors.

#### Houthi Rebellion and Foreign Actors

The Houthi rebellion initiated in 2004 lasted over half a decade and would ultimately upend the political and security landscape of Yemeni. Apart from a durable insurgency, President Saleh tangled with the twin threats of a southern secessionist movement and an increasingly potent Al-Qaeda franchise within the Peninsula. President Saleh raised the spectre of the Houthi Rebellion to a similar level with that of the Al-Qaeda franchise. Saleh manipulated the conflict by claiming the Islamic Republic of Iran denoted the hidden hand behind the movement.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia emerged as an invaluable partner in blunting the Northern insurgency militarily, while providing President Saleh with sustenance to prolong the patronage state. To be sure, the regionalization of the conflict enabled President Saleh to extract military and financial support from Saudi Arabia, while arguing the Houthi Rebellion received support from the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>458</sup> The situation increasingly morphed into a war economy. DCM of the US, Angie Bryan described this possibility, because “Saleh views Saudi involvement in the war, and the concomitant increase in direct Saudi budget support to the ROYG, as an incentive to

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<sup>457</sup> Will Saleh’s Successor Please Stand Up? [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA2766\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05SANAA2766_a.html). Accessed 17 November 2017.

<sup>458</sup> Saudi Strikes in Yemen: An Invitation to Iran—and the US?. [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09SANAA2070\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09SANAA2070_a.html). Accessed 1 November 2017.

prolong the ROYG's campaign in Sa'ada" precisely because Saleh viewed "continued Saudi involvement as the key to keeping the tap of Saudi budget support open".<sup>459</sup>

For example, the Yemeni Ministry of Defence failed to ever enact a weapons procurement scheme with any degree of oversight and accountability. Relaxed procedures enabled the Yemeni elite and the President to redirect Saudi military weapons into the lucrative illicit arms market proliferating Yemen. In this vein, US diplomats in Saana noted the real possibility that millions of dollars of worth of weaponry provided by the Kingdom to Yemen would ultimately end up as a means for patronage and thereby in the grey market.<sup>460</sup> Paradoxically, International Crisis Group observed that a portion of the "weapons ultimately found their way to the rebels they were intended to combat".<sup>461</sup>

Therefore, President Saleh manipulated the 'perceived' Iranian spectre looming over Yemen to ensure Riyadh remained engaged with the domestic conflict to continue receiving financial support from Saudi Arabia. To be sure, Tehran did develop a relationship with the Houthi rebellion albeit one initially centred on conventional train and equip initiatives alongside the provision of weaponry as well monetary assistance.<sup>462</sup> Despite this, a Yemeni insider with connections in Riyadh and the Saudi Special Office for Yemen Affairs divulged that while Saudi officials were aware of President Saleh's designs, the group felt the situation had unravelled beyond their direct control.<sup>463</sup>

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<sup>459</sup> Yemeni Tribal Leader: For Saleh, Saudi Involvement in Sa'ada Comes not a Moment Too Soon. [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09SANAA2279\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09SANAA2279_a.html). Accessed 17 November 2017.

<sup>460</sup> Saudi Strikes Yemen: An Invitation to Iran-and the U.S.? [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09SANAA2070\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09SANAA2070_a.html). Accessed 17 November 2017.

<sup>461</sup> <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/86-yemen-defusing-the-saada-time-bomb.pdf>. Accessed 6 February 2018.

<sup>462</sup> Researcher's Interview with Ambassador Gerald Feierstein. 8 May 2017.

<sup>463</sup> Yemeni Tribal Leader: For Saleh, Saudi Involvement in Sa'ada Comes not a Moment Too Soon. [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09SANAA2279\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09SANAA2279_a.html). Accessed 17 November 2017.

Saudi involvement and external intervention also served to manipulated intra-elite rivalries, with the simmering conflict between Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar and Ali Abdullah Saleh. Throughout the nascent stages of the insurgency and aftermath of September 11th, Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmar and Sheikh Al-Ahmar remained substantial nodes within the wider military-patronage network. The two elites enjoyed the benevolence of Saudi Arabia for one, with Ali Mohsen continuing to receive financial assistance from the Kingdom,<sup>464</sup> while sources confirmed in 2008 that the paramount Sheikh Al-Ahmar historically enjoyed a \$800,000 a monthly stipend from Riyadh (Phillips 2011, 78-9).

Moreover, at the time, Ali Mohsen managed a considerable economic empire imbedded in smuggling, which in turn ensured the continuation of his patronage network. However, as illustrated, American CT assistance served to entrench the patrimonial aspirations of President Saleh and consolidation of power across the Yemeni Special Operations Community. Detrimentially, the 1AD, under the commander of Gen. al-Ahmar, experienced a disproportionate degree of combat engagement against the Houthi rebellion. President Saleh intentionally forced Ali Mohsen into the conflict in a direct effort to dilute the coercive capability of an intractable rival.<sup>465</sup>

Saleh even went so far as too collude with the Houthi movement to erode the stamina of Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar.<sup>466</sup> Upon cessations of hostilities with the Northern insurgents in 2009, the Kingdom directly allocated a staggering \$2.2 billion to President Saleh to preserve the regime; an interchange recognised by US diplomats as allowing the beleaguered president to stave off

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<sup>464</sup> Researcher's Interview with Adam Seitz. 23 May 2017.

<sup>465</sup> Researcher's Interview with Nadwa Dawsari. 24 May 2017.

<sup>466</sup> Ibid.

domestic strife.<sup>467</sup> The direct support was allocated to the government and thus, into the hands of President Saleh and Saleh loyalists.<sup>468</sup>

#### Military Restructuring in the Tribal-sectarian nexus 2011-14

The period preceding the fragmentation of Yemen exposes the fragility of the "state" system or more aptly, the way external donors influenced the patronage state. The chief power brokers denoting the long-standing ruling triumvirate Ali Mohsen, the Al-Ahmar tribal dynasty and the Saleh family-dissipated into fractured elite networks and consequently fragmented the state and armed forces. By and large, elite-military relations informed the dispensation of power within the security and political order. The presidents shift towards familial rule and the allocation of foreign aid into the elite units under familial domain in conjunction with the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Division bearing the brunt the Houthi rebellion effectively clipped the wings of Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar. Without a modicum of cooperation amongst the triumvirate, the patronage network underpinning the military and the state would also remain questionable. Militarily, the fragmentation occurred along patrimonial lines around President Saleh while much of the 70,000-man strong<sup>469</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Division cohered around their patron, Gen. al-Ahmar. Effectively wounded and lacking the long-standing support network, Ali Mohsen "retreated to the safety of Saudi Arabia".<sup>470</sup>

Despite the fragmented nature of Yemen after 2011, Saleh's ouster presented an historic opportunity to bolster Yemen's feeble institutions and resuscitate the state and democratise the civil-military relationship. Military reform was predicated on decreasing the influence of elites within the military and reconstituting allegiances to the state. Ostensibly, this meant transforming

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<sup>467</sup> Yemen Tribal Leader: For Saleh, Saudi Involvement In Sa'ada Comes Not a Moment Too Soon. [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09SANAA2279\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09SANAA2279_a.html). Accessed 17 November 2017.

<sup>468</sup> Researcher's Interview with Adam Seitz. 23 May 2017.

<sup>469</sup> Researcher's Interview with Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Robert Newman 8 September 2017.

<sup>470</sup> Researcher's Interview with Nadwa al-Dawsari. 24 May 2017.

a patrimonial army into a cohesive institution. However, the process that unfolded was more along the lines of a restructuring and not genuine security sector reform.<sup>471</sup>

In 2012, The Gulf Cooperation Council outlined and mandated the restructuring of the Yemeni military security apparatus. All stakeholders had a desire to focus the initiatives on the professionalization of the armed forces and to merge the constituent formations under a coherent, unified command.<sup>472</sup> However, the initiative offered only vague prescriptions to restructure the Yemeni military-security apparatus. Despite this, the International Crisis Group noted the core tenants focused on ensuring “all domestic constituents claim to support a professional military-security apparatus under civilian control and free from regional, party, sectarian or family influence” (ICG 2013, 14). As part of this process, the restructuring project strove to uproot patronage and patrimonial solidarities within the wider-Yemeni military and imbue some semblance of coherency and a civil-military relationship, based on the assessment provided by the International Crisis Group.

President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi was empowered by the international community and therefore derived legitimacy from without and not within Yemen. In a conventional ‘state’, the transfer of power is a relatively smooth process yet in the tribal-sectarian nexus of Yemen, there remains epicentres of power capable of countering the central authority. In turn, President Hadi faced seemingly insurmountable obstacles to shore up support and fracture the patronage network solidified around Saleh, and to some degree Gen. al-Ahmar, while engaging with security sector reform and a peaceful transition to democratic rule. Notably Hadi had trouble when endeavouring to root the fidelity of the military to the wider-state. External patronage, with the case of Yemen, impaired the formation of coherent governance of the security apparatus and a cohesive national army by allocating resources around durable, elite sub-state actors who utilise

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<sup>471</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Randy Rosin. 25 May 2017.

<sup>472</sup> Researcher’s Interview with April Longley-Alley. 22 November 2017.

foreign donations to perpetuate loyalties anchored by tribal and economic interests among alternative solidarities.

Historically, the Republican guard most closely reflected Western militaries in terms of general military doctrine, while the same can be said of the formations constituting the Yemeni Special Operations Community. The 1AD, however, was a loosely cohered tribal militia under the command of Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar while the wider-Yemeni Army existed as an inept conglomerate of tribal militia.<sup>473</sup> Broadly speaking therefore, a conglomerate of tribal militia informed the structure of the conventional Yemeni Army. Yet the three discreet formations shared a bond cemented around tribal ties and the Saleh-era network of patronage.

To recall from the previous chapters on Yemen, the United States was also involved in the reformation process. Following the removal of President Saleh from power, the Obama Administration came to understand the impact of directly targeting the Yemeni Special Operations Community in the fight against AQAP and the way funding accentuated familial domain over elite military formations. In the Spring 2012, the Pentagon tasked CENTCOM with restructuring and reforming the Yemeni military through a process of professionalization. Ambassador Feierstein (2010-13) recalled working alongside Central Command on the reorganization plan and devising an elaborate organizational chart outlining the desired structure of the new Yemeni Army.<sup>474</sup>

The economic component of the US-Yemeni counterterrorism relationship centred on Pentagon section 1206 funds and foreign military financing with the objective of providing security sector reform and diminishing the emergence of AQAP through Special Forces-led train and equip missions, in addition to the direct provision of military hardware. Again, the 'by with

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<sup>473</sup> Researcher's Interview with Ambassador Gerald Feierstein. 8 May 2017.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid.



and through' approach endeavoured to reinforce the local anti-terrorism and elite combat units, the majority of which were subordinated under the wider-Saleh dynasty.

The technical aspects of the restructuring process focused on establishing core military competencies within the Yemeni Army. CENTCOM established working groups to train the Yemenis in the various functionalities of a Western military, to become proficient at logistics, sustainment, operational planning, sustainment and the like.<sup>475</sup> Col. Rosin observed the process overwhelmed the Yemeni officers and personnel in the program and they were unable to retain the core concepts CENTCOM wanted to instil within the armed forces.<sup>476</sup> Part of the problem resulted from the impermanent rotation of American trainers, and without a sustained presence, the program remained doomed to fail.<sup>477</sup> As the Houthi's inched closer to Sana'a, Washington evacuated all non-shooters, and the colonel believed that had a sustained presence remained in a train and assist capacity, the Yemeni military might have been able to develop into a capable fighting force.<sup>478</sup>

While Col. Rosin expressed some measure of optimism surrounding the emergence of a strong army, Ambassador Feierstein concluded this failed due to a lack of the "kind of strong leadership within the government or military that would allow you to really get control of it [the military]." <sup>479</sup> Again, within this environment of the tribal-sectarian nexus, there lacked a strong central authority, and nucleus to enact the military reforms necessary to assert genuine governance over the security sector. Therefore, Hadi was a titular 'president' and lacked the requisite social, political and economic standing to see through the reforms. To some extent, the president failed to grasp the reconstruction process and "was completely oblivious to what was

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<sup>475</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Randy Rosin. 25 May 2017.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid.

<sup>479</sup> Researcher's Interview with Ambassador Gerald Feierstein 8 May 2017.

going, he didn't understand it".<sup>480</sup> Perhaps. However, he faced constant opposition from within. For example, the Islah-aligned Military Chief of Staff kept Hadi at arms-length. The Islah affiliation, therefore, denotes additional influence by Ali Mohsen and Hamid al-Ahmar, the leader of Islah.<sup>481</sup> Whatever the reason, President Hadi operated as "a shadow of Saleh, Hadi had no power, Hadi had *no patronage*, Hadi had no influence".<sup>482</sup> President Hadi admitted so much himself in a conversation with a former British diplomat Noel Brehony during the restructuring process and conceded that "he was very much part of that system himself but lacked a real powerbase within it".<sup>483</sup> Furthermore, Hadi looked to his Southern compatriots to proliferate the officer class and counterbalance the power of the Saleh dynasty, Hamid al-Ahmar and Ali Mohsen. Southern officers from Abyan Province gradually emerged into the restructured military, however, the move failed to translate into a potential challenger to the long-standing powerbases in the military.<sup>484</sup>

Notwithstanding, in 2013, the president managed to defang Gen. al-Ahmar as the directive 'disbanded' the 70,000 man-strong 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Division with the intention of integrating that force pool into the restructured military.<sup>485</sup> Moreover, the General's control over the lucrative ports and smuggling routes in Hodeida was also diluted and therefore Ali Mohsen experienced some decline in those illicit income streams. The same year, the Republican Guard was disbanded, and its' commander, Ahmed Saleh, departed to head the Yemeni diplomatic mission in the United Arab Emirates. Despite his new role in the Emirates, Ahmed Saleh continued to command the loyalty of former RG officers.

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<sup>480</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Iain Smailes. 19 May 2017.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid.

<sup>482</sup> Researcher's Interview with Nadwa al- Dawsari. 24 May 2017.

<sup>483</sup> Researcher's Interview with Noel Brehony. 27 February 2017.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid.

<sup>485</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Randy Rosin. 25 May 2017.

Overall, while the more professionally minded officers were somewhat receptive to the reformation process, the wider- military elite refused to abide by the mandated reforms. Admittedly, American efforts never truly amounted to genuine security sector reform initiatives. Nonetheless, the maladies plaguing the process are common to those hindering the emergence of coherent security sector governance in the tribal-sectarian nexus; the entrenchment of alternative solidarities and the power of non-state actors. Pointedly, the officer corps and other segments had no desire to disentangle themselves from the patronage system and according patron-client relationships that provided them with financial means.<sup>486</sup> Notably, while Saleh-loyalists failed to wholly capture the military in the post-Arab Spring dispensation, the former president's allies remained cemented within the most important formations, to include the Republican Guard and the Yemeni CT and SOF units.

Importantly, the special operations and counter-terrorism formations continued to receive American military aid, which perpetuated the stranglehold Saleh enjoyed over the Yemeni Special Operations Community.<sup>487</sup> Again, despite all outward appearances, the elite formations remained committed to the patronage network controlled by Ali Abdullah Saleh as opposed to the notion of the 'state'. Moreover, the actions initiated by President Hadi only served to further fragment as opposed to cohere the institution of the armed forces. Ali Abdullah Saleh, Ahmed Saleh, Gen. al-Ahmar and the president himself oversaw institutional segments of the broader military structure apart from the growing emergence of the tribal militia. In a society such as Yemen, an official can be 'officially' retired, rotated or removed to root the fidelity of the military or certain formations to the state.

This, however, does not detract from the fact that the individual will remain committed to a network of trust or suitability. Such an environment enabled military formations and allegiances

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<sup>486</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Iain Smailes. 19 May 2017.

<sup>487</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Randy Rosin. 25 May 2017.

to endure alongside the patron or powerful officer. Ambassador Feierstein concluded of that the process of reform “looked pretty on paper but it never really took on the reality”.<sup>488</sup> The Ambassador’s rather blunt assessment encapsulates not only the failure to implement genuine security sector reform, but more importantly describes the ‘paper tiger’ façade of the Yemeni armed forces and, that of the army.

The international community’s plan to restructure the military was doomed to fail from the start, because Westerns believe that building a strong army in Yemen would unify Yemenis and eradicate alternative allegiances. In contrast to the West, the ‘state’ or central authority in Yemen is one of many actors vying for power and control over resources. In this regard, “if we want effective security sector reform in Yemen, we need to start at the local level”.<sup>489</sup> Nadwa al-Dawsari’s observation notes the reality that, within the tribal-sectarian nexus, power is fragmented, and violence has become sub-communalised. The US and international community failed to reform the military because there wasn’t a ‘state’ or strong central authority in the conventional Western sense to reform. This in turn underscores the presence of the tribal-sectarian nexus in Yemen.

#### Saudi Arabia and Iran

Despite the chaos and untenable nature and expectations of security sector reform, President Hadi and Gen. al-Ahmar were sustained by support from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Riyadh had gradually become disgruntled with President Saleh and in or about 2009, ceased direct cash payments to Yemen according to Saudi Minister of Interior Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, because the “cash tended to end up in Swiss banks”.<sup>490</sup> Importantly, the 2000 border agreement between the KSA and Yemen dictated relations with tribes, in that subsequent payments would

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<sup>488</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Ambassador Gerald Feierstein. 8 May 2017.

<sup>489</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Nadwa al-Dawsari. 21 April 2017.

<sup>490</sup> Special Advisor Holbrooke’s Meeting with Saudi Assistant Interior Minister Mohammed bin Nayef. [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RIYADH670\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RIYADH670_a.html). Accessed 17 November 2017.

be directly allocated to the government of Yemen as opposed to the tribes (Phillips 2011, 79). Crown Prince and Defence Minister Sultan bin Abdulaziz al-Saud had historically 'held the keys to Yemen' and was the primary interlocutor from the Special Office of Yemeni Policy, overseeing the Yemen portfolio and dispersion of payments across the tribal landscape. However, Sultan's death in 2011 meant that Saudi Arabia no longer had the keys to Yemen, this in turn meant the Kingdom could no-longer exert the historical degree of influence among the Yemeni tribes.<sup>491</sup> Importantly, therefore, the post-Arab Spring political order resulted in the Kingdom failing to fully engage with the tribal networks as in the past (Hill 2017, 240).

Nonetheless, during the early period of transition, the Kingdom began to funnel a substantial amount of financial support to President Hadi and Ali Mohsen,<sup>492</sup> who emerged as key figureheads in the emergent political order. Saudi Arabia directed support to the units beholden to President Hadi and Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar to stymie the Houthi advance following 2012.<sup>493</sup> Part of this balancing act and support for Ali Mohsen was devised to counteract the remnants of Saleh's patronage network. President Hadi exerted little to no influence over the Yemeni security sector and enjoyed a finite measure of support amongst the officer corps and rank and file.<sup>494</sup> Ultimately, the movement of the Houthi Rebellion assisted by the former president highlights the durability of patronage politics and the impact of external donors when discerning the dispensation of power across the Yemeni security sector.

Prior to 2011, Tehran showed little interests in the Houthi rebellion and never provided substantial support to the organization. However, they took advantage of the 2011 Arab Spring to gain a foothold in Yemen and increased support to the Houthi Rebellion. By 2012, the US began to observe Iranian weapons shipments going to the Houthis, alongside members of the IRGC

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<sup>491</sup> Researcher's Interview with Noel Brehony. 2 February 2017.

<sup>492</sup> Researcher's Interview with Adam Seitz. 23 May 2017.

<sup>493</sup> Researcher's Interview with Nadwa al-Dawsari. 21 April 2017.

<sup>494</sup> Researcher's Interview with Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Bob Newman. 8 September 2017.

operating within Sa'ada during the same period. Iran began to apply its model that worked for Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Shia militia in Iraq. This focused on the provision of weapons to the Houthi fighters and training them to conduct unconventional warfare. IRGC-QF personnel deployed to Yemen in order to coordinate these activities, advise on military matters, and facilitate the movement of Hezbollah fighters into Yemen to help train Houthi insurgents. Furthermore, a significant number of Houthi fighters were "invited" to travel to Iran to receive religious education and military training.<sup>495</sup>

In the case of Yemen, Iran replicated its strategy of forming strong relations with non-state actors to establish a foothold across the region. Hezbollah, the Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq, and militia in Syria are all examples of Tehran's efforts to build non-state militia that operate independent to their respective central authority's. However, IRGC-QF support to the Houthi rebels paled in comparison to the support and control Iran exercised over sub-state actors in Iraq, Lebanon and Syria. Iran never established the type of relationships in Yemen that it has with the Shia militia and politicians in Iraq. Consequently, Tehran's influence and impact on the civil-military relationship in Yemen was negligible in comparison to Iraq.

### Conclusion

The role and impact of external actors in Yemen highlights several points regarding civil-military relations and the tribal sectarian field. First, Western designs and perceptions of Yemen are detached from the reality of power in the tribal-sectarian nexus. Security sector reform failed in Yemen because the Western framework viewed the 'state' as a given referent object of analysis and working with the state presented the best opportunity to enact change. As argued, this is not the case in Yemen, where the tribal-sectarian nexus has taken hold, and notion of the 'state' and dispensation of power are dissimilar to conventional power structures in the Western world.<sup>496</sup> In

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<sup>495</sup> Researcher's Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Randy Rosin. 25 May 2017.

<sup>496</sup> Researcher's Interview with Nadwa al-Dawsari. 24 May 2017

this regard, and to comprehend the dispensation of power across the Yemeni security sector, one must acknowledge that the “informal is more important than the formal”.<sup>497</sup> In other words, the ‘state’ and associated institutions are void of any real power, in comparison to elites and non-state actors. Because of this, external actors perpetuated the informal power structures and thereby, the tribal-sectarian nexus.

For example, the United States allocated a considerable amount of financial aid to the Yemeni Special Operations and counter-terrorism forces to assist in the fight against AQAP. However, the Pentagon inadvertently provided Saleh with a strong source of external patronage, at a time when the country’s oil production was declining. Saleh used the patronage to constrict power around neo-patrimonial rule, which antagonised other regime elites and aided in the initial fragmentation of the ‘state’ and armed forces. Following 2011, the Pentagon continued to financially support the elite counter-terrorism and special operations forces nominally under control of Ali Abdullah Saleh. More importantly, Washington’s support caused Saleh to believe in the misapprehension of sustained American backing. Saleh became deluded and “felt powerful because he thought we were going to keep him in power”.<sup>498</sup>

Ginny Hill clearly articulates the true nature of foreign donors and the impact of external patronage on the Yemeni ‘state’ system: “Yemen’s donors established their own patronage structure, competing with indigenous patronage structures in a contentious political environment where no paymaster had overall control” (2017, 261). In the tribal-sectarian nexus of Yemen, the contours of power and underlying networks of patronage are vulnerable to external actors, whom can manipulate internal power relations and dynamics through the distribution and allocation of financial assistance and resources to elites. In turn, elites utilise external patronage to bolster their respective positions and solidified the integrity of patronage networks.

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<sup>497</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Colonel (Ret.) Randy Rosin. 25 May 2017.

<sup>498</sup> Researcher’s Interview with Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Bob Newman. 6 September 2017.

The over 33-year Presidency of Ali Abdullah Saleh witnessed the gregarious and shrewd tank commander solidify power around a network of patronage rooted within the tribes and the officer corps, and increasingly, kith and kin. Fortuitously, the GWOT emerged as a paramount foreign policy concern when oil-the primary lubricant of the patronage system-was increasingly scarce as a sustainable resource to fuel Saleh's-patronage network. President Saleh shrewdly manipulated Western fears by embellishing the threat of AQAP and succeeded in obtaining massive amounts of counter-terrorism aid channelled to solidify patrimonial rule. A durable insurgency materialised concurrent to the rise of terrorism and provided the president with the means to dilute the influence of his primary nemesis, Gen. al-Ahmar, all the while embellishing the menace of Iran to illicit financial and military provisions from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Despite suffering a political setback in 2012, Saleh had amassed a robust patronage network, anchoring the fidelity of the more elite-formations and sections of the officer class to his person, durable enough to withstand the reverberations of political change. Therefore, Saleh's 'state within a state' permeated into the emergent political and military order following the Arab Spring, co-existing alongside the extraordinarily feeble network of President Hadi, which was nurtured by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and ancillary networks of loyalty under the auspice of Gen. al-Ahmar. Remarkably, Saleh proved not only an irritant to democratization and security sector reform, but a conductor who orchestrated the seizure of Sana'a nearly two years following his ouster. In this regard, external actors within a tribal-sectarian nexus\_ such as Yemen have a negative impact on the emergence of a national and cohesive army, as the provision of external patronage only serves to perpetuate the increasingly fragmented nature of the civil-military relationship alongside the wider dissolution of state and military institutions.



## **Conclusion: The Utility of the Tribal-Sectarian Nexus in the Examination of 'Civil'-Military Relations in Fragmented States.**

### **Decline of the Weberian State and the Rise of the Tribal-Sectarian Nexus**

The thesis set out to examine the nature of civil-military relations in fragmented states, considering the collapse of the Weberian state construct, military fragmentation, and the sub-communalisation of violence. Broadly, as noted in the introduction, the thesis aimed to answer the question: How can we understand the 'state' component in civil-military relationship given the commensurate fragmentation of the government and its armed forces? In doing so, the thesis examined the factors precipitating the dissolution of the military and the fragmentation of the central authority, by evaluating how the three frames-sub-state solidarities, patrimonial economy, and external actors-impact military cohesion and state power.

To lay the conceptual foundation, chapter two synthesised the wider literature on civil-military Relations in the Western world and the Middle East. The chapter noted the differences between civil-military relations in the West and the Middle East, and that Western approaches hold the 'state', or civil component as a given referent object of analysis. This tendency began with the seminal works of Samuel Huntington and Morris Janowitz and remains a focal point in Western scholarship of the armed forces. Consequently, scholars assessing civil-military relations in the Arab World inherently believe that the 'state' accords with the Weberian model and has a strong central authority which exercises a monopoly of violence over its territory. In contrast, the section of civil-military relations in the Arab World noted the historical role of the military in the process of state and nation-building, and the institution's role as a bulwark of the regime. It also underscored that, often-time, the military constituted the strongest institution during the formation of the nascent state order in the Arab World.

In addition, the chapter examined the collapse of the Weberian state model and covered the literature regarding the role and impact of the armed forces during the Arab Spring. However, the events of the Arab Spring witnessed the dissipation of power away from the

central authority, in addition to the fragmentation of the armed forces. To be sure, the collapse of the 'Weberian' model was illustrated through the fragmentation of militaries and the proliferation of militia, that highlighted the disintegration of the monopoly over the legitimate use of force. As a result, the idealised notions of the 'state' and according civil-military relationships are no longer applicable in the study of Middle Eastern armed forces, and those relationships taking place in fragmented states.

Based on this assessment, the thesis developed a novel approach to understand military fragmentation and the nature of power in a political environment that is the antithesis of the Weberian state. Specifically, it developed the model of the tribal-sectarian nexus to test as a hypothesis to provide an understanding of the 'state' in the military relationship and the nature of those relationships taking place in fragmented states following the collapse of the central authority. The tribal-sectarian nexus is the first model of civil-military relations to assert that the state is not fundamental because it examines the notions of state fragmentation alongside tribalism and sectarianism and is thus an attempt to develop a prism in which to understand the relationship between armed actors and a fragmented central authority often based upon tribal and sectarian affiliations which is not covered in the broader literature. Moreover, the model stressed the centrality of sub-state coercive power centres that have emerged following the sub-communalisation of violence. The hypothesis of the tribal-sectarian nexus was tested to the cases of Iraq and Yemen in order to answer the research questions and gain a deeper understanding of civil-military relations in fragmented states.

Chapters three and four surveyed the historical nature of civil-military relations in Iraq and Yemen to understand the institutional characteristics and interplay with the central authority. As demonstrated in chapter three, it was hoped the Iraqi Army would transform into a vehicle for nation-building and succeed in melding Iraq's mosaic of a society together. However, Sunni Arabs dominated the officer corps, and the institution became heavily involved

in politics, spurred by several ideological currents. Saddam Hussein was able to cull the officer corps through the process of Baathification and subordinate the military under subjective control. However, between 1984 and 1988, Saddam provided the officer corps with the freedom to operate as 'professionals' and decentralised control in order to impeded Iranian advances into Iraq. This moment represented a point in which Western style civil-military relations took place in Iraq. Yet, this relationship was short-lived, and Saddam began to coup-proof the forces following the cessation of hostiles.

The loyalties and composition of the officer corps fluctuated based on historical circumstances. While Sunnis historically dominated the officer corps, Saddam increasingly placed members of his tribe, al-Takrit, into the officer corps. This became more noticeable following the implementation of sanctions in 1991 and subsequent uprising. During this period, Saddam also relied heavily upon various tribes as security guarantors in the provinces the central authority no longer had a foothold. International sanctions weakened Saddam's networks of patronage and he could no longer rely on conventional methods of subordination to consolidate power and coup-proof the military. As Operation Iraqi Freedom drew nearer, the Iraqi state was weak, and the military had become incapable of performing in combat as a result of coup-proofing and politicization.

Chapter four evaluated the historical trajectory of the Yemeni Armed Forces and noted that it occurred along a dissimilar path than its Iraqi counterpart. In the Yemen Arab Republic, tribes emerged as key facilitators of power and tribalism came to determine the initial edifice of the officer corps. This process was accentuated by Ali Abdullah Saleh upon his climb to power in 1978. He transformed the military into an institution of patronage and incorporated the tribes into the officer corps to garner their loyalty. Civil-military relations occurred along similar lines in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. While the fabric of the state and the dispensation of power revolved around the principles of socialism, tribes remained a constant,

despite efforts by the central authority to transform society. By some measure, tribalism persisted because soldiers were generally recruited from, and assigned to, their tribal areas. Within the officer corps, senior leaders came from the regime stronghold Lahij Governorate, while other officers from the Dhalai and Radfan tribes held important positions in units surrounding the Capital. However, political credentials, and not tribalism, was a key factor regarding entry into officer corps.

1990 unification witnessed an alteration in the civil-military relationship. Northern elites, comprised of the Hashid Tribal Confederation and constituent Sanhan clan, dominated the new institutions of the state, to include the officer corps. Saleh increasingly shifted to patrimonial rule and began to consolidate power around his direct family members following the decline of oil and advent of the Global War on Terrorism. Still, the military existed as a patronage army, and Saleh allowed certain elites such as Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar and the al-Ahmar tribal dynasty considerable latitude regarding unit formation and control of their own coercive power centres. As a patronage army, the institution was comprised on innumerable 'armies', controlled by various elites, yet cohered to Saleh due to patronage. Further, patrimony played an important role in shaping the loyalties of the officer corps within the army, air force and praetorian guards. As the 2011 uprisings approached, the Sanhan clan and the 'Afaash tribe had managed to consolidate control over the most important military units and the elite special operations forces.

This assessment of civil-military relations in both Iraq and Yemen highlights the patrimonial nature of both armed forces and the reliance on economic and tribal affiliations to subordinate the officer corps. In particular, the importance of tribal solidarities increased as the economic means to sustain patronage within the officer corps declined. However, the application of the tribal-sectarian nexus to both cases provides a clearer depiction of the sub-communalisation of violence and the dispensation of power in both Iraq and Yemen.

While neo-patrimonialism determined the nature of power in both Iraq and Yemen prior to fragmentation, the dissipation of state power into the tribal-sectarian nexus differed across the case studies. In Yemen, Saleh used a complex network of patronage to establish his power base, and this included incorporating the tribes into the officer corps. In turn, the military became the central point to distribute patronage and a means to gain power. This meant that tribal loyalties within the military were stronger than “military allegiance, creating a military-tribal complex of patron-client relationships” (Fattah 2011, 82).

However, intra-regime schisms eventually developed around those elites, which witnessed Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar defect from Saleh and align with the Hashid Tribal Confederation. Tribal infighting caused the fragmentation of the military and necessitated the collapse of the patrimonial state, which necessitated the rise of Warlordism and an increased importance in patrimonial economy. Thus, patronage continues to constitute the focal point in understanding the nature the sub-communalisation of violence in Yemen, while tribalism also remains a key role in determining the organization of militia. However, while Iraq was a patrimonial state under President Hussein with an according patron-client relationship and economic modes of exchange, the US decimated the state during OIF and eroded those prior forms of economic relationships and currencies of power.

In contrast to Yemen, where tribalism played a prominent role, President Hussein had established a strong central authority under personal rule, and relegated tribalism in the process. Hussein had cohered Iraq using a mix of brute force, Sunni nationalism, patrimonialism, and increasingly tribal solidarities as his power began to wane in the late 1990s. In Yemen, patronage and tribal connections allowed President Saleh to sustain political and military influence in the tribal-sectarian nexus, while the dispensation of power also coalesced around Tareq Saleh and Ali Mohsin. Ali Mohsin retained control over what lingering elements of Yemeni Army, with strong connections to the Islah party, while Tareq continued to enjoy support from

officers and soldiers formerly serving within the Republican Guard. Access to patronage and the power of tribal solidarities represent two fundamental avenues enabling both men to retain power amid state fragmentation. Prime Minister al-Maliki attempted to establish undercurrents of patrimonial rule but failed to consolidate enough power to do so. Corruption and criminality pervaded in the post-2003 order, and al-Maliki allowed this environment to persist as means to garner some measure of loyalty from the officer corps and political class. However, US forces did implement a patron-client relationship with Sunni tribes in Anbar during the Awakening. The distribution of financial aid and weaponry cemented the tribes with the military, which resulted in the American forces emerging as the 'strongest' tribe. As prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki did dispense patronage to the tribes, most notably with regards to the tribal support councils, to garner political support. Al-Maliki failed to centralise the necessary power to establish patronage networks like Ali Abdullah Saleh's.

In contrast to Yemen, external actors and communalism played a great role in the fragmentation of the Iraqi central authority and that of the armed forces. To recall with the case of Yemen, US counter-terrorism aid enabled President Saleh to sustain his patronage base and consolidate control of the armed forces around family members. In turn, the centralisation of patronage away from Ali Mohsen, Sheik al-Ahmar, and other long-standing elites generated fissures within the regime and ultimately hastened Saleh's departure from power. In Iraq, US intervention fractured the dispensation of power, which dissipated along communal lines.

Thereafter, the US engineered political power around ethnic and sectarian considerations, that resulted in the formation of communalised army infiltrated by communally aligned political militia. Policies implanted under Operation Iraqi Freedom caused the first fragmentation of the Iraqi military and the central authority. In turn, these misguided American policies enabled Iran to emerge as the primary victor of Operation Iraqi Freedom. America established the political and security bedrock of Iraq around communalism, and specially, a Shia

dispensation of power. The communal nature of the state coupled with the rise of non-state actors enabled the IRGC-QF and Iran to gradually establish political alliances and emplace soldiers and officers beholden to them into the Iraqi armed forces.

Tehran's influence reached an apex after Washington condoned al-Maliki's contested election and withdrew in 2011. Washington and the Pentagon left Iraq without looking back and lost the ability to monitor the future progress of the Iraqi Army. Thereafter, Iran continued to foster relationships with non-state actors, which manifested in the Popular Mobilization Forces that emerged to combat the Islamic State. More importantly, the United States failed to build a strong army, and coherent political system, based on the inability to fully understand and appreciate the complexities of Iraq. The US introduced sectarianism to Iraq by establishing the new state on a communalised political foundation. The new Iraqi Army was not immune to the newfound political dispensation and was eventually engulfed by ethnic, sectarian and tribal ties. In this regard, the United States had a fundamental role pertaining to the cohesion of the military and the dispensation of power in post-2003 Iraq.

This stripped away the political and military institutions of the state and laid the foundation for the sub-communalisation of violence. Within the environment of the tribal-sectarian nexus, the Peshmerga, communal militia, and Sunni-tribes emerged as the guardians of their respective communities. In comparison, tribalism has historically determined the paths of recruitment and composition of both state and non-state armed factions in Yemen, to include the Army, Republican Guard, and the foreign-sponsored militia that manifested after 2015. Moreover, the dispensation of power emerged around sectarian lines, in that the Shia endeavoured to capture the state. Thus, while tribal affiliations increasingly determined the composition of the Yemeni officer corps, tribalism in Iraq remained detached from the security and political projects within the tribal-sectarian nexus. For example, although the Sunni tribes played an important role working alongside Coalition Forces during the Awakening and

contributed to the stability of Anbar Province, the sectarian nature of Baghdad under al-Maliki alienated those tribal forces.

Thus, the sub-communalisation of violence coalesced around tribes and Warlords in Yemen, whereas the monopolies of violence in Iraq centred on sectarian militia, tribal guardians, and ethnic armies. That is to say the Peshmerga, Sunni tribesmen, and Shia militia arose as communal guardians, due to the lack of a coherent Iraqi identity and ever-increasing prominence of primordial solidarities. Equally important is to recall the lack of a true military in either cases. To be sure, Zoltan Barany observed the Yemeni Army is “the failing army of the failing state – is just one of the several warring sides in the country” (Barany 2016, 34). Indeed, a similar assessment can be said about the Iraqi Security Forces and pronounced rise of non-state actors. The PMF and not the Iraqi military safeguarded Baghdad and Iraqi sovereignty from the clutches of Daesh, underscoring the complementary role of militia within the tribal-sectarian nexus .

#### The Tribal-sectarian nexus and State Formation

The thesis demonstrated the utility of the tribal-sectarian nexus as a model to understand the nature of power upon the collapse of a Weberian state and the sub-communalisation of violence. Indeed, it is the first model to refrain from holding the state as a given referent object of analysis and placing greater emphasis on the centrality of armed, non-state actors. The ability of the model to elucidate the process of state formation alongside state degradation is another unique aspect of the tribal-sectarian nexus and an advancement to the literature on civil-military relations. Again, this is evident given that the model holds the central authority as one of many actors vying for power. To recall, the focal point of the tribal-sectarian nexus is the contestation between the ‘state’ and other social organizations or non-state actors over the indulgence of power. This understanding of the state in relation to other societal actors is drawn



from Migdal's model of state-society relations, whereby he assessed societies are composed of innumerable social organizations, in which "the state is one organization among many" vying to gain social influence and establish political control (Migdal 1988, 28).

The model of the tribal-sectarian nexus is the first to de-emphasises the centrality of the state as a given referent of object of analysis and inherent monopoly of violence and argue sub-state actors such as militia are now more important. Based on this understanding, the model of the tribal-sectarian nexus can be employed to understand the process of state formation as espoused by Charles Tilly. To recall, Tilly is concerned with "the place of organised means of violence in the growth and change of those peculiar forms of government", or the centrality of armed violence in the process of state formation (Tilly 1985, 170). Actors attempting to establish a state, will make war to neutralise foreign rivals, eliminate internal rivals to consolidate power, protect clients with the territory, and lastly, develop the means to conduct all three activities (Tilly 1985, 181). In turn, all four activities required an organisation or group of individuals "to monopolies the concentrated means of coercion" (ibid).

Moreover, the nature of warfare and the new reality of state formation, as understood by the tribal-sectarian nexus, taking hold in both Iraq and Yemen adds to the validity of the tribal-sectarian nexus. To recall, the nature of warfare within the tribal-sectarian nexus that coincides with state formation is characterised as a battlefield containing "varying combinations of networks of state and non-state actors" (Kaldor 2013, 2). Armies and militias are drawn from "ethnic, religious or tribal" communities, based on the degradation "of more inclusive (often state-based) political ideologies like socialism or post-colonial nationalism" (ibid). The tribal-sectarian nexus in this regard illustrates a devolution of state capabilities, institutional strength and cohesion at the hands of sub-state actors and solidarities. In Iraq for example, communalism dominated party affiliations, which aided in the rise of powerful militia, and facilitated their ability fight for the monopoly of violence.

For instances, Kurdish soldiers remained beholden to the Peshmerga of Kurdish Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, while politically-aligned Shia militiamen remained subservient to their respective political masters. Although an Iraqi Army technically existed, it operated under a central authority that continually failed to a monopoly of violence, given the power of Sunni tribesmen, the Shia militia, and Kurdish Peshmerga. The militia transformed into a political party and thereafter along the continuum in accordance with Tilly understanding of state formation. Not only are they generating revenues from state and non-state sources in exchange for the promise of protection and, in some cases, services

The process of state formation in Yemen exhibits similar characteristics to Iraq. President Hadi continually struggled to exert political control and establish a monopoly of violence, based on the sustained power of alternative actors. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates tore apart the fabric of Yemen and exacerbated the process of state fragmentation and the sub-communalization of violence. The Emirati's were integral in the rise of the Southern Transitional Council as a political entity and affiliated military organization of the Security Belt Forces. Patronage provided by Abu Dhabi enabled the organisations to fight not only the Houthi rebels but also consolidate territory in competition against pro-Hadi forces.

More broadly, the incorporation of Tilly's work with the tribal-sectarian nexus points to the crisis of legitimacy now faced in fragmented states that stems from the inability of weak central authorities to fully control the monopolies of violence. The sub-communalisation of violence and inability to monopolises violence is a fundamental fixture across much of the contemporary Middle East. Indeed, the rise of armed, sub-state coercive centres and affiliated solidarities with Iraq and Yemen reflects the erosion of 'state' legitimacy and weakness of the central authority, while the sub-communalisation of violence discussed in both Iraq and Yemen has now come to plague cases such as Libya and Syria, while Hezbollah in Lebanon has historically exercised considerable military and political power relative to the central authority.

There are several fragmented states aside from Iraq and Yemen that the thesis might have considered. Chiefly Libya, Syria and Afghanistan represent potential cases to apply the approach of the tribal-sectarian nexus, and thereby substantiate the applicability and robustness of the model. Indeed, the tribal-sectarian nexus will allow for an understanding of state fragmentation in these cases and shed light on the role of sub-state actors and the central role of the monopoly of violence concerning state formation. To be sure, the Weberian state construct can no longer be considered the sole referent point in the study of civil-military relations as it applies to much of the contemporary Middle East.

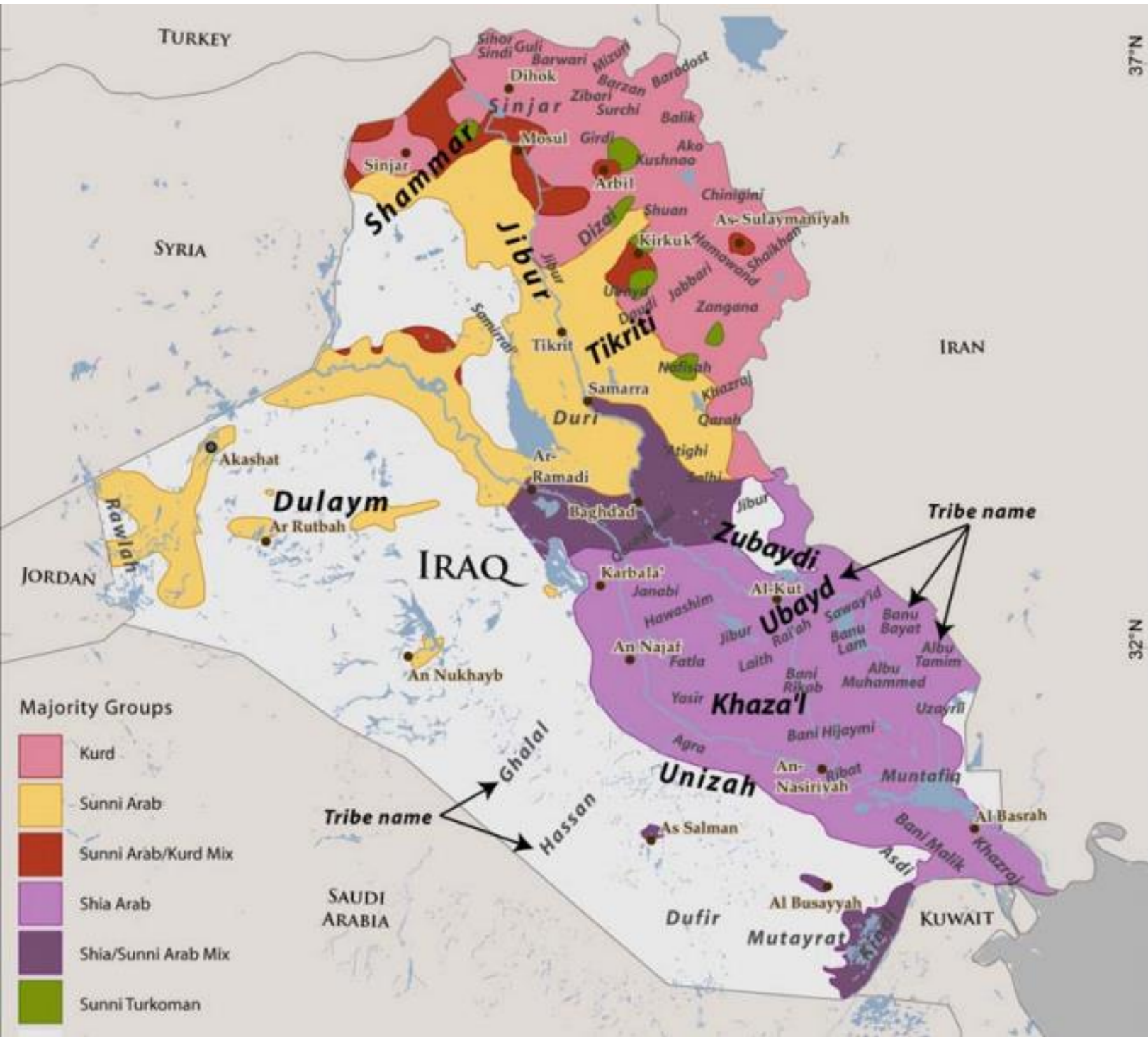
## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Iraqi Army Prior to Fragmentation

Division	Area of Responsibility (AOR) (Province)	AOR Ethno-Sectarian Composition	Influence within the Officer Corps	Formation Composition
1 <sup>st</sup>	Anbar	Sunni/Tribal	Not clear	Mixed ethnic and sectarian
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Eastern Ninewa	Kurdish	Peshmerga until 2010-11	Initially very Kurdish
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Western Ninewa	Kurdish	Peshmerga until 2010-11	Initially strongly Yazidi
4 <sup>th</sup>	Salah ad Din	Mixed	Peshmerga until 2010-11	Initially PUK, more mixed over time
5 <sup>th</sup>	Diyala		Badr Corps	Shia, strong Badr influence
6 <sup>th</sup>	Baghdad	Mixed	Badr Corps until 2010-11	Shia
7 <sup>th</sup>	Anbar	Sunni/Tribal	Iraqi Awakening Party	Sunnis indigenous to Anbar Province
8 <sup>th</sup>	Karbala, Najaf, Qadisiyah	Shia heartland	Dawa Party	Shia
9 <sup>th</sup>	Northern Baghdad	Shia	Eventually Shia	Mixed, praetorian guard
10 <sup>th</sup>	Dhi Qar, Maysan, Muthanna		Sadr but eventually Badr Corps	Local Shia
11 <sup>th</sup>	Wasit	Mixed	Shia	Shia
12 <sup>th</sup>	Kirkuk	Kurdish	Not Clear	Sunni, formed from pipeline protection units, 47 <sup>th</sup> , 48 <sup>th</sup> , 49 <sup>th</sup> Brigades
14 <sup>th</sup>	Basrah	Shia	Shia	Southern Shia
17 <sup>th</sup>	Babil	Shia	Not clear	Mixed Sunni/Shia Arabs

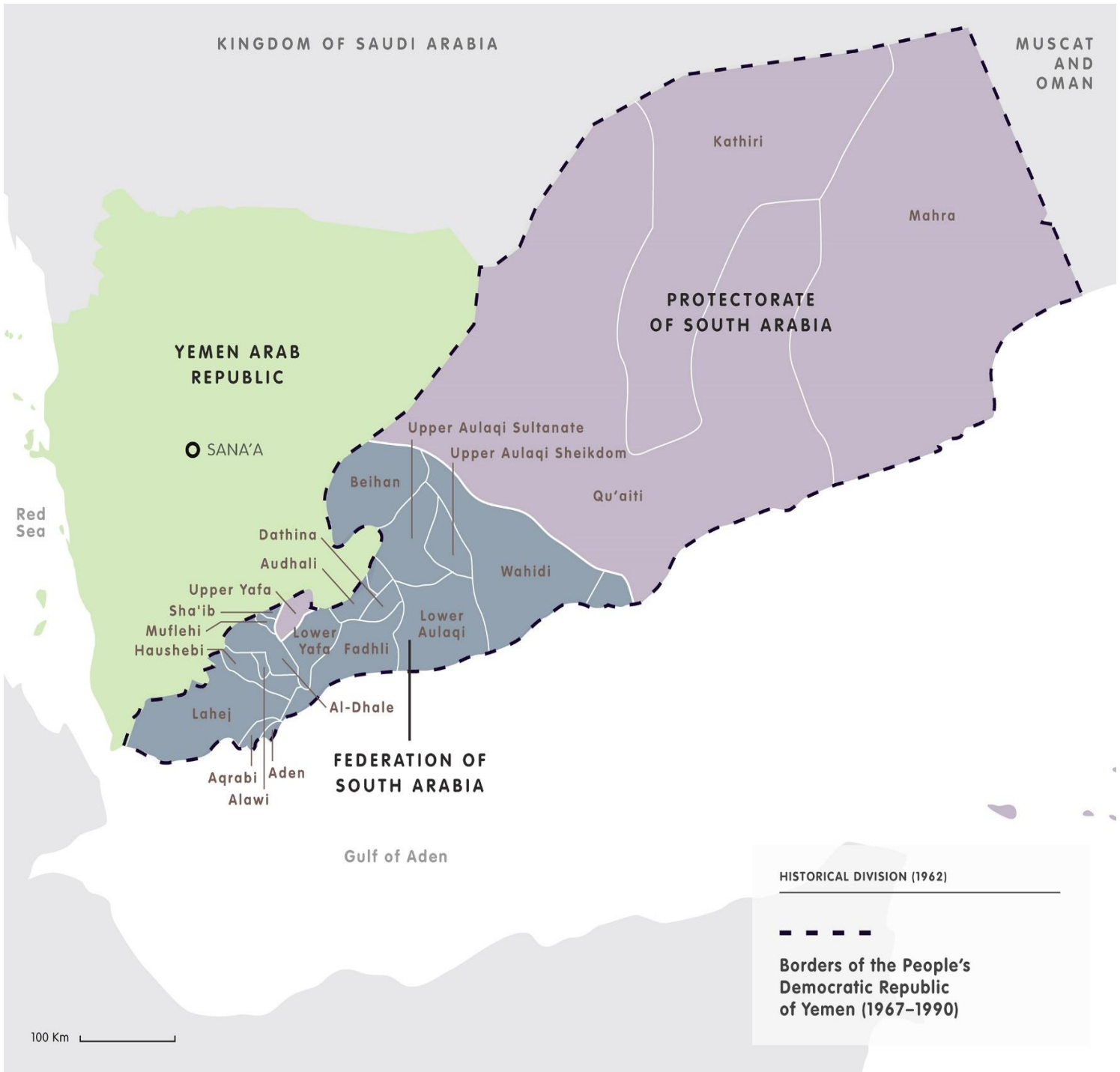
*Source: Data and information compiled by Researcher from interviews.*

## Appendix 2: Tribal, Ethnic, and Religious Map of Iraq



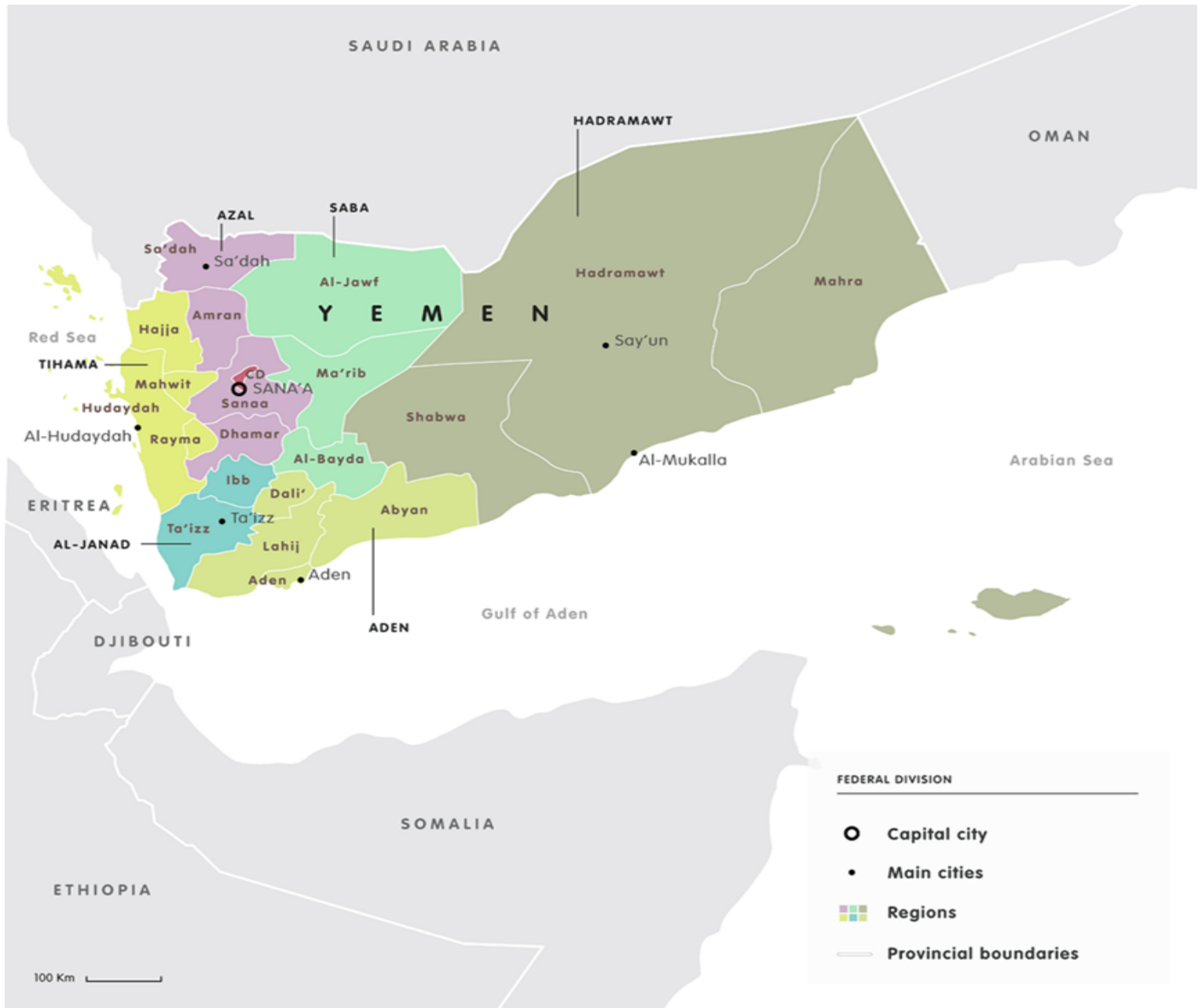
*Source:* Hassan 2007, 6.

### Appendix 3: Map of North and South Yemen Pre-Unification



Source: <https://www.ecfr.eu/mena/yemen>

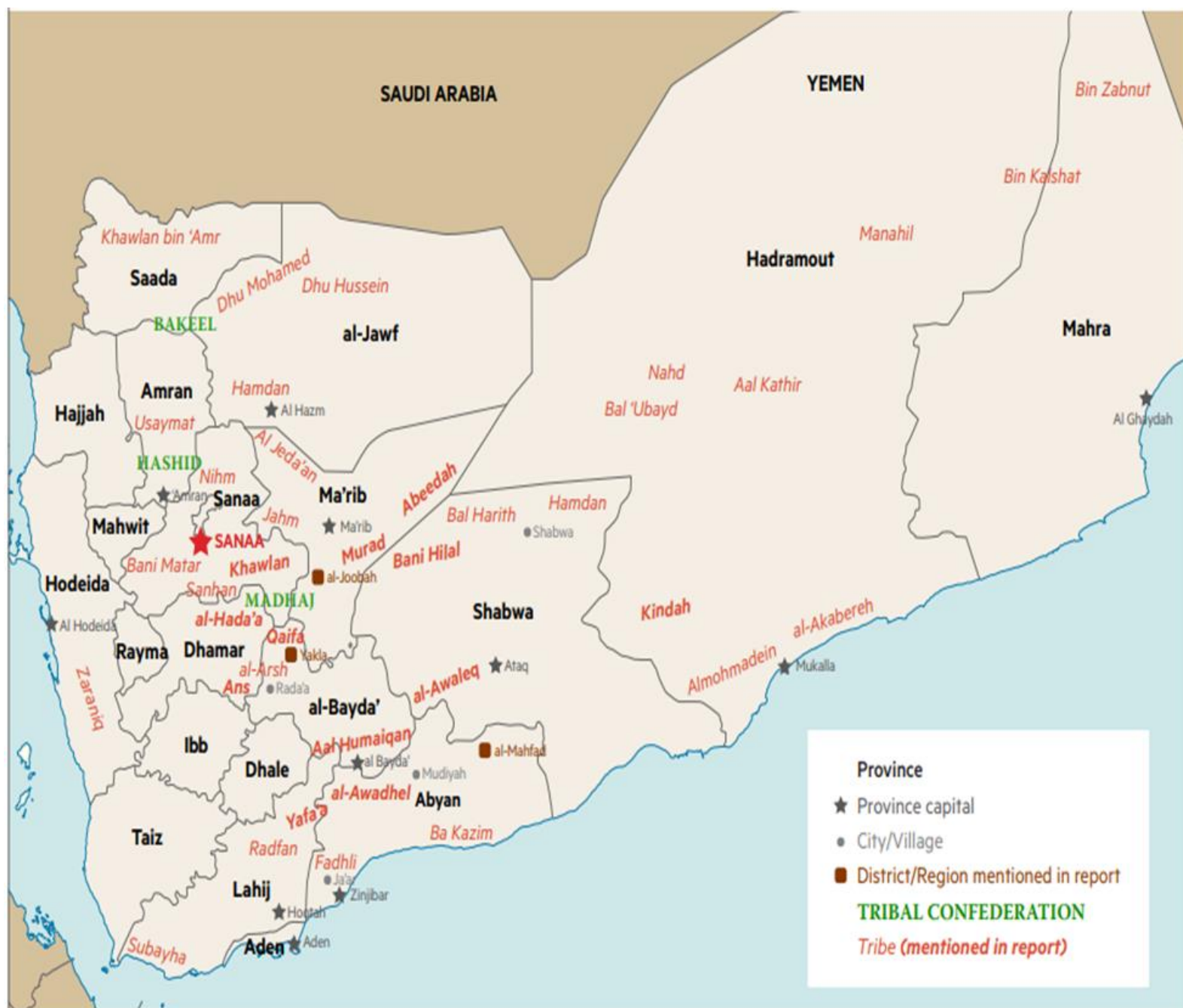
#### Appendix 4: Political Map of Yemen



Source: <https://www.ecfr.eu/mena/yemen>

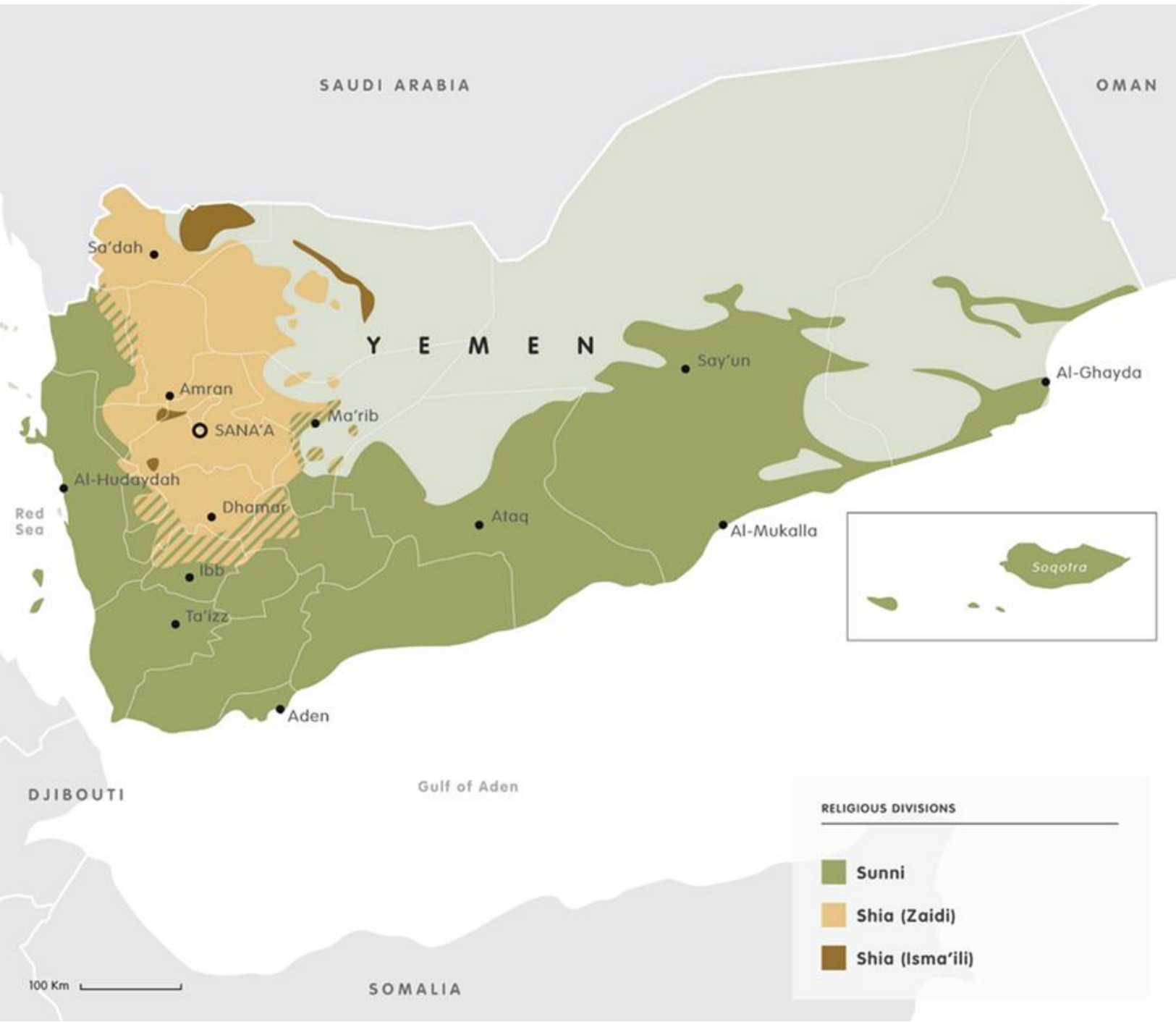


## Appendix 5: Basic Tribal Map of Yemen



Source: <https://www.ecfr.eu/mena/yemen>

Appendix 6: Religious Composition of Yemen



Source: <https://www.ecfr.eu/mena/yemen>

## Appendix 7: Ethics Review Process Form and Ethics Consent Form

Obtaining approval from the School of Government and International Affairs Ethics Committee was required to conduct interviews with live participants. The process entailed completing a Student Application to the Ethics and Risk Committee for approval, along with the provision of a draft consent form, list of potential participants, research design, interview locations, and other information pertinent to the process of collecting data from live participants.

### Student Application to the Ethics and Risk Committee

Research or any other projects undertaken by students of SGIA that involve live human participants and/or raise ethical issues or risks for the student, for SGIA or for the University require approval for those activities by the Ethics and Risk Committee **BEFORE THE ACTIVITY IS UNDERTAKEN**.

#### Guidance on the Completion of the Form and Associated Procedures

1. Approval must be sought and obtained **prior to** the research or other activity.
2. Save in exceptional circumstances, material obtained without prior approval is not admissible in work submitted to SGIA. Examiners are instructed to discount any such material which is included in submitted work.
3. The form should be completed by the student in consultation with the supervisor.
4. The application must be submitted to [lorraine.holmes@durham.ac.uk](mailto:lorraine.holmes@durham.ac.uk)
5. If any further information or amendment is required by the Ethics and Risk Committee, this must be included by the student in a revised application form and submitted to [lorraine.holmes@durham.ac.uk](mailto:lorraine.holmes@durham.ac.uk).
6. Any further activities in connection with the projects for which approval has been sought and obtained, or separate projects carried out during travel for the projects for which approval has been sought and obtained, require separate approval.
7. All parts of this application must be typed.
8. The committee will be responsible for issuing certification that the project meets acceptable ethical and data protection standards and will, if necessary, require changes to the methodology, the nature of the questions, data collection and storage plans or reporting strategy etc.

#### Personal details:

**Student name:** Anthony Chimente

**Supervisor's Name:** Clive Jones

**Supervisor's Signature** .....

**Student's degree programme: PhD**

**Year of study (if appropriate): 2**

**Module (for taught students):**

**Title of dissertation or project: Civil-Military Relations in Fragmented States  
(the precise title is still in the works)**

**Date of application: 14 February 2017**

**Section A**

		YES	NO	
1.	Will you obtain written consent from your informants?	✓		If NO, you must explain why not and explain what alternative arrangements you propose to make to assure that you have consent in the <b>further details</b> box below (Section F)
2	Will you give your informants a written summary of your project and how you will store and use any information given to you?	✓		If NO, you must explain why not in the <b>further details</b> box below (Section F)
3	Will you give your informants an oral verbal summary of your project and how you will store and use any information given to you?	✓		If NO, you must explain why not in the <b>further details</b> box below (Section F)
4	Will your information <i>automatically</i> be made anonymous in your work?	✓		If NO, you must explain why not in the <b>further details</b> box below (Section F)
5.	If you have answered NO to question 4, will you explicitly give <i>all</i> your informants the right to remain anonymous?			If NO, you must explain why not in the <b>further details</b> box below (Section F)
6.	Will any recording devices be used without the <b>express permission</b> of the informants?		✓	If the answer is YES ( <b>which includes covert recording</b> ), then you must explain why in the <b>further details</b> box below (Section D)
7.	Will your informants be provided with a copy of any notes made by you or other record in connection with their participation in your dissertation or project?	✓		If NO, you must explain why not in the <b>further details</b> box below (Section F)
8.	Are there any other ethical issues arising from your project?		✓	If YES, you must explain what they are in the <b>further details</b> box below (Section F).

## Section B

### Project proposal

This section should include a clear statement of the relevance of the requested participation (interviews/ questionnaires/observations etc.) to your dissertation or project.

#### Research Theme:

The broad research theme underpinning this study is civil-military relations in fragmented states using the cases of Iraq and Yemen.

#### My research investigates:

How can the 'civil' component in the military nexus be conceptualized post-Arab Spring. The problem in question is the fragmentation of armies, collapse of the 'Weberian' state and the sub-communalization of violence.

Conventional (Huntingtonian) understandings of the 'civil' or 'state' component in the civil-military relationship presupposes a cohesive state authority with the legitimate monopoly over the coercive institutions of the state. However, this no longer appears to characterize the true nature of civil-military relations in the wider Arab world, and more specifically those relations taking place in fragmented states.

Thus, this study will attempt to answer the following question: How can the 'civil' or 'state' aspect of the civil-military relationship be better elucidated?

The research focuses on the nature of this relationship within the tribal field (a political field characterized by the lack of a fully-fledged Weberian state).

To motivate an understanding of military fragmentation and discern the 'civil' component of the relationship, the politics of patrimony, political economy, sectarianism and external actors will constitute the framework to answer the question and formulate an understanding of the patterns of military fragmentation and in turn the dispensation of power allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the 'civil' aspect in the relationship.

To reconceptualise civil-military relationships in fragmented states it is useful to examine the influence and role of both the tribe and sect. The collapse of the Weberian state into the tribal field brings into question notions of state legitimacy and power as well as an environment characterized by parallel forms of governance and loyalty. To this end, ancillary questions within this study will focus on these concepts and determine how they evolve within the tribal field.

Due to a lack of primary source information, and the secrecy surrounding the inner-workings of the Arab security sector in general, much of the available information is secondary in nature. Of recent, the Chilcot Inquiry as well as WikiLeaks State Department Cables have provided insight into the Iraqi and Yemeni security sectors and will be used by this study in addition to other forms of Official Testimonies by actors involved in the respective states.

A combination of primary data collected through interviews, electronic primary sources and an abundant array of secondary sources will enhance the conceptual approach and provide for a more robust analysis and therefore conclusion to the research questions at hand.

To this end, without interviews, the study would lack a measure of unique insight the respective respondents hold due to myriad experiences in the political, military and diplomatic spheres dealing with the cases of Iraq and Yemen. Conducting research with both Yemeni and Iraqi military personnel-serving and former-alongside retired government officials can provide unique insight into the research and data not found in many Western scholarly sources nor publications.

In turn, the information gleamed will help to underpin the robust nature of the conceptual approach and enable the researcher to discover information and conclusions otherwise unobtainable.

## Section C

### List of participants

You should provide the **names, addresses and roles** of all participants. If you are unable to provide this information now, you should consult your supervisor who will be able to advise you on how you should complete this part of the form.

This application is for ethical approval for conversational, semi-structured interviews for non- pertaining to civil-military relations and security sector reform in Iraq and Yemen (this application is for Dr. Noel Brehony). A separate approval shall be sought for semi-structured interviews conducted with other respondents, which shall encompass all or many those acting as participants in this research.

The individuals interviewed as part of this research encompass an array of experiences, ranging from academic, diplomatic and military. The questions and information obtained during the interview process will enable the researcher to examine primary and first-hand information otherwise unobtainable from other sources. The goal of this research is too conduct interviews with around 50 individuals with experience in security sector reform in Iraq and Yemen. To this end, the research will engage with individuals with diplomatic, military, and governmental experience within Iraq and Yemen. In turn, the desired interview sample will enable the research to obtain first hand insight into the innerworkings of the respective security sectors and from various perspectives. To reach the goal of 50 interviews, the aim is to obtain further contacts during the initial interview process through the practice of snowball sampling in which interviewees will provide details of potential contacts with whom they are familiar with.

Importantly, there is a possibility that through the course of the interview process, respondents will point the researcher in the direction of, or introduce them to other prospective candidates for interviews. If this situation materializes, the researcher will contact the appropriate Department staff member and proceed to draft a justification as to how contact with this prospective interviewee will benefit and provide a unique insight into the research. Ostensibly, there is no use in engaging with multiple individuals who provided redundant information, this is only beneficial in so far as substantiating certain claims. Thus, the prospective insight of any further potential respondents will be taken into consideration.

## **Section D**

### **Location or method of interviews or the distribution of questionnaires**

I intend to conduct conversational, semi-structured interviews allowing for more freedom and adaptability while still maintaining a measure of focus. At this point in time, it is confirmed the interview with Dr. Noel Brehony has been scheduled for 27<sup>th</sup> of February 2017 and will take place in the Cavendish Hotel, located at 81 Jermyn St, St. James's, London SW1Y 6JF.

The interviews will be semi-structured in nature, with questions presented around the respondent's personal experiences and expertise. It is important to engage with the participant in a friendly manner as an extension of a conversation. This is a reason beyond semi structured as allows for pre-determined questions to be discussed while enabling the uniqueness of each candidate to manifest through discussion. In turn, additional information and insight can be captured that the researcher might have overlooked or not

foreseen as important. The goal is to embed the primary source information derived from interviews within the conceptual framework to produce an enhanced analytical conclusion.

As a priority, and if possible, all interviews will be conducted in person. However, location of future interviews is dependent upon the residence of the potential participants and will take into consideration ease of travel and other matters. For example, interviews with US military personnel in the continental US will more than likely be conducted via Skype based on geographic separation. Similarly, discussions with Yemeni or Iraqi nationals will more than likely occur along similar lines unless he/she resides within the United Kingdom. Per ethical research standards, the participant will be given the final say in the location of the interview and the option to withdraw from the process of their own volition at any stage.

Participants will be apprised of my research topic and informed as to how the information derived from the interview will play a role in and be used in the development of the thesis in addition to being appraised of the data storage methods. Respondents will be afforded the option to withdraw from the process at any time or to retract specific statements. Additionally, interviewees will be afforded the option of anonymity under certain circumstances. Interviews shall be recorded with a standard digital voice recorder following prior consent of the interviewee and conducted in the English language where possible. In circumstances where the individual lacks proficiency with the English language, a translator will be taken advantage of. Importantly, apart from native-proficiency in Arabic, the translator will be made aware of the confidentiality guidelines when conducting the interview and information discussed in addition to the more detailed ethical issues regarding the conduct of research. *(See the Example Consent Form provided as part of the application)*

During the research process, it is important to keep in mind the tense relationship between the myriad actors within the states used as case studies and specifically Iraqi and Yemeni nationals who participate in the research. In this regard, it is important to safeguard the data or information collected. Therefore, upon completion of interviews, the data will be transferred from the initial collection device (voice recorder) to a secure device, with initial data deleted from the audio recording device. The device (flash drive) will be use AES 256-bit protection for data encryption purposes. A list identifying the interviewees with recordings will be stored separately with security precautions to ensure no attribution to individual interviewees. All data collected during the interview process will be securely stored and transferred onto the University server as which provides far better data security solutions as opposed to a private device.

The research design and nature of the semi-structured interview process negates the ability or utility of a quantitative approach in this instance and thus the use of a survey is limited within the confines of the case study.



## Section E

**Actual or indicative questions**

Please note that indicative question must be provided for semi-structured interviews.

The questions will be formulated from the factors informing the conceptual approach (patrimony, sectarianism, political economy and external actors) and help form an understanding of the nature of CMR in the tribal field.

Several of the questions in general will focus on the role of non-state actors such as the militia and tribes in addition to state actors (Iran, US, Saudi) with regards to the respective cases and the influence on civil-military relations, the state, and patterns of fragmentation.

Questions are categorized in anticipation of a respondent's ability to answer based on professional experiences.

For example, there is no use asking a former Iraqi government official-civilian or military-about the nature of civil-military relations in Yemen.

Similarly, as a scholar on Iraq, Toby Dodge possesses a more robust knowledge of that country as opposed to Stephen Day who specializes in Yemeni studies.

Lastly, certain diplomats might succeed in answering some questions while others will have a difficulty, this all comes down to location of diplomatic postings and portfolios while serving in a domestic capacity.

Thus, the below questions will be categorized in manner conducive with the background and knowledge spectrum of the respondent and in turn, produce the best possible results.

- How important is an understanding of the tribal milieu in assessing the relationship between President Saleh and General Ali Moshen al-Ahmar?
- How important is tribalism in understanding the dispensation of power across the Yemeni military?
- Can you explain the impact of oil and the prominence or stature of tribes and tribal sheiks in Yemen regarding the patronage networks and the impact of this in the South?
- Please describe the factors and actors enabling the emergence and longevity of AQAP.
- In your opinion, or based on your knowledge/experiences, is there a connection between the Houthi insurgency as a whole and actors within the Yemeni political or military landscape? If so, please explain the factors informing such relationships.
- IS sectarianism a problem within Yemen? If so, do tensions exist within the military? What role has sectarianism played in the conflict succeeding the ouster of President Saleh in 2011?

- During your time in Yemen/Iraq, did it seem like there was a feeling of nationalism among the population with the armed forces?
- During your time in Yemen/Iraq can you discuss the nature of unit cohesion and what alternative loyalties or factors might have plagued the unit?
- Can you elaborate on the role of foreign actors in Iraq/Yemen and the way said actions intersected with the civil-military relationship?
- What role have non-state actors played in developing and nurturing pre-existing sub-state affiliations and allegiances such as the tribe or sect within the military?
- During your time training Iraqi Security Forces, how important was implanting an Iraqi Nationalism in the overall scheme of things and what tensions did you witness during your time pertaining to the influence of militia and tribal solidarities?
- Was the detainee detention program in Iraq itself a driver for radicalization?
- Can you explain the dynamics of tribal-military relations during the rule of President Saleh? How do you believe these dynamics changed following his ouster? Did new clans or tribes emerge as discernible power-centers within the overall tribal-military nexus?
- In your opinion, what was/is the degree of professionalism and allegiance to the state within the Yemeni/Iraqi armies?
- Can you explain the level and degree of influence of Iran within both the conventional armed forces and non-state armed actors?
- Can you describe how the theory and practice of Security Sector Governance helped/hindered the idea of 'national army' in Iraq?
- What role did cultural dissonance play in the coherent formation of Security Sector Governance?
- In what manner did Maliki/Saleh distribute economic incentives to the military and non-state actors in return for loyalty? What impact did such actions have on both unit loyalty and cohesiveness? What is the role and importance of patrimony within the Iraqi/Yemeni Army?
- What has been the conventional role of the Iraqi tribal groupings during the rule of Prime Minister Maliki and what changes manifested following the collapse of the Iraqi Army?
- What role does sectarianism play in Iran's calculus when engaging with and supporting non-state actors in Iraq and Yemen?
- Can you explain the level and degree of support provided by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iran within to actors within Iraq? How about within Yemen?
- Based on your experiences and to your knowledge, is corruption a prominent issue within the Iraqi/Yemeni militaries? If so, who or what groups benefited most from this? What is the overall impact of this practice on the military itself?
- Does sectarianism play a role in Iraqi/Yemeni political life? If so, why do you believe

- What, in your opinion allowed for the rise of militia in the wake of OIF and what has accounted for the longevity of such actors.
- Can you describe the composition of the Iraqi Army (ethnic and sectarian)? Was there a difference within the officer corps and the NCO's?
- What role or impact of have external actors had on the Iraqi military following the overthrow of President Hussein?

Political economy can you explain or describe the role of the security sector in the patronage network?

Continuation sheet YES/NO (delete as applicable)

## Section F

### **Further details**

I will use written consent-as the act of signing a paper- when applicable and ever possible. For individuals lacking proficiency in the English language, information on paper will be provided in the native tongue.

The interviewee shall be given the option to choose between remaining completely anonymous, partly anonymous (revealing diplomatic/military rank, saying that he/she is close to... or held the position of...in...) and being identified by name.

A copy of notes will only be provided upon explicit request by my interviewees in his/her native language.

As a researcher, I will abide by the European Commission's 'Data protection and privacy ethical guidelines' regarding data storage and protection.

Lastly with regards to data protection, I can affirm of my intent to destroy all data stored and collected during the research process upon the completion and award of the PhD as determined by the department and University.

**Durham University**  
**School of Government and International Affairs**

**CONSENT FORM LETTER**

Dear

The purpose of this form is to advise you of the research process and applicable ethical implications to inform your decision of participation. Any initial questions or concerns can be answered by the researcher and further concerns can be addressed to the relevant SGIA departmental personnel as provided with this document. Upon your familiarity with the text of this document and you have brought forth any questions or concerns regarding your participation, you can then provide consent for participation in the research project. If you agree, please signify consent by either signing this form or through verbal acknowledgement in the case you prefer anonymity.

Involvement and participation in the research project is entirely voluntarily and therefore you may exercise the option to withdraw from participation in the study and/or refuse to answer or respond to a question(s). The collection of the data and the answer you provide will be recorded electronically (if consented) and subsequently stored in accordance with the European Commission's "Data Protection and Privacy Ethical Guidelines" 2009. In short, the data collected will be stored electronically (flash drive) using an AES 256-bit protection for data encryption purposes and placed within a secured environment with controlled lock and access. Thereafter, all data will be uploaded to the University's secure server. In accordance with established guidelines, all information and data collected during the process of this research will be destroyed upon submission and completion of the PhD.

**Purpose of the Study**

You have been asked to participate in an interview on evolving civil-military relations in The Republics of Iraq and Yemen after the Arab Spring. Specifically, the factors precipitating the fragmentation of armies into an environment dissimilar to the conventional understanding of the 'state' and civil-military relationship. The role of patrimony, sectarianism and tribe, political economy and external actors are important aspects in understanding this environment and answering the research question of how we can understand the 'civil' component in the military nexus. The goal of the interview is to collect primary data that will present a unique piece of research resulting in the awarding of a PhD.

**Use of the Data**

As part of the data collection, information will be either summarized or quoted verbatim as a source of primary data and evidence, providing the thesis with a degree of originality and unique insight.

**Please sign below if you wish for your comments to be included in further published articles.**

.....Name (Printed)

.....Date

.....Signature

Please sign below if you consent to the electronic collection of data (recording) during the interview.

..... Name (Printed)

.....Date

..... Signature

### **Procedures for Data Collection Process**

To assist the researcher in the collection of primary data, I am requesting you participate in a personal, conversational, semi-structured interview. Upon consent, we can proceed to establish a time and place of choosing for the interview to occur. The length of the interview will be dependent on your preference and with consideration of the researcher's schedule.

In the event of follow-up questions, please signify your consent by checking the line and please understand that the same principles will apply as outlined in the consent form. ....

I agree for the interview to be transcribed. ....

### **Statement of Privacy and Confidentiality**

In any publication based on the information derived from the interview and the findings of this study, the data will contain no identifying characteristics linking you as the participant unless you explicitly and specifically request so.

Your name and contact details will be stored safely and securely on a university server, and stored separately from both transcribed and recorded information, and destroyed upon the earliest opportunity or no later than the completion of the PhD. Your information will be stored safely and securely on an encrypted device while in transit from the interview until the opportunity to be transferred to the main university server. This information will be eradicated upon the university acknowledging the completion of the PhD. In doing so, there will be no distinguishable feature of your involvement on the electronic device. All handwritten notes produced during the interview process will be stored in a locked safe in a controlled access environment and transferred to a secure data storage device.

All information obtain during the interview and any subsequent follow-up interactions will be anonymized, however, if you desire attribution and acknowledgement for your contribution and reference in-text and subsequent scholarship by the researcher, please sign here.

If so, what is your correct name and title (In Print) .....

Date.....

Signature.....

If you have any questions or concerns with the conduct of this research and the applicable ethical standards, please contact the chair of the School of Government and International Relations (SGIA) Ethics Committee Lorraine Holmes [Lorraine.holmes@durham.ac.uk](mailto:Lorraine.holmes@durham.ac.uk) and either my primary supervisor Professor Clive Jones Clive [c.a.jones@durham.ac.uk](mailto:c.a.jones@durham.ac.uk)

If you would like to be contacted in the future regarding this project and other future assignments, please sign here.....

### **Confirmation and Consent**

I can confirm that I understand the information contained within this document and I consent of my own will to participate in this research project conducted by Anthony M. Chimento. I have been brief on what my participation involves and I agree to the use of the data collected as part of my participation as described in the document. I have had the opportunity to consider the information contained within this consent form and understand my role as a participant in this research and have been afforded the opportunity to raise any questions or concerns regarding my participation which have been answered by the researcher to my satisfaction.

**Participant Signature:** .....

Name: .....

Date: .....

I confirm I agree to keep the undertakings in this contract.

**Researcher Signature:**.....

Name:.....

Date:.....

**Please ensure you keep a copy of this contractual agreement for your records and further reference.**

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Professor Ali Allawi. Skype Interview, 15 August 2017. Ali Allawi was Minister of Trade (September 2003-June 2004), Minister of Defence (April-June 2004) and Minister of Finance (April 2005-May 2006) in the Iraqi Transitional Government.

April Longley Alley. Skype Interview, 22 November 2017. April is the senior Arabian Peninsula analyst for the International Crisis Group.

Lieutenant General (Ret.) Robin Brims. In person, 2 August 2017. LTG. Brims was the Senior British Military Representative and Deputy Commanding General, Multinational Force, Iraq (2005-2008).

Ali Khedery. Skype Interview 18 June 2018. Ali Khedery was special assistant to five American Ambassadors in Iraq (2003-2009).

Adam Seitz. Skype Interview 23 April 2017. Adam is the senior research associate and instructor for Middle East Studies at the Marine Corps University.

Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Bob Newman. Skype Interview 6 September 2017. Lt. Newman is retired Foreign Area Officer with and US Military Attaché in Sana'a (1999-2002), Coalition Forces Land Component Command.

Colonel (Ret.) Bob Newman. Skype Interview 9 September 2017. Lt. Newman is retired Foreign Area Officer with and US Military Attaché in Sana'a (1999-2002), Coalition Forces Land Component Command.

Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Craig Whiteside. Skype Interview, 5 January 2018. Lt. Whiteside is a former Infantry Officer during OIF and currently associate Professor at the Naval War College Monterey, California.

Lieutenant General (Ret.) Daniel Bolger. Skype Interview. 29 September 2017. LTG. Bolger was deputy commander of the Multi-National Corps-Iraq, Commander of Coalition Military Assistance Training Team and commanding general, 1st Cavalry Division/commanding general, Multinational Division-Baghdad.

Ambassador Frances Guy. Skype Interview, 21 April 2017. Frances Guy as the British Ambassador to Yemen (2001-4).

Ambassador Feisal Istrabadi. Skype Interview, 4 April 2017. Feisal Istrabadi was a main drafter of Iraq's Transitional Administrative Law and Iraq's Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations (2004-7).

General (Ret.) George Casey Jr. Skype Interview, 17 July 2017. General Casey Jr. was Commanding General, Multi-National Forces-Iraq (2004-7) and Chief of Staff, United States Army (2007-11).

Ambassador Gerald Feierstein. Skype Interview, 8 May 2017. Gerald Feierstein was the US Ambassador to Yemen (2010-13).

Brigadier General (Ret.) Ismael Alsodani. Skype Interview, 10 April 2017. BG Alsodani is a retired officer in the Iraqi Army and was Operation Staff Officer, Deputy Chief of Staff office, Joint Headquarters (2005-7) and Iraq's Defence Attaché to Washington (2007-9).

Colonel (Ret.) Iain Smailes. Skype Interview, 19 May 2017. Col Smailes was the British Defence Attaché to Sana'a (2013-15).

Colonel (Ret.) Iain Smailes, & Nadwa al-Dawsari. Skype Interview, 12 June 2017.

Captain (Ret.) James Spencer. Skype Interview 22 March 2017. James is a retired British infantry and intelligence officer with experience in Iraq and Yemen.

Michael Pregent. Skype Interview, 13 April 2017. Michael is a former U.S. Army intelligence officer and civilian contractor with Defence Intelligence Agency in Iraq.

Noel Brehony. In Person Interview, 5 April 2017. Noel is retired British diplomat with extensive experience in Yemen.

Nadwa al-Dawsari. Skype Interview, 21 April 2017. Nadwa is a Yemen national and expert analyst with the Middle East Institute.

Major General (Ret.) Paul Eaton. Skype Interview, 30 March 2017. Paul Eaton was Commanding General of the Coalition Military Assistance Training Team in Iraq (2003-04).

Colonel (Ret.) Dr. Peter Mansoor. Skype Interview, 17 April 2017. Dr. Mansoor was the commander, 1st Brigade, 1st Armoured Division (2003-05), Executive Officer to General Petraeus (2007-08) and current Raymond E. Mason, Jr. Chair of Military History at Ohio State University.

Colonel (Ret.) Randy Rosin. Skype Interview, 25 April 2017. Senior Defence Official and Defence Attaché to the Republic of Yemen (2012-14).

Colonel (Ret.) Richard Welch. Skype Interview, 15 June 2017. Former member of the US Army Special Forces, Civil-Military Affairs Advisor Multinational Division-Baghdad (2003-05), Director, National Outreach Programs and Initiatives Multinational Division-Baghdad (2005), Chief, Reconciliation Program, United States Division-Centre, Iraq (2007-11).

Colonel (Ret.) Vincent Alcazar. In Person Interview, 14 May 2017. US Air Attaché to Iraq (2014).

Waleed al-Rwaishan. Email, 17 April 2017. Former Yemeni Diplomat in London.

Wishes to be anonymous. Email Interview, 18 November 2017. Former Public Affairs Officer with the Popular Mobilization Forces and Iraqi Ministry of Defence.

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<sup>i</sup> The British Army as of 2017 comprises around 80,000 active duty NCOs and Officers.