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Tribe and State in Post-Ba'athist Iraq

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

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Committee in charge:

Professor John Zysman, chair

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Tribe and State in Post-Ba'athist Iraq

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By Jakub Wrzesniewski

Abstract

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In 2003, an erstwhile successful state apparatus – the security party-state of Ba'athist Iraq – collapsed as a result of the US-led Operation Iraqi Freedom. The breakdown of the state apparatus was then exacerbated by early occupational policy, which swept away the foundations of both the armed forces and the civil services. As a result, Iraq was faced with a condition of near-total anarchy, as US occupational institutions proved themselves unequal to replacing the state structures they had eliminated.

That governance vacuum enabled non-state coercive actors to compete for authority in the shadow of the US occupation. In much of the country, the result was protracted, multi-sided struggle, but in al Anbar tribal leaders were able to establish themselves as the supreme authorities, carving out a tribal quasi-state in the governorate.

This dissertation examines the process of state failure and the nature of politics in the absence of stable state structures, and in doing so concludes that the institutional configuration of the non-state coercive power competitors is the crucial deciding factor separating winners from losers. In al Anbar, it was two characteristics of the tribes - their hierarchical authority, forged out of long-term historical forces, and the more recent legacy of collusion with the Ba'athist state in the two decades prior to the US-led invasion. The central government in Iraq, like the proverbial stranger in the Alps, has been buffeted by blows from all directions, with unsure governance even in its core territories, while the tribes of western Iraq have only each other as significant rivals.

The paper concludes with thoughts on generalizing this framework beyond al Anbar to the other regions of Iraq, and to other failed states.

*for TW and PW, my first and finest teachers
and
JZ, professor, mentor and friend*

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Introduction

The 2003 invasion of Iraq by US and coalition forces triggered the collapse of the Ba'athist state that had ruled the country since its seizure of power in a 1968 coup. As a result of the invasion, the Ba'athist party-state and security apparatus broke down completely, creating a security vacuum, into which the entire country was pulled.¹ In the Kurdish north, this vacuum permitted the regional government of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) to consolidate its rule over the region. Elsewhere, in areas where the Ba'athists had maintained control beyond the first Gulf War, a general breakdown in authority ensued, creating an emergent tide of anarchy which US occupational forces proved unable to master.

Al Anbar, in Sunni-dominated Western Iraq, is the largest single governorate of the country, occupying a third of its land area and containing a largely urban population of 2.5 million. There, sheikhs succeeded in exploiting traditional structures of tribal authority by organizing themselves and pooling the coercive resources at their disposal (manpower, weapons and capital) to assert their authority over the territory.² In their success, they proved capable of excluding rival claimants (the central government in Baghdad, US occupational forces, al Qaeda insurgents) to the territory, of organizing local administration over civil matters, and of negotiating with outside powers. The result was a tribal polity that operated with *de facto* sovereignty over al Anbar from at least 2006 onwards, despite the territory's formal inclusion as part of Iraq. The leadership of

¹ Iraq's descent into chaos occurred in plain sight, and has been covered extensively in a variety of media, including journalistic non-fiction (Packer, *The Assassins' Gate*), documentary film (Ferguson, *No End in Sight*), and, least vividly, academic reports (Stansfield, *Accepting Realities in Iraq*). For a valiant attempt at quantitative measurement of post-invasion upheaval, see Baker, *Iraq as a Failed State: A Six Month Progress Report*.

² A remarkable unanimity exists among all the major actors – US occupational forces, the Iraqi government, tribal leaders, even al Qaeda in Mesopotamia – on the general facts regarding the al Anbar awakening. My first-hand experiences with tribal leaders match the accounts found in McWilliams and Wheeler, *Al-Anbar Awakening*, a two-volume collection of interviews with the US and Iraqi leadership in al Anbar during the rise of the Salvation Council. A remarkably similar story is told, albeit with inverted value judgments, in *Al-Furqan's Media – Spring Of Al-Anbar #1*, a series of youtube videos compiled and uploaded onto youtube as Salafist propaganda.

tribal authority stabilized the province, allowing American occupation officials and the elected Iraqi government to reconstitute the central state sufficiently for US withdrawal in 2012.

Following the US withdrawal, much to the chagrin of both the central government in Baghdad and the United States (which had hoped for an orderly transition towards a more regular state form, with a monopoly on legitimate violence enjoyed by the central government), the tribes maintained their preeminent role in the governorate. Currently al Anbar is embroiled in a civil war between rival tribal factions with uncertain prospects for which side – Ahmed abu Risha’s Awakening Council, aligned with the central government, or Ali Hatem al Suleiman’s Tribal Revolutionaries supported by ISIS – will emerge to control the territory. (A further discussion of the current state of the conflict can be found in the conclusion.)

Successful Tribes, Failed State

The concentration of organized political authority in the hands of tribal leaders challenges a number of preconceptions concerning traditional forms of authority and the stabilization of security in post-state collapse scenarios.

First, the dramatic collapse of the Ba’athist state and the powerlessness of its residual institutions (provincial governments, local police) to play a stabilizing role in cooperation with US occupational forces challenges assumptions about the preeminence and durability of modern state structures of authority.³ Theories of modernization present the modern rationalized state as the ultimate form of political organization, superior to any traditional form in its efficiency at deploying coercion to defend its sovereignty and project power internally. Post-occupation planning on the part of the US occupation forces (though not unchallenged) relied heavily on using those existing structures of the modern Iraqi state (once purged of the Ba’athist leadership) to aid in governing the country.⁴ This proved to be a fatally flawed strategy. In fact, the cadres and institutions that ended up playing the leading roles in organizing coercion in post-conflict Iraq emerged not from inside the former state apparatus but from outside, from social groups unassociated with formal government structures.⁵

³ This perspective derives from 19th-century social science and philosophy of history, with their emphasis on progress and teleological political and social development. While among contemporary scholars there are those who evince greater skepticism about the inevitability of particular patterns of development, it is only necessary to mention Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* to note the persistent influence of convergence and modernization theory.

⁴ That is, to the extent that any serious attempts at planning were made. Fallows, *Blind Into Baghdad* argues that no real efforts were made to plan for different political or security contingencies out of political expediency and a discomfort with predictions.

⁵ After the outbreak of the insurgency, US officials identified Ibrahim Izzat al Douri, a senior security official in the Ba’athist regime, as its leader. Though he likely had some role in the insurgency, it paled in comparison to that of al Zarqawi (a Jordanian civilian, a paradigmatic “foreign fighter”) and al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, and his influence dwindled to his ancestral village. Reuters, “Iraqi Troops Close in on Saddam Ally Izzat Ibrahim Al-Douri.” More recently, he seems to have staged a revival through the unlikely vehicle of the Freemason-like Naqshabandi Order. Ford, “The Fractured Caliphate.” Nouri al Maliki and his cadres emerged from the Iran-based al Da’wa Shi’a party,

Second, traditional leaders significantly over-performed expectations in terms of their ability to compete politically, to deploy coercion against rivals, and to claim authority over their whole territory. The experience of political and social modernization elsewhere in the world has been the story of the marginalization of traditional social structures.⁶ In the West, the only conceivable analogue to tribal governance are the vestiges of the Scottish clan system, which survives exclusively as a type of cultural nostalgia, bereft of any political substantiation.⁷ Similarly, in other regions where modern states supplanted traditional forms of government — East Asia and the former Soviet Union — tribal structures were effectively marginalized, moving irrevocably from the realm of politics and society into folklore.⁸

Third, the capacity of tribal leaders to stabilize their home regions can be put forth as a potential alternative to the dominant strategies of re-establishing security under conditions of state collapse. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, US and coalition occupational forces have heavily leaned on a strategy of buttressing the security resources of the central government, increasing the number of soldiers and police at the disposal of the formal state apparatus, and inducing the central government to deploy those coercive resources against disfavored rivals (specifically al Qaeda and Taliban-linked insurgents).⁹ In other contexts, the international community has employed similar state-centric strategies for stabilizing post-conflict environments in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, etc. The case of al Anbar is one in which the involvement of international actors in stabilization is minimized; tribal leaders embedded within the local community mobilized their own resources and autonomously established security and authority over their own region. The challenges that bedevil reconstruction programs — institution building, creating stable patterns of authority, and effectively confronting insurgent groups — are circumvented by leaders working from within the local framework.¹⁰

Fourth, the success of tribal leaders in establishing their authority over the restive region is all the more remarkable given that they succeeded where other, more heavily resourced contenders failed. In the early period of the US occupation, from 2003 to 2006, US and international forces failed to establish dominance over the region, unable as they were to seal the border with Jordan and Syria or to wrest al Qaeda insurgents from inside al Anbar.¹¹ In 2006, when tribal leaders opted to displace the Islamist insurgency, they were able to dislodge al

with no experience in Iraqi politics, while the tribal leaders of al Anbar likewise emerged outside the Ba'athist party-state.

⁶ For major treatments outlining the expectations related to modernization-induced social change, see Bendix, "Tradition and Modernity Reconsidered," and Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*. For a recent multi-disciplinary, macro-historical account, Diamond, *The World Until Yesterday*. For a comparative perspective drawing similarities between development in Europe and the Near East, see al-Khafaji, *Tormented Births*.

⁷ See Devine, *Clanship to Crofter's War*. Contemporary Scottish clans are best known for their tartans.

⁸ For the Soviet case, see Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime* and Simon, *Nationalism and Policy Toward the Nationalities in the Soviet Union*. For an East Asian case, see Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*.

⁹ Fallows, "Why Iraq Has No Army."

¹⁰ Scott, *Seeing like a State*. The entire final chapter address this issue directly.

¹¹ Filkins, "7 Marines Killed in Iraq." For an illustration of weak US intelligence in the area, see Fisher, "Dispute Rages Over Attack That Killed 40 In Iraq Village."

Qaeda in Mesopotamia from its entrenched position in the province and drive them from the region entirely, decapitating the organization's leadership and displacing its remnants into Maysan province, Mosul, and other, more distant parts of Iraq.¹²

Finally, the success of the tribal quasi-state in al Anbar was remarkable in that its political formation successfully competed in a system based on modern, territorial, internationally-recognized nation-states without being such a structure. The political claims and the identity put forth by tribal leaders were based on their traditional role in the region, and never organized into a modern-style counter-state claiming regional autonomy, official sovereignty, and recognition by the international community. Despite its highly idiosyncratic origins and *modus operandi*, the al Anbar quasi-state proved capable of resisting the pressure of the central government for incorporation and of dealing directly with international actors such as the United States.

Taken together, these characteristics are unique in recent political development and designate the case of al Anbar as distinctive. At a time when increasing attention is being placed on the phenomenon of state collapse and on strategies for dealing with the aftermath of state failure, al Anbar takes on major significance at the intersection of comparative politics and international relations.

Accounting for Tribal Success

Given the remarkable success of the tribal leaders in al Anbar, it follows to examine the characteristics of the tribes and the greater political circumstances that allowed them to play such a significant role. Two key features of modern Iraqi tribalism that enabled tribal sheikhs to convert their social capital and traditional status into effective political control over the region reflect patterns of power in late Ba'athist Iraq: their internal power structure and a history of tribe-state collusion.

First, the patterns of power internal to tribes are hierarchical. This applies both to power within each tribe — with tribesmen willing to accept orders from sheikhs — and between the component clans, sub-tribes and tribes as they amalgamate into larger tribal units, culminating in sizeable confederations such as the Shammar or the Dulaym. This stands in stark contrast to both the observed experience with tribal leaders in other parts of the world (Afghanistan and DR Congo being two diverse examples)¹³ and even with the history of Arab tribes themselves.¹⁴ In conditions of state breakdown, hierarchy within the tribe is absolutely crucial to its effectiveness as a political force; tribal leaders must have enough authority over their tribesmen to organize them into militia units willing to stand their ground in battle, and this provides the mechanism by which traditional status is converted to coercive force.

The second major factor that gives tribal leaders in al Anbar the capacity to effectively deploy coercive force and claim authority over their territory has to do with the legacy of the

¹² Burns, "Showcase and Chimera in the Desert."

¹³ Barfield, *Afghanistan*, Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, *African Political Systems*.

¹⁴ ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*.

patterns of power between social groups and larger institutions in Ba'athist Iraq. Following first the Iran-Iraq war, and taken to a logical conclusion after his disastrous defeat in Operation Desert Storm, Saddam Hussein fundamentally reorganized the structure of authority within the Ba'athist state.¹⁵ The state had originally been organized along Stalinist-totalitarian lines as a party-state with a dedicated security apparatus deploying terror against the broader population.¹⁶ While this proved highly effective in securing the power of the Ba'ath against internal rivals and conspiratorial coups in the period from 1968 to 1980, the Iran-Iraq War placed extreme stress on the security apparatus, costing the regime a significant portion of its most able cadres and its economic base. This political stress was exacerbated in the aftermath of the conflict by the demands of the Kuwaiti government for repayment of the crippling war debts it had extended to Iraq.

Beginning in this period, and culminating in the 1990s after the second catastrophe of Operation Desert Storm, the Ba'athist government shifted from a policy of totalitarian control from above to one of channeling diminished state resources through tribal leaders in order to exert state domination through traditional hierarchies.¹⁷ This legacy of state-tribe collusion in dominating Iraqi society had far-reaching consequences for tribal Iraqis. While the shift from the internal egalitarianism traditionally associated with Arab tribalism to modern hierarchical patterns of internal governance had been long established by the late Ba'athist period, the infusion of resources from the central state helped to decisively establish sheik rule. Additionally, the central state's recognition of tribal sheikh power — both symbolically (through prominence in media and the support of scholarship on tribal history) and substantively (through the official recognition of traditional tribal justice and registration of tribal identity) — contributed to sheikh rule over their tribesmen by legitimating their power to compel and discipline, and to issue orders with the expectation of compliance.¹⁸ Further, while consolidating the power of the sheikhs, it also broadened their exposure to new techniques and technologies of power. Through continual and regularized interaction with a modern state apparatus (however degraded the late Ba'athist state may have been by the mid-1990s, it was still governed through a modern state apparatus) tribal leaders became familiarized with the operation of modern governing institutions, institutions that they had been frozen out of since the overthrow of the monarchy in 1958. The skills developed in negotiating with Ba'athist officialdom were immediately transferable to confrontations with other modern state structures in the post-collapse period. Further, these encounters with modern political bureaucracies transferred some of the organizational patterns and techniques into the command repertoire of the tribal leaders. Improved forms of record-keeping, communication, and management were adapted by tribal leaders, substantially augmenting their traditional authority with a firmer practical hold over their followers.

This legacy applies equally to economic affairs: as an inducement to cooperate with the new Ba'athist policy of control through tribal leaders, contracts from the central government were

¹⁵ Baram, "Neo-Tribalism in Iraq."

¹⁶ Makiya, *Republic of Fear*. See also Bowden, "Tales of the Tyrant."

¹⁷ Jabar, "Shaykhs and Ideologues."

¹⁸ Baram, "Neo-Tribalism in Iraq"; Jabar, "Shaykhs and Ideologues."

channeled through companies owned by tribal leaders. More than just a means of delivering patronage to a politically crucial set of actors, the companies so formed created an opportunity for sheikhs to pass on largess to their own tribesmen — they could claim credit for the jobs created. Also, sheikhs in the border regions, and most of all, al Anbar, benefited from officially permitted smuggling routes into Syria and Jordan.¹⁹ The crippling sanctions under which the Iraqi economy languished created a vast pent-up demand for consumer goods. Any goods brought into the country commanded a substantial premium. Smuggling thus provided the sheikhs of al Anbar with even more substantial economic resources to distribute: the proceeds from smuggling as well as the goods themselves, which would be otherwise unavailable. Smuggling also provided sheikhs with the opportunity to forge links with foreign countries, and operate both inside and outside of the Iraqi Ba’athist state. This connection was to prove a crucial strategic advantage, as Amman, Jordan served as a key safe haven during the most turbulent period of insurgency where sheiks could plan, organize, meet and collect resources.²⁰

One final, though by no means marginal, positive effect of state-tribe collusion on the capacity of tribes to establish authority over their territory in the wake of state collapse was the exposure of significant numbers of tribesmen to military training through the preferential recruitment of entire units for the elite forces (the Republican Guard and the Special Republican Guard) of Ba’athist Iraq.²¹ This policy was in effect prior to the broader neo-tribalism pioneered in the 1990s and created a deep reservoir of capable fighters tied to tribal leaders in al Anbar. A secondary effect of this preferential recruitment was the access to weapons — including heavy weapons — that came with a high level of military participation by tribesmen. The infamous American failure to secure ammo dumps and military installations in the wake of Operation Iraqi Freedom was most favorable to groups such as the al Anbar tribes, which included in their memberships large numbers of former military officers and rank-and-file soldiers who would have access to those installations.²² Further, the control over smuggling exerted by the tribes in a region awash in arms from various sources allowed for easy resupply in the case of dwindling ammunition or weapons stocks.

It was these two patterns of authority prior to the collapse of the Ba’athist state — the hierarchical authority within the tribe, and a legacy of tribe-state collusion — which accounts for the remarkable success of the sheikhs of al Anbar in establishing their authority over their home region.

In the study that follows, I examine the ways in which these two factors came about in the al Anbar tribal system, and how they translated into the establishment of formalized, territorially-bounded tribal authority over civil administration and external relations — a quasi-state. The study will be divided into theoretical and empirical sections.

¹⁹ Todd, *Iraq Tribal Study: Al Anbar Governorate*.

²⁰ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

²¹ Jabar, “Shaykhs and Ideologues”; Jabar, “Chapter 6”; Baram, “Neo-Tribalism in Iraq.”

²² Dodge, “Chapter One.”

Tribe and State

The emergence of the tribal quasi-state in al Anbar intersects with a number of major debates and sub-currents in contemporary political science, and it is important to situate it in the context of the field.

First, there is a burgeoning body of literature on state weakness, failure, and collapse, which relates directly to the Iraqi case. This literature is extremely diverse, with contributions not only from different disciplines but from international organizations and the NGO community, each with and different methodological approaches and conceptual definitions.²³ As a result, it will be necessary to define specifically what is understood by state-ness. One of the most visible contributions to the study of state failure is the annual Foreign Policy/Fund for Peace Failed States Index, which rates state fragility through measures that include a substantial degree of popular accountability and service provision.²⁴ The desirability of both notwithstanding, this amounts to a departure from a traditional Weberian understanding of state-ness, which prioritizes the ability to monopolize legitimate violence over a territory in order effectively to administer it. In parsing this literature, my goal will be to defend that definition of state-ness and demonstrate how it applies in the case of the al Anbar quasi-state.

A related body of literature taken from international relations scholarship concerns the character of the international state system through the study of diplomacy, international organizations, and modernization theory. The contemporary operation of contemporary states in the international environment is historically unprecedented.²⁵ In the aftermath of World War II, the victorious allies shored up a framework for international relations based on territorial sovereignty, international recognition and membership in international institutions. This was reinforced by a symbolic modernist vocabulary of statehood – the nomenclature of government, the scope of state activity, and the existence of certain national businesses and institutions (most notably airlines) were all adjusted to conform to the tacit modernist expectations of an international diplomatic audience. This international system proved remarkably robust through the Cold War period and decolonization, but it faces considerable pressure in the contemporary setting.²⁶ The states recognized as sovereign by the international system frequently are unable to effectuate that sovereignty, while powers that effectively operate within the respective territories of internationally recognized states are frozen from access to regular channels of international traffic and diplomacy. This explains the status of the tribal polity in al Anbar – a regional, territorial authority, but with neither the status nor recognition of a state nor a separatist project for a state-in-waiting.

Another body of work examines the problem of state-ness by inverting the perspective: rather than look at states as they collapse, it examines the variegated actors that rise up in the condition of post-state anarchy to contest for political authority. This is a relatively new body of

²³ Milliken and Krause, “State Failure, State Collapse, and State Reconstruction.”

²⁴ “The 2012 Failed States Index – Interactive Map and Rankings.”

²⁵ Ruggie, “International Regimes, Transactions, and Change.”

²⁶ Jackson, *Quasi-States*.

literature, but the Crisis States Research Centre at the London School of Economics has produced a significant volume of new empirical research in this direction.²⁷ This work examines sub-state actors such as warlords, tribal leaders, guerilla fighters, narco-traffickers and other unconventional violent challengers for political supremacy.²⁸ My goal in examining this literature is both to help determine which characteristics of the al Anbar tribes make them a capable political force and to compare the tribes against other types of organizations competing for influence. This analysis helps to clarify why, for instance, tribal governance proved effective and the al Anbar Salvation Council generated a quasi-state while al Qaeda governance floundered and the Islamic State of Iraq never materialized.

Related to this body of work is the literature of insurgency and counter-insurgency coming out of defense studies.²⁹ Ultimately the generation of state-like patterns of power rests on success in violent confrontation: in short, warfare. The insights of counter-insurgency scholars on the relative strengths and weaknesses of different configurations of insurgent forces and violent challenges to organized armed forces prove quite valuable.³⁰ Similarly, the literature on civilian and humanitarian post-conflict reconstruction applies both in its assessments of the challenges of post-conflict and post-state collapse environments and in its revelations regarding the constraints and expectations imposed by international agencies.³¹ In both counter-insurgency and reconstruction literatures, the emphasis is on working through, empowering, and (when necessary) resuscitating the institutions of the central government. The case of al Anbar stands in stark contrast. Why were local traditional leaders capable of achieving what an internationally-backed central state apparatus could not? My contention is that two crucial characteristics of the Anbari tribes — their internal *hierarchy* of authority and their empowerment through late Ba’athist *tribe-state collusion* — helped to determine their success in the competition for political dominance that followed Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003.

The Empirical Case: al Anbar

In the section examining the case of al Anbar in detail, my argument relies on my experience as a participant-observer working on tribal engagement for a US Department of Defense project. I combine information drawn from my work there, including interviews conducted with tribal leaders and US personnel, with publicly available accounts from Iraqi tribal, US military, and Arab and Western journalistic sources. The Iraq War is perhaps the best covered major conflict in history, with the various sides pushing information into the public record not only through traditional media channels (through embedding, leaks, interviews, etc.) but also through new

²⁷ Giustozzi, *The Art of Coercion*.

²⁸ Sanin, “Criminal Rebels? A Discussion of War and Criminality from the Colombian Experience”; Ibrahimi, *Hazarajat 1979-1984*; Giustozzi, *Genesis of a “Prince”: The Rise of Ismail Khan in Western Afghanistan, 1979-1992*.

²⁹ Army and Corps, *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*; Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*.

³⁰ Mackinlay, *Globalisation and Insurgency*.

³¹ Montgomery and Rondinelli, *Beyond Reconstruction in Afghanistan*.

media and online sources. While maintaining a critical perspective on sourcing, I draw from a wide variety of material to inform my discussion of al Anbar. In addition to contemporary sources, I use both contemporary histories of the region and a selection of primary material.

My discussion of al Anbar proceeds in three parts:

Overview: al Anbar and the Salvation Council

Al Anbar has gained a certain notoriety as a result of the fierce insurgency against US forces there from 2003 to 2006 and from the remarkable subsequent stabilization following the emergence of the Salvation Council, but the region is remote and little-known as anything but a cauldron of irregular warfare. As a result, a certain amount of factual throat-clearing is necessary in order to introduce the basic facts concerning the province and its tribal leadership. This section includes a description of the geography of the territory, a sketch of its recent history, and a brief overview of its economy and demographics. This section also includes an account of the tribes inhabiting the territory, with the extant information regarding their geographic disposition, size, and leadership. This section concludes with an overview of the al Anbar Salvation Council in both its 2006-7 emergence and in its subsequent transformations. In addition to the key personalities, the key moments in the emergence of tribal power will also be introduced. The connections between tribal leaders and local power in al Anbar will be laid out with attention to their control over the key aspects of al Anbar's internal governance, especially security, border control, and economic administration.

Having demonstrated that, indeed, the tribal state in al Anbar continues to function, the following sections will attempt to account for the success enjoyed by the sheikhs by examining the two key characteristics of Anbari tribes — the hierarchy of authority within the institution of the tribe, and the short-term legacy of tribe-state collusion, which left the sheikhs of al Anbar comparatively empowered as the state faltered and fell around them.

The Longue Durée: Hierarchy in Tribal Institutions

Arab tribes have been present in the Middle East since pre-historic times. Their antiquity, indeed their seeming *permanence*, has tempted observers to ascribe to them a primordial quality, as though the current configuration of particular tribes and the system of authority within those tribes were a foundational and unchanging characteristic of Arab societies. The tone of commentators suggests that the ability of sheikhs effectively to muster and command their followers was simply an intrinsic social fact. In reality, the durability of tribal structures has as much to do with their adaptability to changing circumstances as to any connection to a distant Arab heritage, and tribes have been continually changing throughout recorded history, both through the replacement of certain tribes with others and, more interestingly for our purposes, through the evolution of institutional structures within tribes. This evolution reflects changing circumstances and shifting opportunities resulting in changing relations between states, sheikhs and tribesmen.

Indeed, classical descriptions of Arab tribesmen emphasized the democratic and egalitarian nature of the tribe, with sheikhs at great pains to preserve a minimum of preeminence among

their followers. Their status was closer to *primus inter pares* than to monarch or lord. As late as the early 20th century, British observers remarked on the constant diplomacy – including flattery, persuasion, and outright bribery – necessary to keep the Sharif of Mecca’s Arab army in the field.³² The emergence of hierarchy within the tribes resulting in the type of authority that has legitimated sheikhs to issue commands – up to and including orders to stand-and-fight against formidable odds and with little chance of booty – represents a relatively recent phenomenon. This transformation was triggered by the shift from nomadism to settlement and catalyzed by technological change and the experience of modern warfare in the 20th century. This section will trace the institutional change in the operation of tribal authority, outlining the shift from tribal egalitarianism to hierarchy.

The Recent Past: Tribe-State Collusion in Ba’athist Iraq

Ba’athism conceived of itself as a modernizing socialist form of Arab nationalism. Its program for the transformation of traditional Iraq involved the creation of a Soviet-style party-state, with all social institutions – mosques, tribes, families, unions, schools – subsumed by state structures. The professed initial attitude of the Ba’athist regime towards the tribal character of large segments of the Iraqi population was hostile – tribalism, along with sectarianism and superstition, was identified as a reactionary atavism, which would be undone in the course of societal modernization.

In practice, the central echelons of the Ba’ath party came to rely on their own network of tribal loyalties and familial connections in order to staff the most sensitive sections of the burgeoning party staff and security apparatus. A clandestine organization with a tiny membership prior to assuming power, the Ba’ath had no substantial following in Iraqi society, and the traditional institutions – Arab and Kurdish tribes, Shi’a religious centers, the commercial class of Baghdad and Basrah – were not sympathetic to the party’s rule. This isolation provoked an early reliance on social connections in order to preserve regime security, but as the circle expanded beyond the *alte kampfer* of the Qasim period, Ahmed Hassan al Bakr, head of both party and state, and his better-known nephew Saddam Hussein took to recruiting cadres connected to them through tribal channels. This practice, though pervasive, remained unofficial until the Iran-Iraq War. The strain of that conflict on the Ba’athist party-state was so great that it could no longer maintain a totalitarian monopoly over national life; as tribal volunteers demonstrated loyalty to Iraq, the official stance towards tribes softened. In exchange for loyalty – which was enforced through occasional collective punishment – the Ba’athist regime publicly recognized the status and traditional authority of sheikhs over their tribesmen and provided subsidies, jobs, and other inducements to the most cooperative tribal leaders. While some tribes began to benefit for the first time (such as those in the Shi’a south which had been traditionally frozen out of positions of influence for fear of sectarian loyalties), great gains accrued to the Sunni tribes of central and western Iraq, including those in al Anbar, where *sub rosa* tribal recruitment into the security apparatus came out into the open, and overt support to the tribal sheikhs became more generous.

³² Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

This was one durable legacy of Ba'athism: the experience of participating in the heart of the Iraqi security state familiarized the Anbari sheikhs with effective organizational techniques and left behind a sizeable cohort of well-trained and well-armed tribal veterans. In the street-to-street, intimately local fighting that determined control over al Anbar, this resourcing and staffing advantage proved decisive for the tribal leaders.

Beyond al Anbar

The developments in al Anbar have repercussions far beyond the limits of the governorate. The success of the sheikhs of the al Anbar Salvation Council demonstrated that, in the wake of state collapse, mobilization by domestic social institutions to re-establish order over a territory is possible, and their success in competition with al Qaeda in Iraq as well as US occupational forces demonstrates that such institutions enjoy advantages over better-resourced rivals in the post-state-collapse environment.

This study attempts to account for that success by examining two characteristics causally related to the performance of Anbari tribes in coercive competition — the long-run legacy of tribal *hierarchy*, emerging from the particular history of Iraqi tribes, and the shorter-run legacy of *tribe-state collusion*. Hierarchy within the tribe allowed sheikhs to issue orders, up to and including orders to stand-and-fight against great odds, to their tribesmen with the expectation of their being carried out. This is not a trivial consideration in small-scale, irregular warfare, in which decisive confrontations are few and often determined by competence and morale more than by pure number or available resources.

In the period immediately prior to US operations in 2003, the Ba'athist security apparatus sought to co-opt the sheikhs of Iraq, lavishing them with resources, public recognition, placements for their members in the security services and autonomy. As a result, tribal leaders, and the sheikhs of al Anbar in particular, enjoyed a considerable advantage going in to general struggle for political power triggered by the US invasion. These two factors enhanced one another: tribal hierarchy provided the institutional backbone to tribal authority, while pre-war coordination with the state left the sheikhs more practically empowered than virtually any other domestic social actor.

I end this study with an attempt to draw some general conclusions. Lessons can be applied from al Anbar directly to the examination of other tribal systems in crisis states. In other tribal systems, do leaders enjoy hierarchical authority over their subordinates? Which social groups in particular enter the post-collapse free-for-all empowered and which disadvantaged? Applying these frameworks to other anarchic environments helps make sense of multi-sided, multi-dimensional conflicts and helps generate an accurate perspective on the coercive potential that actors based in different social institutions can muster. Towards that end, I conclude with a few observations about the applicability of such a framework to some of the more prominent contemporary failed states — Yemen, Somalia, Congo, and Afghanistan/Pakistan.

In addition to understanding the distribution of forces in post-collapse environments, the research develops insights into the relationship between emergent forms of post-conflict order and the system of international relations. This development represents a challenge for the

international order. The state system has functioned since the end of the Second World War as a network of sovereign, territorially exclusive nation-states linked by mutual recognition through a common diplomatic language and international organizations. The emergence of political centers of power outside of recognized political boundaries and in the form of traditional social institutions rather than formal governments complicates the exercise of conventional international relations and points to the limitations of the existing state system.

Apart from patterning the way in which policy elites understand international relations, the poor fit between the state system and power structures such as the al Anbar Salvation Councils have significant ramifications for the way in which reconstruction programs are carried out. Currently there is a dominant assumption that humanitarian and security goals can best be achieved by resuscitating and re-establishing formal state structures in accordance with international “best practices,” usually derived from success stories favored by dominant intervening powers. The case of al Anbar suggests an alternative, in which security and humanitarian objectives are achieved by bolstering the capacity of indigenous institutions that have already demonstrated the ability to command authority over their home territory. This also reveals a stark and consequential choice faced by reconstruction planners, since supporting established local powers and building up a new central government are largely conflicting priorities.

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Part I

Chapter 1: State

This chapter focuses on the problem of state failure and the way people think about it. Its main argument is that outside actors operating in the aftermath of state collapse pursue only a limited range of options because of the way they think. These actors, I contend, are embedded in a community whose members share unspoken assumptions about the nature of the state and the problem of political order. I begin by noting the existence of an epistemic community³³ that I call the “state-failure community”: a collection of Westerners professionally concerned with state failure and state reconstruction. The state-failure community includes policy makers, military officers, representatives of multilateral organizations and NGOs, academics and think-tank affiliates, government contractors and development consultants, and journalists. I then describe a set of beliefs called the “dominant paradigm”: ideas about what states are and what they should be. The dominant paradigm is hegemonic³⁴ among members of the state-failure community, and indeed among many members of Western publics at large: its principles seem so obvious to those who believe in them that they are taken for granted and invisible. Next, I briefly discuss the intellectual history of the dominant paradigm, explaining how it became dominant. Finally, I conclude by explaining the effects of the dominant paradigm in the case of Iraq. I argue that it significantly delayed and complicated Coalition forces’ partnership with the tribal leaders of al Anbar because the dominant paradigm cannot conceive of tribal leaders operating outside the central state as legitimate nodes of coercive power that can be entrusted with governance and pacification.

³³ Adler and Haas, “Conclusion.”

³⁴ Gramsci, *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. For a detailed discussion of the concept of hegemony in International Relations, see Cox, “Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations.”

The Dominant Paradigm

Below, I introduce what I consider to be the dominant frame of reference in international relations and policy circles (as well as with the broader informed public) for political development and power relations.

How Do State-Failure Specialists Think?

Theorists from fields such as international relations and political sociology have offered many nuanced ontologies of the state. Realists and neorealists,³⁵ for example, argue that states are self-interested rational actors. Liberals and liberal internationalists have faith in the ability of states individually and collectively to improve human conditions. Meanwhile, various schools of post-positivists criticize these positions as billiard-ball ontologies of the state and mechanistic accounts of state action. They focus instead on the way state managers view the world (constructivism)³⁶ or on the transnational primacy of capitalist class interests over the unitary agency of states (Marxist IR).

Stepping off the shoulders of these giants, however, it is worth asking how the actors actually grappling with state failure understand the state. These actors include policy makers, military strategists, and educated laymen. In this section, I describe a “dominant paradigm”: the way that the majority of these actors discuss and understand the ontology of the state and the nature of the international state system. I identify the tacit everyday assumptions that underpin the way they think about political order — what it is, where it comes from and how it operates. This dominant paradigm is important because its tacit assumptions structure Western responses to state failure. In particular, I show how basic assumptions about the nature of the Iraqi state led to an unwillingness among American policy makers and Coalition commanders to engage Iraqi tribal leaders as potential allies in the fight against al Qaeda in 2005–2008. Western leaders’ and commanders’ assumptions not only made them disinclined to engage with tribal leaders, but in fact made those tribal leaders’ political agency illegible. Despite being in desperate circumstances and faced with a growing al Qaeda insurgency, it was very difficult for Coalition leaders to think seriously about tribal leaders as potential pacifiers. The dominant paradigm presented tribal leaders with coercive power autonomous from the state inherently as a problem for security, not a potential part of the solution.

State-Failure Experts Form an Epistemic Community

The issue of state failure and reconstruction has generated an epistemic community — a group of practitioners defined by their expertise, professionalism and shared cognitive frameworks, following the definition of Peter Haas³⁷ —that we can call the “state-failure community.” I define

³⁵ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*. For a discussion about the major currents in international relations, see Keohane, *Neorealism and Its Critics*.

³⁶ Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (*Cambridge Studies in International Relations*, 67).

³⁷ Adler and Haas, “Conclusion.”

members of the state-failure community as people with two characteristics: (1) they come from outside the population and territory governed (or once governed) by a failing state; yet (2) they nonetheless have a stake or interest — whether professional, financial, political, or ideological — in the restoration of a functioning central state there; and (3) they have a substantial effect on the way efforts at state reconstruction proceed. In the case of post-Ba‘athist Iraq, for example, Iraqis living through state failure itself are not part of the epistemic state-failure community because they are not outsiders. Instead, the community includes people coming or leading from abroad, all of whom work to address and analyze state failure: peak policy makers (including US secretaries of state and their Western equivalents), military officers, staffers at all levels of international organizations, policy specialists and area specialists at NGOs and think tanks, academics interested in state failure, contractors and development consultants, and journalists specializing in conflict areas. However, membership excludes dedicated theorists of international relations and comparative politics.

Members of this epistemic community share a set of assumptions for making sense of state failure: the “dominant paradigm.” This dominant paradigm centers on notions of progress, state sovereignty and the exclusive sovereignty of states, humanitarian obligations, and a specific model of the modern nation-state. It concerns political power, stateness, and international intervention. Below, I describe the dominant paradigm. Its assumptions are so basic as to be hegemonic: ubiquitous, invisible, and taken-for-granted. In other words, they are narratives, cognitive frames, and analytical tools *through which* members think and talk about politics, peace, and security. They are built into the definitions and concepts members every day to make sense of the world.

The dominant paradigm asserts that:

- *States emerge to guarantee order.* The smallest human collectivities are bands of hunter-gatherers, with every member known to every other. Societies above a certain level of population can no longer rely on personal connections and social mores in order to preserve stability.³⁸ They require regular rules and procedures to ensure their material well-being, and some way to guarantee social order among interacting strangers. As a result, authoritative institutions emerge to manage collective life, led by political leaders claiming a monopoly on legitimate coercion.
- *States are the apotheosis of political development.* While in the past there may have been a diversity of institutions claiming ultimate authority and willing to deploy coercion to enforce that authority, over time the nation-state emerged as the most effective and ultimately highest such institution,³⁹ with an exclusive monopoly on the legitimate use of force over its people. To quote Max Weber, something is “a ‘state’ if and insofar as its

³⁸ These concepts are derived from classical 19th-century social science, and synthesized perhaps most elegantly by Talcott Parsons, “Evolutionary Universals in Society.” A contemporary presentation of these ideas is offered in the introduction to Diamond, *The World Until Yesterday*.

³⁹ Hegel, *Hegel*. For a more recent revival of this notion, see Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*.

administrative staff successfully upholds a claim on the 'monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force.'"⁴⁰

- *States are always sovereign*: Nation-states are sovereign, in the sense that they recognize no higher authority which can legitimately compel them to act against their will,⁴¹ though they may be constrained by the military or economic power of other states.
- *States are defined territorially*: Nation-states are defined by the territory they lay claim over, with frontiers marking the authority of one state ends and the authority of another begins. Since states are the most effective institutions in claiming authority and projecting power, all territory on Earth now is encompassed by nation-states. While sometimes claims overlap, effectively every square meter of ground is under the governance of one and no more than one state.⁴²
- *States maintain order*: On territory claimed by a nation-state, the security institutions of that state (armed forces, police, judiciaries, etc.) maintain general order and stability.⁴³
- *States have a reciprocal obligation with the people they govern*: The relationship between the people governed by nation-states and the states themselves is one of reciprocal obligation. A variety of metaphors are used to convey this reality. It is sometimes describe as a social contract among citizens,⁴⁴ sometimes as a service provider-client relationship.⁴⁵ The purest political manifestation of this reciprocal relationship is the practice of electoral democracy.
- *An interstate system maintains order among states*: Locally, order is maintained by the relationship between a people and the nation-state governing them; globally, it is maintained through the interaction – sometimes cooperative, sometimes conflictual – between different nation-states.⁴⁶
- *States are durable*: With the exception of unusual circumstances such as the dissolution of empires, states are supposed to be long-lasting. A proper state predates it current citizens and will long outlive them as well.

⁴⁰ Weber, *Economy and Society*.

⁴¹ In practice, the supremacy of sovereignty has been mitigated by appeals to universal values and to systemic rules embedded in the international economic order. Nevertheless, even those measures are justified through the consent and participation of states in international regimes.

⁴² A notable exception might be the uninhabited continent of Antarctica, which nevertheless is under a complicated regime of overlapping claims. Should climate change progress far enough to make the area economically valuable, we shall see if even this limited halfway house in the international order will last.

⁴³ Fukuyama, "‘Stateness’ First."

⁴⁴ Locke and Shapiro, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*.

⁴⁵ Rotberg, *When States Fail*. See also "The 2012 Failed States Index - Interactive Map and Rankings."

⁴⁶ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*.

Why Is the Dominant Paradigm Dominant?

The simplest reason that the dominant paradigm is so common in the state-failure community is that it is common among the general public. But why is it dominant among the public? The dominant paradigm enjoys wide currency for four reasons: its assumptions are convincing, exclusive of alternatives, useful to policy makers, and often beneficial to society. Below, I explain what this means.

The dominant paradigm provides a *convincing* account of the emergence of the modern nation-state. It is an abstraction and a simplification of the history of the state, but that abstractness and simplicity make it all the more convincing. The dominant paradigm is a simplifying lens: it makes power relations look simpler and produces simple metrics against which a state's progress can be measured. It is a paradigm in the Kuhnian sense,⁴⁷ providing a widely-held, functionalist model of the development of political institutions, in which practical requirements of social organization prompt the development of increasingly specialized and sophisticated practices and institutions. Such accounts are presented as established fact to general audiences, such as in Jared Diamond's recent *The World Until Yesterday*: large populations (over ten thousand inhabitants)

already suffice to tell us how states have to feed themselves, how they have to be organized, and why they exist at all ... The state's large population also guarantees that most people within a state are strangers to each other ... Hence states need police, laws, and codes of morality to ensure that the inevitable constant encounters between strangers don't routinely explode into fights. ... Finally, once a society tops 10,000 people, it's impossible to reach, execute, and administer decisions by having all citizens sit down for a face-to-face discussion in which everyone speaks his or her mind. Large populations can't function without leaders who make the decisions, executives who carry out the decisions, and bureaucrats who administer the decisions and laws.⁴⁸

To this cognitive foundation, derived partly from Weber and the broader 19th-century classical social science and later perfected by Talcott Parsons in the United States, can be added the Darwinian imperative created by security competition.⁴⁹ War and conquest have taken particularly efficient models of state structure and spread them globally. So it is no accident that the general public, and members of the state-failure community, find political explanations expressed in the language of the dominant paradigm to be convincing.

The dominant paradigm is *exclusive* in that it precludes the possibility of imagining the world through alternative paradigms. It rigidly establishes the modern nation-state, with its monopoly on legitimate violence, as the telos of political development. As a result, it delegitimizes other nodes of coercive power in society. The only exception is if those alternative nodes are "legitimate revolutionaries" — entities that are themselves vying to establish or take

⁴⁷ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

⁴⁸ Diamond, *The World Until Yesterday*, 16.

⁴⁹ Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime." Also Centeno, *Blood and Debt*.

over the state itself, but that *also buy into the dominant paradigm*. Hence transnational Islamist revolutionaries, such as al Qaeda members, are not considered legitimate revolutionaries because they do not accept ideas such as an international order of sovereign, territorially bounded states. For political agents from outside, such as members of the state-failure apparatus, interacting with anything other than a state or with legitimate revolutionaries is frowned upon. Such interaction, as with tribal potentates, may be acceptable if necessary, but only after attempts to interact with states or legitimate revolutionaries have exhausted themselves, and only on a provisional and temporary basis.

The dominant paradigm is *useful* to policy makers, political leaders, state bureaucracies, and academics because it make power arrangements legible.⁵⁰ Its concepts of territoriality and sovereignty allow states managers to assign custodianship of regions and populations clearly. This makes political administration easier rather than navigating a tangle of informal societal power relationships. This can have very significant consequences: in his State of the Union address following is 2002, George W. Bush pivoted from a focus on al Qaeda itself to the so-called “Axis of Evil” states, partly as a means of defining adversaries that fit into conventional security policy frameworks,⁵¹ while Henry Kissinger was notoriously dismissive of the notion of a transnational Europe as a political actor with his quip about not having a phone number to dial to speak with Europe.⁵²

Finally, the dominant paradigm is often *beneficial to society* because it reinforces the expectation that states will evolve, continually providing more and better services for citizens. The idea of states’ responsibility to their citizens establishes a cause-effect relationship. Ideally, this provokes change in the direction of greater social welfare, greater security, more responsive government, economic growth, and other collective goods. Thus there is a progressive, Hegelian dimension to the orthodoxy.⁵³ According to the dominant paradigm, states first emerge to establish a monopoly on legitimate coercion, eliminating the coercive capacity of rival institutions and establishing general order. As states become better at organizing their populations, they also become better at *serving* those populations, providing more and higher-quality public goods.⁵⁴ They develop a more reciprocal and more representative relationship with their populations, who transform from subject-slaves into citizen-clients. The culmination of this process is the introduction and entrenchment of electoral democracy and the “delivery” of first-rate services such as policing, national defense, education, health services, and infrastructure. This evolutionary narrative acts as a Gramscian hegemonic discourse, creating the parameters and the vocabulary for discussing security, both in policy circles and to the general public.⁵⁵ For the most part, these ideas function well. They provide an historically-grounded account of the rise of states

⁵⁰ Scott, *Seeing like a State*.

⁵¹ Bush, “George Walker Bush’s Second State of the Union Address.”

⁵² “SPIEGEL Interview with Henry Kissinger.”

⁵³ Hegel, *Hegel*.

⁵⁴ Fukuyama, *State-Building*.

⁵⁵ Among academics this perspective is less dominant, with both a significant debate around the assumption of progress and an awareness of the coercive potential and increasing power of non-state actors.

as peak political institutions, as well as an aspirational blueprint for how states should operate in order to provide optimum stability and services. They indicate relationships of authority and responsibility which underpin the institutions of international relations.

Origins of the Dominant Paradigm

The Dominant Paradigm as a Reflection of the History of Political Order in Western Europe

If the ideas and concepts underpinning what I call the dominant paradigm are inadequate for understanding cases of state failure, why do they remain the framework so often applied? Indeed, why is the dominant paradigm so dominant, if it is flawed? How did these ideas come to be taken for granted among the community of specialists dedicated to working on issues of state failure and reconstruction?

The power of these ideas rests in their ability to make sense of the political dynamics of the developed world and to explain the course of political evolution in the West. This, unfortunately, is also the source of their limitations – the conclusions derived from the Western experience and the paradigm that so well captures the functioning of the modern international system become social scientific laws of development rather than the highly contingent, historically patterned phenomena representing only one of many possible configurations of authority. Below, I try to trace out a short profile first of political development in the West and then of the dominant strains of thought about it, to illustrate where the dominant paradigm comes from and how it emerged out of the 19th and 20th-century project of rationalizing and scientizing political development.

To begin, it is useful to realize that the nation-state – currently the exclusive institution to enjoy formal sovereignty and, in theory, the universal form of political organization across the globe – is not an eternal institution, but rather one formed step-wise and piecemeal out of confused and conflictual political environment. As late as the early 17th century, even in the heart of Europe, the territorially-based nation-state as a political model was merely one of many different types of polities, its eventual dominance far from a foregone conclusion. The emergent nation-states in Western and Northern Europe contended against episcopal principalities, armed religious orders, merchant confederations of free city-states⁵⁶ and, perhaps most significantly, the Holy Roman Empire, an amorphous, confessionally-based political order claiming universal sovereignty.⁵⁷ Perhaps inevitably such an environment proved unstable, with endemic regional conflict provoked by a variety of different claims to authority, principally but not limited to questions of religious conformity. As a result of the particularly grueling and destructive Thirty Years' War, a conflict which devastated Central Europe and exhausted all of its belligerents

⁵⁶ The most notable being the Hanseatic League in the North, and the Venetian and Genoese republics of Italy.

⁵⁷ For an excellent intellectual history tracing the origin and persistence of religiously-grounded universal government, see Pagden, *Lords of All the World Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c.1500-c.1800*. One of the most eloquent contemporary defenders of universal empire was, interestingly enough, Dante Alighieri – see Dante Alighieri and Shaw, *Monarchy*.

materially and morally, the first steps were taken to regularize and codify the European system of political relations, eliminating religious justifications for conflict by enshrining a territorial principal of sovereignty: *cuius region, eius religio*. This principle weakened the standing of the Catholic-universalist Holy Roman Empire, and greatly strengthened European powers based along national-territorial lines.⁵⁸

Academic Literature on Pre-Modern and Early Modern State Formation and the Dominant Paradigm

A significant body of scholarship examines the emergence of European nation-states in the Renaissance and early modern period. This field emerges out of a synthesis of scholarship on the craft of war, most notably Clausewitz's study,⁵⁹ and the emerging work on political economy, both in its Smithian⁶⁰ and continental⁶¹ guises. Perhaps the pioneer in this area was Otto Hintze, who emphasized the role of the security dilemma and the need to respond to external threat in stimulating a political-institutional response to adjust and improve military competition.⁶²

Different strands of the state-formation literature emphasize different elements of that political-institutional innovation. The greatest emphasis is placed on the bureaucratization and rationalization of tax collection, especially in Hanoverian Britain,⁶³ as well as the French revolutionary success in mobilizing manpower, including the famous *levée en masse*.⁶⁴

Perhaps the most cogent authority on the relationship between the emergence of modern systems of political administration and their roots in security dilemmas and resource mobilization is Charles Tilly, who famously declared that "states make war and war makes the state."⁶⁵ In doing so, he both underlined the *raison d'être* of the modern state and its essential character, at least in the Weberian perspective: that of being an organization capable of monopolizing coercion over its territory.

Attempts have been made to synthesize varying strands of the European state-formation theories, most notably and elaborately by Rokkan, who schematized all of the social, economic, and political transformations taking place between the late Middle Ages and the nineteenth century⁶⁶ – and even including large macrohistorical structural antecedents, such as legacies of Roman imperialism and the movement of foundational ethnic groups across European space.

In addition to the literature on state formation as administrative reform and the rationalization of resource management, an allied body of work discusses the concomitant emergence of nationalism, imbuing membership to national states with a crucial sense of shared

⁵⁸ Croxton, *Westphalia*.

⁵⁹ Clausewitz and Graham, *On War*.

⁶⁰ Smith, *Wealth of Nations*.

⁶¹ List, *The National System of Political Economy*.

⁶² Hintze, *The historical essays of Otto Hintze*.

⁶³ Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (Verso World History Series).

⁶⁴ Connelly, *The Wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon, 1792-1815*.

⁶⁵ Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime."

⁶⁶ Rokkan, *State Formation, Nation-Building, and Mass Politics in Europe*.

identity, purpose, and destiny. The contributions of Benedict Anderson⁶⁷ and Ernest Gellner⁶⁸ in this field demonstrate the dependence of nationalism on the emergence of modern forms of communication and administration.

These works on state formation, taken together, are perhaps the crown jewels of contemporary social science. They treat one of the most fundamental political questions concerning modernity from a variety of perspectives, generating sophisticated and persuasive conclusions.

The state-formation literature, though aware of its own limitations (note how little overlap there is between the convergence school and state-formation scholars), is firmly grounded in the European experience of the shift from tradition to modernity. The literature is suffused with accounts of transformations that enabled new forms of political organization. These new forms were then standardized into the practices of the successful nation-state military powers of the West. This process is contingent on that shift, and is implicitly imagined as a one-way process. Order is consolidated, regularized, amplified, and then tested against rivals. This described, with great perspicacity, a particular and particularly vital period in Western and world history.

The Arrival of Political Modernity

The remainder of the 17th and 18th centuries would see continued conflict on the European continent, with the territorially-based states developing more effective systems of marshaling resources and deploying manpower in military confrontations. The efficiencies resulting from streamlined political administration combined with a European technological edge to enable the export of the Western power struggles across vast stretches of territory, taking the territorial-state model with them to areas previously insulated from the European political system. By the end of the 18th century, the Americas were largely in European hands, and outposts existed throughout Asia and Africa. With European colonial ventures came the diffusion of the principal of territorially-based political control.

The French Revolution intensified the process of political and administrative rationalization and, with the innovation of the levée en masse and the ideological innovation of war-time nationalism linked the concept of national belongingness to the political-administrative structure of the territorial state. This development proved to be a decisive advantage — European powers that adapted the national principle (France, Great Britain, German and Italy post-unification) thrived, while those which resisted or proved unable to adapt to it (the Habsburg Empire, Ottoman Turkey) failed. The intensification of European competition together with technological innovation resulted finally in the globalization of the territorial nation-state model, as Western powers absorbed into their own formal control all territory without coercive institutions forceful enough to resist them. Not all territory belonged to Europeans, but by the eve of the First World War, virtually the entire inhabited globe was organized politically along territorially lines.

⁶⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

⁶⁸ Gellner and Breuilly, *Nations and Nationalism*.

World War I and the Emergence of the Nation-State

It was at this point that one of the political forms most central and taken-for-granted in the dominant paradigm became a historical reality: the nation-state. The neo-Weberian model of the state, as well as the Westphalian definition of statehood, relate to control of territory, establishing geographic boundaries for political power. Prior to World War I, this geographic basis for delineating state-ness was unproblematic: governments based in one capital or another deployed military and colonial forces across territory, establishing their writ as supreme in that space, and they were recognized as sovereign powers over that space, irrespective of the wishes of its habitants or their relationship to them.

With the denouement of World War I and especially the publication of Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, the principal of national self-determination was first articulated as a norm of the international system, delegitimizing government by people of one ethnic group over another.⁶⁹ With fits and starts this principal undermined the great imperial world-states one by one, beginning in Central Europe and culminating in world-wide decolonization, with the ideal-type for modern state-ness established as something along the lines of Republican France – a political community sharing a common language, culture and self-awareness, governed by a representative leadership and administered through a rational-bureaucratic state apparatus.⁷⁰

A conflict inherent with this ideal-type is that there are no authoritative grounds for drawing the circle of political belonging; among liberal powers (France, Great Britain, the United States) the belief is that civic membership in the state (that is the right to participate fully in economic and political affairs conducted on the territory, and equal protection under the legal system) represents inclusion in the national community represented by that state, regardless of the ethnic, religious, tribal or familial category of the individual citizen (interestingly, this would solve the issue of national self-determination in an age of empire by simply extending full citizenship to all imperial subjects – at a stroke, they become full members of the civic-national community and their grievances are thus settled, Paris center or no Paris center).⁷¹ This perspective is, of course, at odds with most nationalists, who identify nationhood as prior to state-ness, and intrinsic out of (usually) ethnic identity, and who tend to reject the legitimacy of any government not drawn from members of their own ethnic community.⁷²

As such, the issue of national self-determination cannot be solved by extending civic inclusion universally across the territory of a multi-ethnic state, but rather by each ethno-national community generating out of itself a representative political organ which can legitimately legislate for its membership. Inadvertently, the principal of national self-determination undermined the territorial conception of statehood, by conferring legitimacy on leaders who could claim to speak for populations, rather than those claiming an effective monopoly on violence over a territory. In much of the world, this conflict between those who claim authority over a territory and those who claim the loyalty of a people has been settled by the harmonization of the two claims. In

⁶⁹ MacMillan, *Paris 1919*.

⁷⁰ Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen the Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914*.

⁷¹ Brubaker, "Immigration, Citizenship, and the Nation-State in France and Germany."

⁷² Smith, *Nationalism*.

Europe, and especially Central and Eastern Europe, ethnic communities served as the basis for military and political mobilization, adjusting borders so that territory and ethno-national identity coincide,⁷³ creating effective territorial states that enjoy national-state legitimacy among their people (some exceptions exist, and are a source of trouble — Belgium, Transylvania, Catalunya). This region was that which inspired the original Wilsonian Fourteen Points and represents perhaps the purest manifestation of national self-determination.

Elsewhere, colonial powers created states on territory, instead of generating a state apparatus out of ethnic communities. The result was that the vast majority of the sovereign states created through decolonization represent not nation-states linked to a particular and identifiable ethno-national community but territorial states, in which a disparate citizenry is unified by a shared government.

Three Models of the Modern State: Marxian, Hegelian, and Anglo-Saxon

Traditional social science was built around 19th-century models of political development which stressed progress, improvement and convergence. Marxian models conceived of technological change triggering change in class composition, resulting in revolutionary disjunctures between different phases of development characterized by different techniques of wealth extraction and different leading classes.⁷⁴ Hegelian dialectic claimed to identify an ideational telos whereby political forms tended towards rationalization and improvement, with eventual convergence towards rationalized, bureaucratic nation-states (not coincidentally resembling Hegel's native Prussia).⁷⁵ Even the less fully theorized Anglo-Saxon models derived from Smith emphasized technological change as a driver of improved developmental conditions, which would then be reflected in improvements in political organization, with eventual convergence around best practices.⁷⁶ Effectively, prior to the rise of fascist movements, Western political theorists all emphasized universal progress — conservatives promoting an imperial, tutelary version to justify colonial projects in progressive terms, radicals organizing for the inevitable class revolution that would usher in the latest and greatest political order, and liberals clinging faithfully to the progressive power of enfranchisement and democracy. Each perspective envisaged an irresistible progress of political forms, with a crucial role for the modern, rationalized state. Both proponents of Anglo-Saxon-style development-through-trade-and-growth and Hegelian ideational telos imagined a crucial, permanent role for the state — once it existed, there was no going back. The Marxians, if anything, were even more radical — the only development that could challenge the state was the final class revolution, which would abolish political control completely in favor of an even better socialist utopia. The prospect of backsliding in political forms, of states losing out not to other states but to collapse and internal anarchy, simply had no place in classical social science theory.

⁷³ Janos, *East Central Europe in the Modern World*.

⁷⁴ Marx, *Das Kapital*.

⁷⁵ Hegel, *Hegel*.

⁷⁶ Smith, *Wealth of Nations*.

Though at this point antiquated, these views are far from obsolete. Among policy makers and academics, contemporary exemplars⁷⁷ of all three positions can be identified (though perhaps the Marxian perspective has both evolved and receded the most.)⁷⁸ The theory of convergence through economic development has been a mainstay of the political science debate and policy debate in North America.⁷⁹

World War II, Modernization Theory, and the Cognitive Consolidation of the State-Centric International System

Apart from an academic and intellectual framework stressing the state as the ultimate form of political organization, brought about naturally through the historical process and everywhere desirable for its developmental benefits, there is also the influence of the structure of the international system heavily favoring national-state-level perspective on politics and the assumption that political order is best and most naturally exercised through states. The international system, as it exists today, and as it has existed for 200 years, is a system of states. The pre-eminence of western arms, technology, and economic might, eliminated through hegemony and colonialism alternative systems in Asia, assimilating every part of the world into a single diplomatic and economic state based on the European model.⁸⁰ These trends were accelerated by World War I and World War II, which induced states to strengthen their internal organization and more fully homogenize the administration of peripheral territories in their existential military clash.

The two World Wars were both catalysts for regularizing and codifying the emerging global political order. The First World War destroyed the three remaining dynastic empires of Europe and resulted in the promulgation of the Fourteen Points, establishing the principle of national self-determination as the legitimizing basis of political authority. Ambitiously, the postwar settlement sought to institutionalize international relations through the League of Nations, an effort that failed against renewed great power rivalries and global economic depression. Instead, peak nation-states created exclusive regional blocs, ultimately plunging the world into a second global conflagration. The attempts to institutionalize the international system in the wake of the Second World War proved more successful, establishing the regime of norms, rules and organizations that now serves as the backbone of international politics. It was the postwar settlement that took the intellectual currents that had developed in European thinking – the concepts of territorially-based sovereignty, of national self-determination, of reciprocal relations between government and governed – and enshrined them as the basic value-concepts of the international order. Indeed, even the bipolar power structure of the Cold War did not undermine the dominance of this paradigm: while the US and the USSR competed over peak

⁷⁷ Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth*; Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*.

⁷⁸ Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism; with Capitalist Civilization*.

⁷⁹ Kerr, *The Future of Industrial Societies*.

⁸⁰ Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System. with a New Prologue 3, 3*. Also Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*.

position in within the world system, the projects they pushed had a striking conceptual symmetry based on this dominant way of understanding politics.

Further, the demonstration effect of the raw force of modern states under arms established states as the only security actors of any consequence. Both postwar settlements attempted to institutionalize supranational organization of states, essentially formalizing the international state system. While the League of Nations that followed World War I failed in its ambition to do so, the post-World War II formal system of international organizations and global order based on territorially exclusive sovereign nation-states succeeded, and still forms the basis of the international political order. The organizations that came out of that postwar settlement – the United Nations, the Bretton Woods organizations (the IMF and the World Bank) – were largely based on meliorist modernizing assumptions.

The dominant political science of that time codified the same modernizing assumptions. Seminal American social scientists, such as Rostow and Seymour Martin Lipset,⁸¹ produced their most influential works in this vein, all based on an expectation that technological change in developing societies would drive an accelerated version of western state development and produce a convergence toward the political institutions of modernity. Other scholars in associated fields, such as Alex Inkeles, considered the process of industrialization to be so transformative on an individual psychological level as to inevitably create political change to reflect that transformation.⁸² Even among already industrialized societies, theories of convergence advocated by Clark Kerr argued for an eventual convergence between Eastern Bloc and Western Bloc along a mixed economic model and some form of democracy.⁸³

Though these particular works date from the mid-century heyday of progressive optimism, their influence remains very much with us through the 1990s and even until today,⁸⁴ albeit with decreasing conviction. Arguments are put forward for economic engagement with China,⁸⁵ Burma, Vietnam, and even North Korea with the assumption that democracy follows on the heels of development.⁸⁶

The end result is a world-system and an academic political science that take the existence/telos of the modern state as an obvious desideratum and a natural historical outcome. Further, these are not uninvolved observers. The international community, through the aid complex, the United Nations, other international organizations, and military intervention, actively shores up the state system against even strictly local challenges that might undermine the overall order.

⁸¹ Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth*. Lipset, *Political Man*.

⁸² Inkeles and Smith, *Becoming Modern*.

⁸³ Kerr, *The Future of Industrial Societies*.

⁸⁴ Inglehart and Welzel, "How Development Leads to Democracy."

⁸⁵ Pei, "Is China Democratizing?" Wang, "The Politics of U.S.-China Economic Relations."

⁸⁶ Sutherland, "Transforming Nations"; Garten, "Business and Foreign Policy."

The Literature on State Failure and State Reconstruction

The Problem of State Collapse

The problem of state collapse has been described as “one of the greatest political and humanitarian challenges facing the world in the twenty-first century.”⁸⁷ The issue looms large in social science, spawning a number of research institutes; hybrid initiatives with development agencies and news outlets⁸⁸; and countless books, dissertations, and journal articles.

The great anxiety concerning state failure is that the breakdown of the order provided by the state will result in internal anarchy (the Hobbesian state of nature), long considered to be the political *summum malum*, a condition so grievous as to essentially degrade the quality of life available to those subject to it. Understanding state failure means understanding this situation, and specifically the alternate forms of political that emerge out of it. The very nature of this condition, however, makes it difficult to examine — anarchy discourages scholarly observation, and poses challenges for the researcher.

Quasi-States: Leftovers of the International Order

Increasingly, this has led to a certain paradox whereby states that are internationally recognized and enjoy the trappings of that recognition (diplomatic representation, membership in the United Nations, etc.), are assumed to function effectively on their territory. As a result, certain regions are internationally recognized as ordered and governed by certain state institutions, even though that is not actually the case. The most obvious examples are the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which is nominally connected to the government in Kinshasa, but which in actually is contested by proxies of Rwanda, Uganda, local brigands and thugs, and finally armed forces actually loyal to the Kinshasa government.⁸⁹ Similarly, in Somalia, an internationally recognized government exists that currently controls Mogadishu and regions around the Ethiopian and Kenyan borders, with an uncertain claim over Puntland but nominal authority over the full territory of Somalia.⁹⁰ This may be even more problematic than the case of the DRC, because among the Mogadishu government’s rivals are forces that are contesting its claim over the full territory (al Shabab) as well as other forces with no legitimate authority whatsoever (various pirate groups), and a functional and effective democratic government in Somaliland that is not an active military belligerent but also refuses to recognize the authority of the Mogadishu government over its territory. According to the rules of international sovereignty, the “statelet” of Somaliland — peaceful, democratic, solvent — is less of a state than the cobbled-together and militarized coalition of exiles and power brokers until recently based in Kenya that has controlled Mogadishu for less than a year.

⁸⁷ Rotberg, *When States Fail*.

⁸⁸ “The 2012 Failed States Index — Interactive Map and Rankings.”

⁸⁹ Jackson, *Quasi-States*.

⁹⁰ Adam, “Formation and Recognition of New States.”

There is a certain irony that the concept of sovereignty currently props up tottering regimes and prevents the emergence of new territorial configurations of power. Originally, the concept in the early modern period derived the other way: where an effective demonstration of control over territory allowed political units to repudiate previous dependencies on external powers (the independence of the Dutch Republic, the hollowing-out of the Holy Roman Empire). In terms of recognizing the state-ness of a particular territorial order, sovereignty in the sense of international recognition of the independence of a given polity is actually a final consideration rather than a primary one — an endpoint of a process of successful state-creation rather than a *sine qua non* litmus test regarding the nature of a political order.

Reformation Through Intervention

The literature on state reformation — that is, the experience of societies following state collapse — skews away from case studies of indigenous leadership in favor of examining different international interventions.⁹¹ The focus of such studies is to identify optimal strategies for reconstruction, gleaned from a tiny number of relative success stories (Kosovo, and only Kosovo),⁹² and distill, from the much larger pool of failed attempts, lessons to avoid. The literature is therefore oriented heavily to the practitioner and the policy specialist (as opposed to academic audiences, let alone local political operators). It includes a substantial amount of polemic concerning the desirability, or even necessity, of state-building interventions.⁹³

The international community has identified state failure as one of the pre-eminent challenges to maintaining peace and order in the world.⁹⁴ The resulting literature on the problem emanates from the perspective of policy planners and practitioners. The provenance of the literature is telling in the reading of it: the problem is defined in vague and variegated ways, with an aggregation of not-always-commensurate phenomena all grouped under the umbrella of state failure.⁹⁵ In addition to the collapse of the state apparatus and the breakdown of public order, some studies identify failure to provide public services as a form of state failure. Others identify state predation on the governed population, while still others point to a lack of democratic accountability or the victimization of minority groups.⁹⁶ While all of these developments represent humanitarian catastrophes and developmental obstacles, it is far from obvious that they all represent dimensions of state failure. If all of these can be called state failure, is there any undesirable outcome that fails to qualify?

⁹¹ Dobbins et al., *The Beginner's Guide to Nation-Building*. See also Fearon and Laitin, "Neo-trusteeship and the Problem of Weak States"; Paris, "International Peacebuilding and The 'Mission Civilisatrice'"; Rotberg, *When States Fail*.

⁹² Hehir, *Kosovo, Intervention and Statebuilding*. See also Mertus, "Improving International Peacebuilding Efforts: The Example of Human Rights Culture in Kosovo."

⁹³ Dobbins et al., *The Beginner's Guide to Nation-Building*.

⁹⁴ Fukuyama, *State-Building*.

⁹⁵ Haken et al., *Failed States Index 2013*.

⁹⁶ Rotberg, *When States Fail*.

Further, since this literature is targeted at members of the international community, policy planners, and political practitioners based in the West or in international organizations, the studies focus on the behavior of external forces at the expense of observing the behavior of local actors.⁹⁷ Indeed, local actors typically are reduced to one of three categories. First, there are the victims of state failure: passive, starving, desperate masses in need of succor and assistance.⁹⁸ Second, there are the black-hatted villains: evil men with guns who, if not the causes of state failure, represent a source of humanitarian suffering and a challenge to state reconstruction.⁹⁹ Finally, there are the local elites: the sometimes cooperative and sometimes troublesome partners of international cadres tasked with state reconstruction. The elites' principal role is to serve as a source of frustration and disappointment for the expert planners and administrators coming in from the outside. Such groups — as opposed to uncooperative local elites — are considered to represent legitimate interests, or to have a constructive role to play.¹⁰⁰ (Typically, the villains are brushed aside in most studies, with the assumption that reconstruction takes place in the aftermath of their defeat, and that their persistence represents a kind of law-and-order problem to be dealt with by the security arm of the reconstruction project.)

The Problem of Domestic Actors

One departure from this perspective comes in a paper by the RAND Corporation, which perhaps inadvertently recognizes that the official villains of intervention are indeed a constituent indigenous political force. The paper contrasts “co-optive reconstruction,” in which international actors attempt to engage local actors as broadly as possible, and what they call “deconstructive state-building,” which involves intervention to eliminate local actors who may already be effectively operating a state apparatus if they are disfavored by the intervening powers.¹⁰¹

A significant component of the state-building literature engages in anxious hand-wringing about the challenge of engaging with local elites to execute the reconstruction project. However, this literature is one-sided, and apart from a few articles taking a deductive, game-theoretical approach based on interests abstractly assigned to local elites, there is little in the way of material about the actual behavior of local elites in international reconstruction efforts. Perhaps the ultimate mark that this crucial element remains understudied is the un-self-conscious way in which several studies remark that it is better to work with a local “enlightened leader” than without one.¹⁰² (A more valuable contribution by Ignatieff is his recognition that returning diasporas constitute a political counter-elite that complicates efforts at re-establishing an effective state apparatus.)¹⁰³

⁹⁷ Mallaby, “The Reluctant Imperialist - Terrorism, Failed States, and the Case for American Empire.” Ghani and Lockhart, *Fixing Failed States*.

⁹⁸ Power, *A Problem from Hell*.

⁹⁹ Francis, *Civil Militia*. Mackinlay, *Globalisation and Insurgency*.

¹⁰⁰ Chesterman, Ignatieff, and Thakur, *Making States Work*.

¹⁰¹ Dobbins et al., *The Beginner's Guide to Nation-Building*.

¹⁰² Fukuyama, “‘Stateness’ First.”

¹⁰³ Chesterman, Ignatieff, and Thakur, *Making States Work*.

The Intervention Blueprint

In addition to the focus on the international side of reconstruction, there is the issue of what kind of state is to be resuscitated. The goal in every state-building effort by the international community and Western powers is invariably the same. Despite all of the caveats and cautions against inflated expectations, the project is to recreate a central state commensurate with the world political system: one capable of maintaining order and sovereignty over its territory; one overseeing an economic model based on private property, market pricing, and foreign investment; and one with a political system palatable to Western publics and the international community, usually amounting to a multi-party electoral democracy.¹⁰⁴

This plan is universally applied regardless of the cultural background of the target society, regardless of its level of economic development, and regardless of its political history. Thus, the agenda typically amounts to not just a tremendous challenge of institution-building, but a large-scale effort at social engineering, combining the resolution of the security dilemma with ethnic, social, and confessional reconciliation; broad-ranging economic reforms; and the transfer of democratic norms and institutions, often *ex nihilo*.

State-ness at What Price?

Finally, the literature on state reconstruction includes a substantial component of polemic and debate. While the political popularity of state-building efforts in the West waxes and wanes cyclically, the effectiveness of state-building projects remains to be definitively proven or understood.¹⁰⁵ As such, a lively debate exists among experts, academics, and practitioners over the necessity and desirability of state-building.

On one side, there are those who consider central states along the conventional model to be somewhat overrated, and perhaps not worth rescuing if they have reached a level of terminal collapse. These arguments often challenge the centrality of the international system of recognized, officially sovereign territorial states, and are willing to countenance territorial fragmentation and institutional disintegration instead of taking extraordinary steps to revive unviable states. This is closely aligned with a related position in the debate, which is a fundamental pessimism about the international state-building effort.¹⁰⁶ This position contends that the outcomes won through the state-building process fall short of the tremendous expenditure of effort, attention, and resources put into them.

Interestingly, the other pole of this debate tends to make similar observations but draw radically different conclusions.¹⁰⁷ The failure to secure optimal outcomes from state-building efforts is chalked up to an inadequate commitment of time and resources, and to the

¹⁰⁴ Ghani and Lockhart, *Fixing Failed States*; Fukuyama, *State-Building*; Dobbins et al., *The Beginner's Guide to Nation-Building*.

¹⁰⁵ Luttwak, "Give War a Chance"; Fukuyama, "The Imperative of State-Building."

¹⁰⁶ Ottaway, "Rebuilding State Institutions in Collapsed States."

¹⁰⁷ Dobbins et al., *Overcoming Obstacles to Peace*.

unwillingness to openly use overwhelming force. Peaking in influence during the George W. Bush administration, the position embraced frank neo-imperialism and advocated international recognition of trusteeship over failed states by international powers and long-term efforts — perhaps lasting a generation or more — at creating a permanent order acceptable to the international community.¹⁰⁸

Further, the existence of the international order imposes certain patterns and restrictions on that domestic struggle for political authority. Most significantly, the international commitment to the sovereignty of recognized states significantly complicates the ability of neighboring states, and disempowers them from meddling in the struggle for supremacy. Whereas historically, state collapse, or even simply state weakness, created a pretext for the annexation and dismemberment of states by their neighbors (the partitions of Poland), the current international system has not permitted territorial aggrandizement through military adventure since 1949 (Hyderabad). Intervention by external forces either requires extraordinary force — together with unilateral bellicosity — or an international imprimatur through the United Nations. Otherwise, it must be executed clandestinely through local proxies.

As a result, local competitors for political primacy are insulated from existing state rivals, significantly reducing the scale of competition and the sophistication of the forces involved. The international system, with its preoccupation with territorial integrity and recognized sovereignty, places a great premium on control of the capital. Groups that are extremely effective, well-organized, and capable but that are based in peripheral regions far from the capital face a severe handicap in their interactions with external actors as compared to whoever sits in the presidential palace. Finally, the international system actively intervenes in favor of capital-dwelling incumbents, providing them with resources and guidance in order to attempt to recreate the territorially integrated sovereign state, though along lines palatable to international opinion.

Nation Against State

Such governments received stable, internationally recognized territories inhabited by a diverse population, and one not unanimously involved in the liberation struggle. The response was to launch campaigns to try to convert the territorial statehood into a sense of collective, political solidarity: nation building, in other words (as opposed to state building). The international community, according to its diplomatic protocols and its interests in an orderly structure for international affairs, was more than willing to label these post-colonial governments as nation states immediately, and take at face value claims that there existed some solidaristic impulse towards political community among the population in the governed territory, despite sometimes overwhelming evidence to the contrary. The reluctance of the international community to adjust

¹⁰⁸ Mallaby, “The Reluctant Imperialist — Terrorism, Failed States, and the Case for American Empire”; Ferguson, *Colossus*.

borders or allow them to be adjusted to better reflect patterns of solidarity — ethnic, religious or otherwise — is well documented.¹⁰⁹

Effects of the Dominant Paradigm in the State-Failure Community

As described above, the pervasiveness of the dominant paradigm has many positive effects, especially in societies with relatively effective states already enjoying a monopoly on the means of legitimate violence. However, when outsiders apply the dominant paradigm to situations of state failure and state reconstruction, it can cause confusion and forestall the pursuit of useful options. This is for several reasons.

First, societies and economies do not necessarily dissolve when states fail to provide security or govern the economy. Outsiders watching states fail, and particularly members of the state-failure epistemic community, tend to treat state failure in apocalyptic terms. Consummate Hobbesians, they express anxiety at its potential to undermine the ideational basis of the international system: in addition to causing suffering for locals, their thoughts turn to the Pandora's box of international terrorists, criminal syndicates, and other ne'er-do-wells that the stateless vacuum will breed like microbes. Meanwhile, ordinary people living under conditions of state failure find coping strategies and devise alternative institutions, while undergoing tremendous suffering and disruption, in order to deal with the practical necessities of survival. For the reconstructionists, re-establishing the territorial state is the primary goal, while ordinary people never lose sight of practical day-to-day considerations. As a result, ordinary people show much greater toleration for the absence of a regular state apparatus *if* coping mechanisms are operating well enough or *if* local elites can devise arrangements that guarantee some measure of security and predictability, even if those elites operate outside a formal state apparatus.

Second, weak or collapsed states with recognized governments lacking coercive or institutional capacity make a mockery of the legibility of power afforded by the dominant paradigm. The dominant paradigm gives outside actors unrealistic expectations about weak or failing governments, imposing upon them security obligations that they cannot live up to, while obscuring the actual power relations that predominate — usually a messy, tangled web of interlocking authority shared among different non-state actors. As a result, the dominant paradigm is not an entirely academic matter, but patterns the behavior of outside powers as they grapple with the consequences of the collapse of other territorially-based nation-states.

Third, the dominant paradigm overemphasizes the eternal permanence of the central state and the impermanence of non-state coercive entities. The central state is the only long-lasting entity in this model. Therefore, any non-state node of coercive power, such as tribal militias, regional warlords, religious militias, ethnic paramilitaries, is presumed to be impermanent. When these non-state nodes have control over significant means of violence, it is a sign that the situation

¹⁰⁹ Most recently, note the unwillingness of the international community to countenance the partition of Iraq. The case was pitched to a broad audience, most notably in Galbraith, "The Case For Dividing Iraq," and failed to make any headway as a policy proposal. Consider as well the unhappy case of Somaliland: Adam, "Formation and Recognition of New States."

is aberrant and fluid, and that the state is failing or failed. Members of the epistemic community assume that these non-state coercive entities are naturally entropic: unlike the state, they will eventually either be defeated by the state or will melt back into governed “society” (which is the opposite of the state) when the present political chaos is resolved.¹¹⁰ This is because the state not only enjoys ontological primacy, but because it is presumed to be better at coercion than anyone else. No warlord can, in the long term, stand up to a regular national military. Nor would it be right for a warlord to do so.

Finally, there is the problem of Orientalism. When applied by outsiders from Western nations to societies in the developing world, the dominant paradigm becomes a tool for making sense of political phenomena. When looking at their own societies, Westerners tend to see all of the elements of the paradigm exemplified. But when they apply the dominant paradigm to societies undergoing the breakdown of state institutions, they are naturally more likely to see disorder, incompetence, and “cultural” barriers to progress.¹¹¹

In conclusion, it is worth noting that acknowledging the poor fit between the dominant paradigm and the reality of post-state-collapse societies should not invite us to ignore the vast human cost of state failure as compared to the presence of a functional, competent state. Rather, it is to note that the evolutionary notion of development towards a democratic nation-state model with reciprocal obligation between states and citizens is not always useful when it comes to state collapse and projects of state reconstruction.

Iraq and the Limits of the Dominant Paradigm

Why Iraq?

In the Iraqi case (and to a certain extent the case of Afghanistan), the close engagement of Western states and militaries in the local security situation allows for a much closer view of what is actually happening inside the anarchy that follows state collapse than is usually available. Drawing on the body of data available from journalistic and government sources, together with participant observation and interviews with those involved in the stabilization effort in Iraq, this study will examine how the Iraqi state fell apart in the wake of the US invasion in 2003, how new structures of political authority emerged in the condition of stateless anarchy that followed, and how these indigenous, spontaneously generated political structures interfaced with efforts by the occupational administration to re-create the Iraqi state.

¹¹⁰ Giustozzi, *The Art of Coercion*.

¹¹¹ Said, *Orientalism*.

An Alternative Local Order

In looking at the specific problem outlined in this study – that is, the particular way the tribal leadership of al Anbar spontaneously reconstituted a state-like system of authority and power over its territory in the wake of the collapse of the Ba‘athist state apparatus – the ample literature on state-building offers limited insight. The orientation of the literature toward international actors and reconstruction efforts by external powers does not correspond well to the developments in al Anbar. The literature itself draws insufficiently on the behavior of local political actors and ascribes them too little agency, or at least insufficiently examines the agency recognized. And to a certain extent, the existence of such an extensive literature on the international statecraft of reconstruction tends to undermine projects such as those by the tribal leaders of al Anbar, since they do not fit into the rubrics of reconstruction theorists, they run afoul of reconstruction practitioners on the ground.

The basic problem of efforts at state reconstruction is that they take the long-term epochal phenomena identified by the state-formation scholarship, attempt to compress them into a medium-term plan of accelerated institutional development, and then execute it through the most short-term metrics and rotations possible.

Al Anbar

The case of al Anbar belongs to this category par excellence. After the collapse of the Ba‘athist state in Iraq – which, despite its status as an international pariah and founding member of the Axis of Evil, constituted a modern nation-state internationally recognized – created an anarchic environment beyond the ability of the occupying forces to adequately control, a variety of non-traditional political institutions assumed authority over different parts of the country’s territory. In the center and south of the country, the reconstituted central government, with support from religious institutions and political parties, has managed to regain a modicum of control. From the very beginning of the occupation of Iraq, the focus of efforts and attention of policy makers, scholars and journalists has been on the Baghdad-based government and its “maturity” into an effective state. In al Anbar however, political order is maintained outside of the re-established, modern bureaucratic state apparatus, in the hands of tribal leaders who have accumulated enough coercive capacity to control their territory, and exercise authority and deliver services parallel to the central government, all without any inclusion in the international state system, where they are not even recognized as a sub-national government. In al Anbar at least, the conventional Sweden-Somalia spectrum breaks down: order exists, but it is not a state-driven order according to conventional notions or the expectations of the international community. Further, while al Anbar is unusual, it is not singular: in different forms, parallel political institutions outside of conventional state structures play key roles in a variety of states, not only in the Middle East, but even in developed nations. In examining al Anbar and accounting for the success of the tribal Awakening movement, this study aims to contribute to understanding the under-studied phenomenon of non-state coercive authority, and its translation into political structures.

Chapter 2: Tribe

The central empirical claim of this dissertation is that the tribal sheikhs of al Anbar succeeded, against seemingly long odds, in seizing political power and pacifying their province after the fall of Saddam Hussein because of (a) the way the Saddamist regime had previously empowered the Anbari tribes and (b) the Anbari tribes' highly hierarchical structure. In other words, the governance strategies of the Saddamist regime and the nature of the Anbari tribes together allowed them to succeed in a particular post-collapse environment. This chapter generalizes my empirical claim about al Anbar, tracing how violent groups emerge under conditions of anarchy from existing social segments, how their capacity for coercion is dependent on prior relations to the state, and how the anarchy itself is patterned by the characteristics of those very groups. I thus develop the beginnings of a theory of how certain types of order emerge from certain types of anarchy based on the characteristics of the groups contending for power. The chapter considers both the Iraqi case and three other contemporaneous examples of state collapse or state withdrawal: the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, and the Canadian Far North.

The way political authority re-emerges after the collapse of a central state differs from the process of initial state formation. In the very beginning, at least according to Hobbes, we find prior to any organized authority the pure state of nature — a uniform tapestry of *bellum omnium contra omnes*, in which life is universally solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.¹¹² But once some form of state has appeared in the history of a place or people, particular kinds of political relations become normalized. The state establishes path-dependent modes of political engagement and competition that persist even after it disappears. It is therefore impossible to theorize about the post-state-collapse environment without talking about the *ancien régime*.

How exactly does the *ancien régime* shape the set of “contenders” — those violent groups that emerge to contest for political dominance after state collapse? And once the state has collapsed, what past and present conditions make some contenders more likely than others to win — that is, to establish effective control over territory and populations?

¹¹² Hoekstra, “The de Facto Turn in Hobbes’s Political Philosophy.”

To answer these questions, this chapter begins by developing a theoretical framework. The framework focuses on ways that the *ancien régime* privileges some actors over others, establishes networks of resource distribution and patronage, creates cleavages or builds bridges among groups, and generates expectations and cognitive frames among the populace. Next, the chapter applies this framework to post-Ba‘athist Iraq. Finally, it applies the framework in a preliminary way to other recent cases of state failure or state withdrawal: Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and – perhaps counterintuitively – the Canadian Far North.

Competition for Power in the Wake of State Collapse: A Theoretical Framework

In Conditions of Anarchy, Political Contestation is Violent

It is the state, through its institutions and coercion and dispute resolution, that creates internal order, establishing rules for the conduct of public life.¹¹³ These rules may be permissive and transparent, enabling wide latitude for personal freedom, and even non-coercive avenues for political contestation. They may also be, as they were in Ba‘athist Iraq, highly repressive, forbidding dissident mobilization of any kind, enforcing certain types of political participation and severely curtailing the space for the exercise of even personal liberty. Whatever the character of state-created order, one overarching characteristic remains the same – the state forbids the exercise of private coercion of public, especially political ends. While the state reserves the right to terrorize and oppress its own inhabitants, it categorically forbids that behavior from other institutions without its consent. This is the typical situation for most people in the developed world, to the point where we take public order for granted and are scandalized by its breakdown. Politics, for those in functioning states, is a rule-bounded elite competition played out in election campaigns, political parties, or the hierarchies of the state bureaucracy, certainly not in the streets and fields to be settled with RPGs and AK-47s.

But in the wake of state collapse, political contestation is almost always violent to some degree.¹¹⁴ Without the stability accorded by a functioning state apparatus, there are few limitations on the behavior of contesting parties. Basic security from private or criminal violence is largely absent. The result is the universalization of violence, with political mobilization becoming effectively indistinguishable from insurgency – an extreme case of Clausewitz’s observation that war is politics by other means.¹¹⁵

A Premium on Firepower, Intelligence, and Internal Loyalty

Under such conditions, the determinants of successful political engagement change considerably. Rather than the electoral/plebiscitarian mobilization of the democracies, or the bureaucratic

¹¹³ Weber, *Economy and Society*. See also Diamond, *The World Until Yesterday*.

¹¹⁴ Koonings and Kruijt, *Armed Actors*; Rotberg, *When States Fail*.

¹¹⁵ Clausewitz and Graham, *On War*.

maneuvering within authoritarian systems relying on personal loyalty, patronage networks and the manipulation of factional alliances, the politics of state failure instead rests on the mobilization of coercive capacity.¹¹⁶ Put simply, it comes down to loyal fighters, adequate firepower and the local intelligence (in both senses) to use them effectively. Competition is matched in its intimacy by its viciousness – decisive confrontations occur in relative moments (an erstwhile thriving movement can be snuffed out in days), and micro-confrontations that occur on highly local levels involving relatively small numbers of people add up to drive national-level outcomes, rather than result from the interplay of grand forces.¹¹⁷

Violent anarchy can become endemic. While in theory such circumstances can be overturned through decisive intervention or, over time, through the accumulation of coercive potential into smaller and smaller numbers of successful actors, that outcome is far from inevitable. Given unfavorable initial conditions, porous borders and abundant sources of arms and man power, such conditions can stabilize and persist with the same longevity as a state-based political system.¹¹⁸ Apart from the brief Taliban period (which never managed to secure the entire country in any case), Afghanistan has not had a functioning state since 1979.¹¹⁹ The same has been true of Somalia since the early 1990s.¹²⁰ Nor is this a uniquely modern phenomenon: while endemic multi-sided violence was the norm for most of Europe prior to early modernity, even the more effective pre-modern Asian states such as China and Japan were periodically convulsed by decades-long warring states periods, typified not only by multiple power centers but also unconventional armed grounds, including temples, monasteries, bandits and ethnic minorities.¹²¹

“I Coulda Been a Contender”: What It Takes to Become One

A Diversity of Contestants for Power

With the demise of the security institutions of the formal state apparatus, the field is open to a variety of groups to organize militant wings and become agents of coercive contestation. Vadim Volkov charts the emergence of post-Soviet Russia’s criminal gangs from their origins as social networks of gym buddies, soccer fans and Afghan war veterans. In the Yugoslav war, similarly, groups of soccer hooligans formed militia units aggressive in carrying out atrocities and precipitating conflict.¹²² It is also possible that associations or groups that had previously been innocuous civil society organization can, in a security vacuum, arm themselves, creating ersatz militias based on existing social networks. The Shi’a militant groups of southern Iraq – especially those tied to the Mahdi army of Moqtada al Sadr – started out as religious congregations and

¹¹⁶ Army and Corps, *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*.

¹¹⁷ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

¹¹⁸ Giustozzi, *The Art of Coercion*.

¹¹⁹ Goodson, *Afghanistan’s Endless War*.

¹²⁰ Clarke and Herbst, *Learning from Somalia*.

¹²¹ Turnbull, *War in Japan 1467-1615 (Essential Histories)*.

¹²² Volkov, *Violent Entrepreneurs*.

leveraged the organizational support lent by the religious leadership in the early stages of their formation.¹²³ Political parties can also create armed wings for themselves in the same way, as can

¹²³ Cockburn, *Muqtada*.

Non-state hierarchies of coercive authority									
Name	Description	Typical Advantages	Typical Disadvantages	Success Case	Failure Case	Basis of Authority	Basis of Solidarity	Associated Social Form	Source
Brigandage/Mafia/Criminal Enterprise	Authority exercised by senior members of criminal organizations	Extreme ruthlessness; discipline enforced through extraordinary violence; aura of terror; very effective at revenue collection	Vulnerable to defection, infiltration and factionalism; succession struggles; predatory economic behavior makes civilian relations problematic	Northern Mexico	West African lumpeninsurgents; North American mafia; SE Asian piracy	Violence, Patronage	Pragmatic security/wealth seeking	Mafia or gang	Bunker and Sullivan, 2010
Tribal/Ethnic Militia	Authority exercised by hereditary leaders or other notables in a web of extended kinship	High level of solidarity and cohesion; links between fighters and civilians	Difficulty sustaining operations; "fighting season/planting season"; low professionalism of fighters; traditional, not merit-based, leadership; cannot recruit beyond tribal base	Al Anbar	Anti-Taliban elders in Afghanistan and FATA; American Indian Movement; Guaraní War; Chechen revolt	Heridity	Kinship loyalty/tradition	Tribes and Clans	Gustazzi and Noor, 2006
Ideological Mobilization	Authority exercised by leaders pursuing an ideological program	Depending on ideology, broad or even universal potential recruitment; cooperation and mutual support with similar ideological groups; optimistic though still rational ideology; loyalty to movement, not leader, simplifies succession; professionalization in both political and coercive arms; strong links to civilian populations	Political program may be falsified or discredited; high resource demands; potential for factionalism and co-optation	Chinese Communists; Viet Minh; Igur, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam	Greek Communists; Red Brigades; FLQ; Ba'ath	Ideological leadership	Ideological commitment	Political Party	Mackinlay, 2002
Warlord Militia	Authority exercised by officers over soldiers; no political program beyond resisting other armed forces	Military prowess; organizational sophistication; command-and-control discipline; can recruit universally	Military-civilian gap; weak governance and administration skills; morale not resilient in case of defeat	Chinese Warlord era; Rwandan militia in Eastern Congo; Post-Soviet Afghanistan	White side during Russian Civil War	Military Prowess	Pragmatic security/wealth seeking	Military Units	Gustazzi, 2005
Mercenary Company	Authority exercised by business executives	High quality soldiers and weapons; professional competence and discipline; pragmatic decision making; no fixed loyalties	Transient; reliant on clients and resources based in second countries, which are vulnerable to regulation by governments or international agreements; no connection to local populations; weak intelligence gathering capacity	Conquistadores; Condottieri; Blackwater				Corporation	Holmqvist, 2005
Spiritualist Militia	Authority exercised by divine or divinely inspired leaders	Supernatural claims can create extraordinary charisma; small successes can be parlayed into messianic devotion; can make unlimited resource and loyalty claims on adherents; so long as leader uncompromised highly resilient to setbacks	Extremely vulnerable to the elimination or discrediting of the sacred leader; if explicit prophecies or messianic claims are articulated, vulnerable to falsification; generates high levels of antagonism from outsiders; potential for irrational decision making	Early Islamic conquests; Tajik Rebellion; Lord's Resistance Army	General Butt Naked; Branch Davidians	Messianism, Profitability	Spiritual force	Cult	Vind, 2006
Fundamentalist Militia	Authority exercised by leaders claiming religious authority	High level of solidarity and cohesion; links between fighters and civilians; highly resilient morale; broad, international base for fund-raising and recruiting; discipline enforced through both worldly and spiritual sanctions	High levels of antagonism with other faith groups; potential for irrational decision making; petty competition among leadership cadres can lead to factionalism	Taliban; Hezbollah; Oliver Cromwell; Ibn Saud; Iko-Iko	la Cristiada; Muslim Brotherhood	Piety	Religious duty	Congregation	Norton, 2009

traditional/cultural structures such as tribal hierarchies.¹²⁴ In a splintered state, units of the former security apparatus may continue to operate under their own authority, with their officers become in effect warlords or gang leaders.¹²⁵ The chaos of state failure also supplies organized criminal enterprises with the opportunity, should they choose to take it, to militarize and exert their criminal power openly.¹²⁶

There is tremendous diversity in the types of coercive organizations that emerge in the wake of state failure, and the above chart attempts to capture the major categories with some descriptive depth. These are groups which may or may not have a political agenda, but which do not have the full panoply of capabilities of state-ness. In the anarchic post-state political environment, they are rivals for coercive control over territory, and their differences have consequences for how that rivalry plays out, and for the character of the emerging security environment. What we have is a sort of varieties of warlordism, in which the organizational form selected to manage force has great consequences for the way in which they operate, and the way in which collective life is structured around their influence.

What It Takes to Compete

In the absence of a state apparatus with a monopoly on violence across a territory, the initiative passes to non-state actors that are able to organize effective coercion. On the most basic level, this means the ability to assemble groups of men, arm them, and deploy them to execute the objectives of the group. There is great variety in the nature and type of organizations that are capable of this practice, but there are also dozens of different non-state actors who, though competent in achieving other types of institutional objectives, cannot translate their organizational capacity into coercive competence.

In this category we can place most aid agencies.¹²⁷ While they draw on a significant number of professionalized personnel who are willing to take extraordinary measures to achieve the organization's goals, and while they can mobilize resources (sometimes resources orders of magnitude greater than those available to local non-state actors), they possess neither the willingness nor the expertise to compete violently against other groups in the territory. As a result, they are often stymied in their objectives, or they must seek out the patronage of a group capable of armed coercion. Typically, international aid groups appeal to international armed groups, and humanitarian bodies are often the most vociferous proponents of UN military intervention.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Norton, *Hezbollah*.

¹²⁵ McCord, *The Power of the Gun*.

¹²⁶ Heifetz, "Mexico at War."

¹²⁷ Fitzduff and Church, *NGOs at the Table*.

¹²⁸ Clooney, "United Nations Security Council Address on Darfur"; Power, *A Problem from Hell*. Also consider the asinine Kony 2012 campaign.

A Typology of Contenders

The literature on international relations focuses on relations between states: wars, treaties, espionage, investment. As the behavior of actors outside the state has become a topic of interest, there has been some difficulty with terminology, and the result is that the rather ungainly term “non-state actors” has entered into usage to denote a panoply of different interests acting in their own right (for a discussion on nomenclature, see Clapham).¹²⁹ Depending on the context, the term tends to take on different color: in international political economy, non-state actors are usually multinational corporations or international organizations. In developmental studies, the term usually captures non-governmental organizations and private firms contracted by governments. In the security literature, it usually denotes insurgent groups, guerrillas, criminal gangs and warlords. Under conditions of state failure, by definition all groups struggling for primacy are non-state actors, and as such the objects for study. To make sense of the political environment of the failed state, it is necessary to have a reasonable typology of the different groups that operate.

Violent and Meek

The first line that can be drawn is between groups that have a coercive capacity and those that do not. The latter groups exist in large number: many represent the continuation of civil society in the condition of statelessness, being religious congregations, mutual aid organizations, family or cultural units. To these can be added the constellation of international NGOs and news agencies drawn to conflicts: humanitarian groups, the international press, developmental foundations and the occasional business venture. While these are all significant actors in that environment, their lack of a coercive capacity sidelines them from the highest level political dynamics: ultimately, they are able to do what they do not through their own power but through the willingness of the groups who do have a coercive capacity to allow them to carry on their work unmolested.¹³⁰ Should that willingness end, then such groups can either be expelled from the region or destroyed.¹³¹

This leaves groups with an organized coercive capacity, or, in other words, the ability to order armed men to commit violence. Once the state imposed monopoly on violence is no longer operative, force becomes the currency of power in the territory: property can be expropriated, information and discussion suppressed, and behavior corporally controlled. Power, that is the ability to control the behavior of other people, takes on a particularly direct and nasty aspect, with the ability to directly mobilize violence supplanting control over economic resources or hegemony over discourse. (Pace Nye, Stalin had a point about soft power when he inquired to the number of the Pope’s armored divisions.) Collective life will be determined by the actions of armed men, competition between groups of armed men and, finally, the sorts of rules that those men impose on themselves and the areas they control. Understanding the types of power

¹²⁹ Clapham, *Non-State Actors*.

¹³⁰ Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters*.

¹³¹ Nordland, “Africa: War on the Rescuers.”

structures that can mobilize and control violence thus becomes a crucial task in getting a handle on what goes on after the state fails.

Mackinley's Varieties of Violent Challengers

But looking strictly at those groups that do have an armed competence, there is a vast diversity of organizational forms, objectives, and structures. One security scholar, Mackinley, has developed a typology of insurgent groups based on different levels of sophistication and organizational capability.¹³²

The lowest level he describes as “lumpeninsurgents,” amounting to no more than opportunistic armed mobs without a unifying ideology or commitment to a common cause. These groups are formed for strictly cynical reasons, taking advantage of the security vacuum in order to press for materialistic short-term demands against a populace momentarily vulnerable due to the lack of state-provided security. Without a commitment to a larger cause, there is not the discipline to ensure even a basic level of training or minimal unit cohesion. This means that such groups, while capable of horrific atrocities against civilian populations, are incapable of competing against even minimally trained rivals. On a concrete level, most such fighters run into battle not even knowing how to properly sight a rifle, fire at random, and rely on their appearance and willingness to use force to intimidate civilians into obedience. These groups are the masters of “spray-and-pray” fighting tactics, and very little else. When confronted with a spirited resistance, even from otherwise unassuming civilians populations, will retreat, if not be routed.¹³³

The next category of Mackinley's typology is what he calls the “clan insurgency.” In this category, traditional bonds of kinship and collective loyalty, often but not always linked to a traditional warrior ethos, provide the backbone for armed units contesting for territorial dominance on behalf of their kinship units and their traditional leaders. The level of practical military competence among these groups, according to Mackinley, is typically not high. After all, these are part-time warriors, not dedicated professionals. They often have had little formal training prior to undertaking operations against rival groups. But the bonds of kinship, the fear of shame in front of one's peer group and kinsmen, and the expectation of affective loyalty toward the clan or tribe motivates the fighters in battle and also prompts a willingness to train. These groups are much more likely to stand and fight, and are likewise more likely to improve over time.

Mackinley's third category is the “popular insurgency.” It is based on ideologically activated practical grievances that take on a political character and develop into a counterprogram for governance and political organization aimed to replace the status quo, be that an established unpopular government or a post-collapse vacuum. The ideological nature of the popular insurgency typically implies leadership cadres that are familiar with insurgent theory in one form or another, thus professionalizing or rationalizing the force. In rural areas, they often take on

¹³² Mackinlay, *Globalisation and Insurgency*.

¹³³ Ascherson, “How Millions Have Been Dying in the Congo.”

paramilitary-style unit structure with a parallel political leadership responsible for publicity and the administration of any territories controlled, while in urban areas, or those regions controlled by hostile forces, it can take on a conspiratorial cellular structure. In its most developed form, such as among the Tamil Tigers or the PKK, the popular insurgency can replicate the organizational structure of a mature consolidated security apparatus. Practically, in battle, the popular insurgent forces will follow orders issued by their leadership, stand their ground (even against resistance), and execute with the highest level of professionalism available to them. The political orientation of Mackinley's popular insurgency often has it taking on the assumptions concerning national identity and the extent of state territoriality of whatever government — past or present — they are trying to replace. In such a way, they may even reinforce the nation-building efforts of prior regimes.

Mackinley's fourth category, devised to try to capture the particular case of Al Qaeda, is what he calls "global insurgent force." It is of perhaps least interest to us since it is, by definition, deterritorialized and preoccupied with achieving global-level political effects rather than contesting for control over any given territory. As such, it exists almost exclusively in a network of decentralized cells and is highly circumscribed operationally. It does not produce a professionalized fighting class, but instead relies almost exclusively on conspiratorial terroristic tactics.

A Taxonomy of Insurgent Forces

Mackinley's typology is extremely valuable, not least because it describes how the institutional structure, origin, and ideological orientation of fighting groups influence their battlefield performance. However, the model makes some implicit assumptions made about those associations that are falsified by the experience of al Anbar. First of all, the lines between these categories of insurgency are, in practice, rather porous — a point that Mackinley himself concedes. In Iraq, Al Qaeda, his global insurgence *par excellence*, developed a military wing that operated as a classic insurgent campaign. Moreover, all three categories of higher insurgency — clan, popular, and global — are prone to attracting what he calls "lumpen-elements," meaning low-quality fighters of questionable commitment to the cause whose loyalty can be diverted by side payments or intimidation by other factions. Finally, and most significantly, the association that he makes between higher-order capability and higher-efficiency authority structures and ideologically driven "popular" insurgency (implicitly understood to be either leftist or nationalist in its orientation) underestimates the potential for sophisticated institutional innovation and political maneuvering available to organizations without a classic insurgent political profile. Most notably for our purposes, the sheikhs of al Anbar, though insular and basically apolitical, devised sophisticated institutional plans and pioneered diplomatic, media, and local administrative efforts to translate their armed movement into a true state-in-waiting. This is not just limited to clan and tribal structures. In Mexico, the Zeta narco-insurgency, notorious for its brutal violence and expertise in violent control of the local population, has also generated sophisticated

communications networks, command-and-control structures, and intelligence-gathering systems that have effectively shut out the central government from its zone of control.¹³⁴

So in order to properly appraise the effectiveness and potential of post-state coercive challengers for authority, a slightly more complicated typology is necessary. It should recognize the crucial difference in fighting quality that comes with different institutional structures and motivating beliefs, but it should not assume that its mastery of coercion stems directly from its origin.

When Contenders Clash: The Nature of Post-Collapse Military Contestation

Great Stakes, Small Fights

Ironically, the conventions of the international state system can create a protective housing that insulates domestic anarchy from foreign actors interested in establishing order for reasons of their own. Intervention by foreign governments is usually very complicated – both from a logistical perspective and a diplomatic one. Even the most ruthless and avaricious security companies (Executive Outcomes, Blackwater/Chi) are unwilling to enter failed states entrepreneurially without the imprimatur of a sovereign client.¹³⁵

This results in a limited number of contestants of an overwhelmingly local character, though often with material support and occasionally manpower support from abroad, operating locally on small scales, with the need to assert their importance quickly or else have resources and authority usurped from them. The time scale and the size of the conflict is thus diminished considerably.¹³⁶

Furthermore, a great deal hinges on the outcome of a relatively small number of violent contests. The losers of battles have few places to which they can retreat, and the loss of a given battle may represent a significant portion of their manpower. Under these conditions, the most appropriate body of work to draw upon is the literature that examines in detail the way in which violent contests for power play out. Specifically, this includes Randall Collins and his study on the microsociology of violence, and the significant body of work on insurgency and counterinsurgency that exists in the field of security studies.¹³⁷

War Without Armies

The work of Giustozzi and affiliated researchers at the Crisis States Institute at the London School of Economics sheds valuable light onto the problem of coercive competition in the wake of state collapse.¹³⁸ In breaking from the literature on nation-building and state-building by

¹³⁴ Beckhusen, “Mexican Cartels Enslave Engineers to Build Radio Network.”

¹³⁵ Scahill, *Blackwater*.

¹³⁶ Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State (Verso World History Series)*; Blackbourn and Blackbourn, *History of Germany, 1780-1918*.

¹³⁷ Collins, *Violence*.

¹³⁸ Giustozzi, *The Art of Coercion*.

focusing on the intimate scale in which violence is carried out and political and military leaders organize and deploy manpower, this literature highlights certain qualities that get lost at the higher order of abstraction:

1. *Not all soldiers are equal.* Frequently, in making large-scale strategic assessments, scholars and analysts look at numbers of troops and personnel available to gauge the relative strength of contestants. Even at the state level, this is already problematic. It is very unlikely that on an individual level, a soldier from, for example, the United States is comparable to the one from Bolivia. Differences in training, equipment, and *esprit de corps*, as well as factors related to national development and nutrition, will all affect combat effectiveness.

This is vastly more true in terms of militias and coercive capacity in conditions of state collapse. The relative abundance of small arms in conflict zones results in the democratization of militia formation. Any group of men willing to carry arms can constitute itself as a guerrilla force. Thus, the level of ability of insurgents, soldiers, and other fighters in the post-conflict environment will range from the highly competent and motivated to those who will drop their weapons and flee at the first sign of resistance. For a group to be successful in surviving, let alone contesting for authority, a key factor is the quality of the men that it can muster. They must be capable of shooting straight, reliable in executing orders, and stalwart enough to face danger willingly. This is far from easy to achieve.

2. *Not all commanders are equal.* Related to the quality of the fighting men is the character and strength of the authority that commands them. In established rules-oriented societies, there is a strong coincidence of title and authority. If a person holds a position in a hierarchy – especially a legal or political hierarchy – and expects that in matters under the purview of that position, her or his directive will be obeyed.¹³⁹

Under conditions of state failure, titles and official positions of authority are rendered meaningless. Real authority – the ability to summon coercive force and to impose one's goals on recalcitrant opponents – is available to literally anyone, checked only by other operators deploying force. Under such conditions, the social roles that confer an authority not grounded in the rules and procedures of the formal state are put to the test. Those figures who find that their social role allows them to give orders and expect obedience, even if only over a small group, become extremely powerful since their authority is no longer limited by the legal framework of the state. These inheritors of power through social position will find competitors whose authority derives from other considerations. There will be rivals that seek to buy influence over people and communities, others who operate through a powerful commitment to an ideology that attracts loyalists, and still others whose personal charisma is enough to grow a following. Ultimately, these different forms of authority will challenge one

¹³⁹ While this has traditionally been the case in high-functioning states, occasionally the prestige of political power is eclipsed by private actors, even for those exercising political office. Consider Jamie Dimon's frankly insolent display when he was brought in to testify before the Congressional finance committee, and the deference that most of its members showed him. Taibbi, "Senators Grovel, Embarrass Themselves at Dimon Hearing."

another. Those leaders who can inspire their forces to stand and fight, and to take personal risks and make sacrifices for the sake of the goals of the group, will succeed.

3. *Guns are important, but they are cheap.* The literature on state formation emphasizes resource mobilization and the ability of effective states to squeeze both manpower and revenue out of the territory that they administer. This is crucial in interstate contests where volume of forces is significant and where wealth can easily be transformed into coercive capacity. In set-piece battles with thousands of troops, and in the face-off of technologically advanced, heavy-weapons-equipped modern militaries, there is a straight line between wealth and the power of an army.

However, under conditions of state collapse, when the main prize is the obedience of the population, it becomes much more difficult to translate wealth into force. In the case of Iraq, the ubiquity of weapons meant that the resource requirements for establishing a militia or other armed group were relatively small. And indeed, even civilians unaffiliated with any armed movement tended to have assault weapons in the home. The resources necessary to maintain a faction are a key component to its competitiveness. But they are also relatively abundant in the shattered ruins of the state.

Competition for Power in Post-Ba'athist Iraq

Why did a particular group of non-state political actors attached to a particular set of traditional social institutions — namely, the sheikhs of al Anbar at the heads of their tribes — come to replace the collapsed Ba'athist state as the key political and security leadership in their region, resisting attempts by jihadi insurgent groups, the revived central state, and American occupation forces to impose their own control over the territory? The result was anomalous by the expectations of contemporary observers. Instead of being brought under the administration of a regular state system, al Anbar persists under the domination of a non-state authority construed along traditional lines.

The reason for the success of the Anbari tribes rests in their institutional characteristics when weighed against their rivals. Specifically, it was the long-wave establishment of internal hierarchy within the Arab tribes of Mesopotamia together with the more recent experience of state empowerment under late Ba'athism that established the sheikhs and tribes as the formidable powers that they are, set to dominate their governorate once unleashed by the hollowing out and final collapse of the central government in 2003.

From Totalitarianism to Chaos: How Security Ddisintegrated After the Fall of Saddam

While the collapse of the Ba'athist state following Operation Iraqi Freedom was dramatic and complete, what followed was not a *tabula rasa* free from the legacy of Ba'athist rule. There is a tendency, in even the more sophisticated literature on state collapse, counterinsurgency, and

small-scale warfare, to generalize away some of the importance of initial conditions.¹⁴⁰ In the case of Iraq, the Ba'athists left behind crucial legacies that would pattern the subsequent contestation for political domination.

The totalitarian nature of the Saddamist government – with its sham elections showing 100% support for Saddam Hussein; its cult of personality around a ubiquitous, omniscient, and all-powerful leader; and the utter lack of a free media, with a culture instead poisoned by Soviet-style double-speak and pervasive propaganda – made the introduction of democratic forms of authority extremely problematic.¹⁴¹ The first major legacy of Ba'athism to its successors was to create social and cultural conditions vastly complicating transition to a democratic order.

The Decline and Fall of the Ba'athist security apparatus

Prior to the US invasion of 2003, Ba'athist Iraq boasted an effective security apparatus.¹⁴² Although the Kurdish north had been effectively given up to Kurdish nationalist parties because of the NATO-enforced no-fly zone, the military, together with the security services, effectively snuffed out the early-1990s Shia uprising in the south, which had spread to involve thousands of opposition fighters controlling a substantial swathe of the country, including the second-largest city of Basrah. Despite the privation caused by sanctions, the Ba'athist state managed to maintain its monopoly on violence within the rump of Iraq, dealing with several internal plots against the leadership, Iranian support for opposition forces, and the continual enmity of the West. Indeed, in the 1990s, the Iraqi state seems to have effectively demonstrated the minimal definition of Weberian state-ness – sanctions and repression had effectively curtailed the state role in service provision – but the security services, including national defense, surveillance and repression, effectively maintained order among an immiserated people living in dilapidated infrastructure. The welfare and management components of the state apparatus were left to atrophy during this decade, but the security apparatus, especially those elements closest to the leadership, were well resourced and effective.

Despite the relative strength of the Ba'athist state, the 2003 invasion by US and multi-national forces proved irresistible. Militarily, the demoralized, under-equipped and under-trained Iraqi forces – still very much aware of the disaster of their last confrontation with US power –

¹⁴⁰ Chesterman, Ignatieff, and Thakur, *Making States Work*; Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters*.

¹⁴¹ The stated mission of the American occupation was to establish a democratic order in post-Saddam Iraq. I personally would not contest the sincerity of that aspiration; the steps taken by the occupational authority in selecting the Iraqi membership of the Governance Council and in organizing broadly contested multi-party elections (even including figures inimical to the occupation, such as Moqtada al Sadr) all testify that a good-faith effort, though a grotesquely inadequate one, was made to achieve the goal of democratic transition. It is likely that US policymakers were lulled into a false confidence by an optimistic reading of the post-communist transition of Central Europe, imagining that the relatively painless transformation of the political order in places such as Poland, Hungary, or the Baltic States would more or less repeat itself in Iraq. (Of course, if they had looked a little further east for their lesson, to the Ukraine, Central Asia, and Russia, perhaps they would have been a little more guarded in their expectations.)

¹⁴² Makiya, *Republic of Fear*.

acknowledged the futility of their position and by and large refused to take the field against US forces. Those few units that did stand their ground were wiped out entirely. Rather than surrender in large numbers, most units of the Iraqi Army simply dissolved themselves and quit the field.

Apart from the physical assault inflicted on the Iraqi state by US forces which, during the period of hostilities, actively sought to degrade and destroy the command and control functions of the Iraqi state, the state US goal of bringing accountability against the Ba‘athist leadership also undermined the Ba‘athist state structure.¹⁴³ Emblematic of the American approach was the printing of a deck of cards represent the “most wanted” Ba‘athist cadres, members of the Iraqi government accused of serious crimes by the United States and slated for arrest and prosecution.¹⁴⁴ The leadership of the security apparatus – the leaders of the very agencies maintaining stability inside Iraq – were heavily represented in the list. As a result, once the US occupational administration was in place, not only were these cadres unavailable to continue in their business of repressing dissent and maintaining order, but also many of them actively worked to undermine the stabilization efforts of the transitional authority and the new Iraqi government it was attempting to incubate. To a large extent, this outcome was inevitable – maintaining the personnel responsible for the repression under Ba‘athist Iraq would be a difficult measure for an occupational authority cultivating the cooperation of the same Shia and Kurdish groups that had been the target of that repression – but this was nevertheless a predictable complication for coalition efforts. However, this already difficult situation was exacerbated by certain policies pursued by the occupational authority. Once American victory had been established as a fact on the ground, Iraqi military units began to reconstitute themselves to seek terms for cooperating with the occupational authority. Similarly, civil servants from state ministries and agencies not specifically targeted for prosecution began to return to work, seeking to resume their functions under occupational administration.¹⁴⁵ This represented the remnants of the Iraqi state seeking accommodation to the reality of US dominance, and presented an opportunity to reconstitute at least part of the administrative apparatus that had previously maintained the monopoly of violence in the Arab south and center of Iraq. However, these overtures were rejected; the Iraqi army was dissolved, to be replaced by a completely new armed force from the ground up, while the civilian components of the state apparatus were subject to far going de-Ba‘athification, with senior and mid-level civil servants purged from their positions, depriving the nascent reconstituted Iraqi state their experience and institutional memory. Occupational personnel proved to be too few in number and too limited in crucial language and managerial skills to make up for the double whammy of the loss of so many state cadres and their simultaneous turn towards insurgent and anti-occupational organizations.¹⁴⁶ Occupational forces, far from being able to step in to provide an effective surrogate for the missing Iraqi state, were unable even to secure the military facilities and ammunitions stockpiles

¹⁴³ Weigley, *The American Way of War*.

¹⁴⁴ *Iraq’s Most Wanted Playing Cards*.

¹⁴⁵ Ferguson, *No End in Sight*.

¹⁴⁶ Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life in The Emerald City*.

of the Ba'athist military or control the movement of goods, money, and weapons across borders. As a result, groups could arm themselves with relative ease. It was at this point that the condition of war, characterized by hostilities between two opposing states, gave way to that of state failure, with a general collapse of order in which violence is no longer effectively regulated. A generally chaotic and turbulent period followed, with different groups organizing coercion towards a variety of ends and competing with one another while avoiding direct confrontation with occupational forces.

Why the Tribes Won in al Anbar

One of this chapter's main arguments is that the nature of the Ba'athist security apparatus primed the tribal sheikhs of al Anbar and their tribesmen to be highly effective post-collapse contenders. Here, I explore this contention from several angles.

The Detritus of the Ba'athist Security Apparatus Was Uneven

The substantial size of the Ba'athist security apparatus — including not just the regular army, but special organs of internal security, intelligence and counter-intelligence, and domestic repression — resulted in a substantial number of Iraqis already trained to some extent in combat and the use of weapons and familiar with military discipline.¹⁴⁷

Crucially, this soldier class was not uniformly distributed among all communities in the country. Because of their perceived sectarian and political loyalty, the Sunni tribes of al Anbar and the northern Tigris region were disproportionately recruited for the most responsible roles in Saddam's security apparatus. Anbaris received the best training and belonged to elite units within the special Republican Guard, and also provided Saddam's personal bodyguard. Sunni tribesmen also provided approximately 70% of the officer class in the entire security apparatus.¹⁴⁸ The discrepancy was especially pronounced following the Shia uprising in the wake of Operation Desert Storm, in which Shia military units defected *en masse* to the rebel cause and were pulverized by loyalist forces. This alone accounted for a significant loss of Shia officers and soldiers but was taken to further extremes in purges following the repression of the uprising.¹⁴⁹

Disproportionate access to training and positions of responsibility was mirrored in access to military matériel. After the fall of Saddam, Sunni soldiers of the elite units had direct access to the substantial stockpiles left behind by the disbanded Iraqi military, which were notoriously left unguarded and unclaimed by US occupational personnel.

¹⁴⁷ Makiya, *Republic of Fear*.

¹⁴⁸ Bowden, "Tales of the Tyrant."

¹⁴⁹ Sakai, "Tribalization as a Tool of State Control in Iraq: Observations on the Army, the Cabinets and the National Assembly."

Semi-Autonomous Barons: How Saddam Empowered the Tribal Sheikhs of al Anbar

In exchange for their political support and the loyalty of their tribesmen, Sunni sheikhs under Saddam in general and the sheikhs of al Anbar specifically enjoyed tremendous autonomy over their own region and their own tribesmen. One RAND analyst described the political arrangement in al Anbar as “baronial,” with substantial resources transferred into the hands of tribal leaders from the central government.¹⁵⁰ This flow allowed sheikhs to shore up their authority through the distribution of patronage and largesse. It also gave them the opportunity to enforce discipline for breaches of tribal custom and solidarity.¹⁵¹

Under Saddam, in addition to these other benefits, the sheikhs of the border region were granted tacit right for smuggling and the running of contraband into the country. Under conditions of sanctions-induced shortages, this offered tribal leaders tremendous leverage by their privileged ability to alleviate shortages of critical goods. Also, non-trivially, the sheikhs themselves were able to travel much more freely. Even before the American invasion, many had commercial and political interests that straddled the Jordanian border and maintained residences in Amman.

In the wake of the Ba‘athist regime’s collapse, this initial position for the Anbari sheikhs gave them a tremendous advantage in consolidating the autonomy they enjoyed under Saddam Hussein, in strengthening their connection to the outside world, and in constituting armed militias from the most elite and best-motivated remnants of the Iraqi security apparatus. Further, the relative homogeneity of al Anbar meant that they did not have local rivals to dispense with in the initial stages of the occupation. In contrast, tribal leaders in other parts of Iraq, especially the Shi‘a south, did not enjoy some of these advantages.¹⁵² They lacked access to a porous border with friendly states, instead being jammed between US-controlled Kuwait and an Iran that was backing theocratic Shi‘a groups as well as local rivals in the form of mosque-based militias such as the Mahdi Army, which enjoyed both domestic legitimacy and connections to Iran.

Under What Conditions Are Tribal Militias Effective?

The particular characteristics that tribal militias enjoy over competing types of militant political groups concern the very basics of violent contestation. The tribal network provides a pre-existing command hierarchy with sheikhs accustomed to leadership and authority and rank-and-file tribesmen accustomed to obeying them. The nesting system of clan, sub-tribes, tribes, and confederations also provides a mid-level leadership, contributing flexibility and sophistication to the tribal militias’ overall structure. Further, the tribal ethos of solidarity, valor, and collective honor functions as a means of instilling discipline and collective esprit without requiring a lengthy period of training and indoctrination. Finally, in terms of considerations of manpower, the network of kinship relations – not limited to just the immediate tribe, but also radiating

¹⁵⁰ Bruce and Martini, “Whither Al-Anbar Province?”

¹⁵¹ Baram, “Neo-tribalism in Iraq.”

¹⁵² Cockburn, *Muqtada*.

outward through marriages and adoptive relationships — provides a ready means of recruitment for replacing fallen soldiers and for increasing the number of men-at-arms to reflect circumstance.¹⁵³ The embeddedness of tribal loyalty also has an economic advantage. While tribesmen who fight expect and receive compensation, they are not, in a sense, exclusively professional soldiers. While there is a key cadre of dedicated security officers — usually within the extended family and household of the sheikh — some have civilian careers and private incomes to draw on, while others can rely in thin times on the kinship network relating them to more prosperous tribesmen, allowing them to withstand temporary economic privation.

The advantages of tribal militias are not limited to the quality and availability of manpower, however. The same networks that are used for recruitment and command over armed men include non-militia tribal members who may be pursuing civilian careers, who may have aged beyond armed service, as well as women, children, and other non-combatants. These groups are expected to provide support, and do so — sometimes economic, sometimes logistical, sometimes by providing specific skill sets on an ad hoc basis. Perhaps most importantly, they provide information as to activities they have witnessed in their own locale that are relevant to the armed struggle.

Famously, in al Anbar, the Americans were unable to develop any reliable sources of human intelligence prior to the al Anbar Awakening. Locals simply would not cooperate in providing information about tribal armed groups, or even about the Al Qaeda-linked insurgents, who often had foreign origins and abusive practices.¹⁵⁴ The results were not pretty: without effective means of gathering information, the Americans often detained Anbaris indiscriminately. Without an effective screening procedure, they subjected detainees to abusive and coercive interrogation willy-nilly, poisoning their relationship with Iraqis and culminating in the national disgrace of the Abu Ghraib prison scandal. Far from providing effective intelligence, this tactic backfired into increased recruitment for the anti-American insurgency.

As soon as the sheikhs broke from Al Qaeda, however, the tribal network became available for intelligence-gathering, and the Al Qaeda operatives and key cadres irreconcilable to the tribal leadership were instantly identified and targeted.

Tribal Victory in al Anbar

In al Anbar province, sparsely populated and relatively homogenous, the security situation resolved itself rapidly. As the state fell apart, Sunni tribal leaders used the prestige and influence afforded their position to organize armed groups, which then established effective control of the province in tandem with al Qaeda and other militant pan-Islamic political movements in opposition to the US presence in Iraq. This would normally complicate an assessment of where power definitively lay in the province, but in 2006 the tribal leaders broke with al Qaeda and effectively brokered a deal with occupational authority to purge the province of Islamic

¹⁵³ Conte, “Agnatic Illusions: The Element of Choice in Arab Kinship.”

¹⁵⁴ McWilliams and Wheeler, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

extremism.¹⁵⁵ So, beyond even the ability to control coercion on the territory, the tribal leaders, far from any typical state structure, also could establish relations with significant external actors. As a result, al Anbar coalesced into a novel political form: effectively beyond an Iraqi central state (which was more notional than real even in Baghdad) but under a measure of order and leadership through an ad hoc network of tribal leaders.

Comparing Anarchies: A Preliminary Exploration of Three Other Cases

Al Anbar is not the only place where the diminishing power of the state to control violence on its territory presents non-state actors with the opportunity to dominate local politics. The problem of state failure is broadly recognized as a pressing and expanding phenomenon. However, to paraphrase Tolstoy, while all successful states may be more or less similar, failed states break down in many different ways. A comparative perspective on how states fail and how this variation patterns the political environment in the aftermath of state failure sheds light on the legacy of state involvement with non-state actors, effective ways of attempting to mitigate the damage caused by declining state authority, and ways of dealing with the condition of state failure.

The grounds for the comparison between the various cases should be the nature of state weakness and the transition away from authority exercised through regular state-bureaucratic structures to power organized through social hierarchies outside the state.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (Especially Eastern Regions)

Even prior to the period of formal colonization, the traditional authority structures within the Congo region were subject to systematic destabilization by European mercantile powers, most notably the Portuguese. Formal colonization further debilitated local Congolese political and social institutions, with the corvée labor extraction practices of the Congo Free State effectively atomizing the Congolese population through terror, displacement, and death, leaving a population behind with very few authority-wielding legacy institutions.¹⁵⁶

Ancien régime: The decline of colonial authority did not coincide with a concomitant rise of Congolese political institutions. Instead, the withdrawal of formal Belgian power resulted in a period of crisis and the eventual consolidation of power behind the Western-backed Mobutu regime. The Mobutu regime, financed by foreign backers and through resource extraction, continued colonial-era policies of keeping Congolese society weak.¹⁵⁷ With the post-Cold War withdrawal of Western patronage, rather than create the conditions to fund and maintain the coercive apparatus locally, the regime and the politically elite instead began to cannibalize the

¹⁵⁵ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

¹⁵⁶ Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*.

¹⁵⁷ MacGaffey, "Civil Society in Zaire: Hidden Resistance and the Use of Personal Ties in Class Struggle."

state apparatus itself, including the central bank and the army.¹⁵⁸ On the one hand, state policy aimed at the degradation of social autonomy; on the other, the state elite undermined the state itself. The state was set for total political collapse.

Post-state condition: Rwandan intervention in pursuit of Hutu genocidaires demonstrated the hollowness of the Congolese security apparatus, with soldiers and police deserting en masse rather than confront a capable resistance movement. However, Laurent Kabila was unable to translate victory over the moribund Mobutu regime into consolidated authority, largely from his unwillingness to accept continued Rwandan patronage. Following his assassination, his son Joseph likewise failed to project state authority over Congolese territory, securing a tenuous grip on the West through international recognition and elite bargaining, but largely surrendering the countryside to a patchwork of violent groups, including regional separatists, foreign-backed militias and local gangs of teenage killers. Neither UN forces nor the central government have been able to stabilize those areas.¹⁵⁹

While an indigenous kingdom of considerable sophistication dominated the western portion of the territory of Democratic Republic of Congo, effectively governing a significant expanse of the Congo basin either directly through a centralized feudal system based around the royal family or through tributary kingdoms, this local governance structure was undermined through Western colonial intervention and depopulated by the Transatlantic slave trade. Portuguese colonialism in Angola, motivated by slave extraction for their New World colonies, weakened indigenous political structures to the point of collapse. In the 19th century, the breakdown of these centralized indigenous states altogether created a vacuum of authority, with localized, village-level successors de facto leading their population but with extremely limited authority and resources.¹⁶⁰ This development facilitated the entry of Belgian soldier-diplomats who secured the vast Congo basin as a personal colony of Leopold II. What remnants of indigenous order remained were broken down and instead a brutal, extractive colonial administration was imposed, led by European cadres and enforced by a local constabulary force. The political priority was wealth extraction during the Free State period, leading to imposition of corvée labor on the population, enforced with no regard to the breakdown of existing social ties or the welfare consequences to the population. Replacement of the Free State with direct rule by Belgium alleviated the suffering of individual Congolese, but did nothing to re-establish indigenous authority structures, instead just moderating the cruelty of the locally-recruited constabulary and increasing the expertise of centrally recruited and educated Belgian administrators.¹⁶¹ When decolonization began to intensify, Congo had a tiny indigenous intelligentsia tilted towards educators and literary intellectuals, a thuggish security apparatus trained by the colonial power, and white technicians and administrators more closely connected to Belgium than Africa. With the severing of the colonial connection and the declaration of independence, the whites departed

¹⁵⁸ Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters*.

¹⁵⁹ Ascherson, "How Millions Have Been Dying in the Congo."

¹⁶⁰ Thornton, *The Kingdom of Kongo*.

¹⁶¹ Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*.

while different indigenous factions, based partly on ideology and partly on personal patronage, scrambled to mobilize a restive and atomized population against one another. In the end, with some sub rose intervention by Western intelligence agencies, Joseph-Desiré Mobutu, the army chief of staff who had served in the colonial constabulary, deposed independence leader Patrice Lumumba and established one-party rule over the country. Decolonization did not alter regime orientation; under Mobutu, the Congolese state continued to be focused on wealth extraction, exploiting domestic labor to hasten the plunder of natural resources with proceeds directed towards the personal consumption of state elites. As disinvestment took its toll on the profitability of resource extraction, the state itself became an object of plunder. In the twilight of the Mobutu regime, money-printing became a revenue strategy to finance the personal expenditures of the elite; military officers pocketed the pay of their soldiers and diverted matériel onto the black market; and at all levels, state officials treated their positions as profit opportunities, either through the appropriation of public property or through the shakedown the public for bribes. As a result, when Laurent Kabila launched his invasion from Rwanda, the entire Congolese state crumbled, with even the security apparatus abandoning its duties without a significant fight.¹⁶²

The neglect of institutions not related to wealth extraction resulted in a dearth of non-state institutions capable of organizing coercion. While discontent against the corruption and incompetence of the Mobutu regime was widespread, no domestic forces effectively mobilized against it (despite the fact that, by the end, the security apparatus was rendered ineffective by that very incompetence and corruption); instead, the government was brought down by a force organized and outfitted by a more effective neighboring state. Even this force, cohesive and disciplined enough to take Kinshasa, proved unable to establish control over the country or even to protect its own position, and Kabila's death (he was assassinated by his own bodyguard) ushered in a period of complete state breakdown. Traditional leaders, village heads, provincial governors, and military officials failed to convert social regard or official position into any kind of coercive capability, and found themselves at the mercy of those groups willing to resort to violence. Such groups emerged from a variety of sources; the most impressive and capable were Rwandan-sponsored Tutsi militias, politically despised but unbeatable in battle due to superior cohesion and organization. Other groups arose spontaneously on the basis of pure plunder and brigandage; with the region awash with weapons both from the abandoned stock piles of ex-Zairian forces and the international small arms trade, ruthless or desperate young men could easily constitute themselves into gangs targeting civilians, and did so. Lumpeninsurgents par excellence by MacInlay's typology, these groups would not take the field against serious rivals and only victimized unarmed villagers.¹⁶³

The systematic destruction of traditional political and social hierarchies that had begun with the elimination of local kingdoms and proceeded through the colonial corvée and Mobutu-era kleptocracy had been effective in eliminating any social basis for opposition to the regime in power. Without such hierarchies, the absence of a dominant, forceful, coercive state apparatus resulted in a Hobbesian hellscape: instead of existing social structures adapting coercion and

¹⁶² Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters*.

¹⁶³ Mackinlay, *Globalisation and Insurgency*.

establishing order in loco imperium, the majority of the population remained isolated and atomized. Coercive power was seized by outsiders, either in the form of foreign interests or marginal leaders at the head of cynical, undisciplined fighters. None has proven equal to re-establishing large-scale public order, leading to a situation of periodic negotiations punctuated by acute violence and fighting.

Pakistan's FATA

Even by the standards of Afghani statecraft, the Pashtun border regions have always been a lawless periphery of the Kabul-based polities that dominated the region in the 18th and 19th centuries. Even as the region was absorbed into the British Raj as a result of the Afghan-Sikh wars, it remained outside of the formal political structures and authority institutions of the colonial administration. Without the inducement to hierarchy of regular relations with centralized political authority, traditional power structures in the form of clan and family loyalties persisted at the most local levels, organizing collective life cooperatively on the smallest scale, but prone to fracture and contention as clans and tribes interacted with one another. The hands-off approach of the post-colonial Pakistani state only served to exacerbate fragmentation, creating the opportunity for other political agents to enter and attempt to broker alliances which would permit for inter-clan and inter-tribal cooperation against outsiders, with mixed results.¹⁶⁴ The Taliban has succeeded in brokering political cooperation between a significant number of clans and lineages, but that alliance is prone to defection and fragmentation due to local jealousies or the efforts of rival forces.

Ancien régime: The region was nominally subject, predating even the British Raj, to a procession of state governments, which were unwilling or unable to project any kind of formal authority within the region. The Pakistani military did not enter the region until 2001, and its presence there has been hotly contested, triggering a robust insurgency.

Post-state condition: The region remains in turmoil, with all power devolved onto local groups and Pakistani military units limited to their own bases, occasionally emerging from them to conduct limited operations. Largely-scale authority, to the extent that it exists, emerges from coalition building among elders, warlords, and Taliban leaders.

The weakness of the Pakistani state, especially in the federally-administered tribal areas adjoining Afghanistan, is over-determined. Pakistani state authority has never completely extended over the Pashtun-majority borderlands, which have formally and publicly enjoyed an irregular relationship to the authority of the central government. The territory only came to be included in Pakistan as a hinterland region of semi-compliant tribal groups inherited from the British Imperial administration. Subject to extreme domestic and external pressures, the Pakistani state was never able to extend regular administration over the region. (The extent to which the

¹⁶⁴ Naseemullah, "Foundations of the Frontier: Norms, Resources and Sovereignty in Pakistan's Tribal Areas."

Pakistani state is able to maintain its monopoly on violence even in its core regions is debatable.)¹⁶⁵

To the extent that order of any kind operates in the territory, it emerges from a network of local leaders who leverage lineal connections and reputational capital to organize squads of armed men capable of enforcing their writ. The challenge is to find a means of working through these existing power hierarchies to regularize and stabilize order in a means consistent with the regular operation of the Pakistani state.

After September 11, 2001, the United States increased pressure on the Pakistani central government to support its fight against the Taliban within Pakistan. However, the lone effective institutions of the Pakistani central government – the military and intelligence services – were loath to take on the Taliban. Although Pakistani forces did suffer significant personnel losses in fighting the Taliban, the military top brass never exerted full force in that fight. Instead, they stuck to their longstanding policy of maintaining ex-mujaheddin fighters and cordial relations with the Taliban as trump cards in potential future military conflicts with India. Combined with a domestic environment hostile to perceived kowtowing to Washington, this exacerbated the power vacuum within FATA: the Pakistani military would not, and could not, enter. At the same time, there was no US military presence on the ground in Pakistan (save special forces and covert agents who were chasing Al Qaeda operatives quite single-mindedly and had little interest in state building).

As a result, the main armed actors in FATA by the late part of the first decade of the 21st century were, on the one hand, small, local, kinship-based militias; on the other, they were Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (the TTP, or the Pakistan Taliban Movement) and various transnational Islamist organizations seeking rearguard safe havens, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. Enjoying neither major rentier assets nor material support from interested outsiders, the local kinship-based militias generally did not pursue territorial expansion. Instead, they protected their own small units of remote territory by virtue of superior knowledge of local terrain. Their primary survival strategy was shifting back and forth in their relations with the TTP and transnational Islamists groups, switching between alliance-building and skirmishing.¹⁶⁶

Somalia

Although Somalia is one of the few African states with a religiously, ethnically, and linguistically homogenous population, the diversity and pluralism resulting from its basic social structures is a well-documented phenomenon. Unlike the Congo basin, where indigenous kingdoms created robust, centralized political institutions only to be smashed by colonial interventions and administration, the foundational units of collective life were socio-cultural – a system of patrilineal tribes and clans, from broad confederations down to the so-called *dia*-paying groups – with local political formations (territorial Sultanates, city-state trading centers, and, occasionally, empires dominating neighboring ethnic and cultural groups) emerging out of coalitions of these

¹⁶⁵ Naseemullah, “Shades of Sovereignty: Variable State-Building and Insurgency in South and Central Asia.”

¹⁶⁶ Abbas and Jamestown Foundation (Washington), *Pakistan’s Troubled Frontier*.

lineage groups. The colonial period did little to disrupt these traditional social structures, with both the Italians and British finding it more expedient to co-opt clan leaders as necessary, and delegate the management of the countryside to them. These institutions faced significant disruption under the modernizing, socialist regime of Siad Barre, but proved resilient enough to overthrow that government, breaking the state entirely in the process. Since then, the effective hierarchy within tribes, clans and lineages has produced a variety of viable coercive contestants, but the lack of a legacy of state-brokered collaboration has prevented them from cooperating in non-coercive governance structures.

Ancien régime: At independence, multi-party democracy was introduced, creating another venue for clan and tribally elites to dominate. The military coup of Siad Barre, however, marked a profound turning point. Influenced heavily by Marxism-Leninism and identifying Islam alone as the source of the worthwhile elements of Somali tradition, he initiated a thoroughgoing campaign to undermine tribal and clan leadership in the name of modernizing nationalism. Concentrating power in the security apparatus of the newly dubbed Somali Democratic Republic, Barre imposed strict economic controls and political repression that disrupted traditional Somali social structures while also launching a disastrous war against Ethiopia over the majority-Somali Ogaden region. The failure of that war precipitated revolts throughout the country organized along tribal and clan lines, which he ruthlessly suppressed using recruits drawn from deracinated Ogaden refugees.

Post-state condition: A variety of opposition groups emerged to mobilize against the Barre regime, each drawing on different lineage connections in different regions of the country and each producing its own coercive and political wings. The result proved overwhelming, and the Somali Democratic Republic was effectively brought down by the multi-faceted resistance. However, the various resistance groups all mobilized independently of one another and did not have an overlapping base of support, so they turned their coercive power on one another in a scramble to secure their own dominance in post-Barre Somalia. The results have varied greatly across the country, from the creation of an enclave of enviable stability and democratic representation in the breakaway Republic of Somaliland, through the more troubled self-declared Puntland autonomous region, to genuine multi-sided anarchy and civil war throughout the south of Somalia. This politically heterogeneous post-state status quo persists, despite significant Western-backed efforts to create a coalition interim government.

Conclusion

The fundamental characteristic of a functioning state is the monopoly of violence. With the assumption of the role of enforcer of peace by a robust political institution, the security question for the populace at large is settled from above, allowing those living under the state – as individuals, as families, as social groups – to move beyond considerations of their personal safety to questions of securing their livelihood, developing their personal talents and interests, pursuing their particular desires, in short to moving beyond the fear of death and taking care of the daily

business of life. For those of us who live in these circumstances, it is very easy to forget that this is not the natural condition of life, but rests upon a very particular political framework. For those outside of such a framework, every action, no matter how mundane, is circumscribed by the fear of violence.

In such circumstances, the typical measures of political efficacy — popularity, persuasiveness, the mobilization of votes and of financial contributions — become eclipsed by the need to organize force. Political power belongs to those who have mastered the business of violence, the accumulation of loyal manpower willing to brutalize human bodies, and the tools (weapons, logistics, intelligence technology) to maximize their effectiveness. In the absence of state-supplied security, the realm of politics devolves into a dog fight between the factions that can muster the coercive capacity to engage in organized violence.

Often, in the social-scientific examination of politics, the beginning of the violent phase of political competition also marks the end of sustained analysis: the collapse of state institutions marks the beginning of a Hobbesian war of all against all, the *summum malum* too terrible to contemplate. However, while this is a dreadful condition with grisly consequences for the civilian population, the change in the underlying logic of political contestation does not render the new environment intractable. The introduction of violence to political contestation requires the use of new analytic tools to examine the competitiveness of different agents, concepts which have already been developed by security specialists, scholars of insurgency and small-scale warfare, and specialists on failed states. Not all violent groups are equivalent, and the social characteristics of different violent groups can be used to understand their behavior and to evaluate their prospects in a post-state security vacuum.

It is towards that end that I propose a social-groups approach to violent contestation in state-failure scenarios. The number of contesting groups is finite, based largely on the social environment of the society prior to the collapse of state-sponsored security. The institutions which regulated collective life on a sub-state level serve as the most likely incubators of organized violent groups, particularly if they wielded informal authority. Further, the characteristics of those institutions — specifically, the extent to which they operated on the basis of authoritative hierarchy — have significant implications for their effectiveness in the realm of violent political contestation. To understand what happens when the state fails, consider the institutions that exist prior to state failure, and their suitability for the new environment where violence and coercion are the norm.

Together with the internal structure of the groups violently contesting, the other major determinant of their competitiveness is the shorter-term legacy of their involvement with the now-defunct state. Contemporary social science correctly recognizes that the state — particularly the modernist state — plays the central role in the organization of collective life for those under its aegis. Consequently, even a state dysfunctional enough to precipitate its own demise will mark the institutions which survive its extinction. One possibility is that sub-state institutions colluded with the former state apparatus and enjoy a privileged position in the emerging anarchy, well-placed to assert their political prerogatives against all contenders. Another is that state hostility towards those social institutions has eroded their authority over their members, leaving them inert prey to newer, more ruthless and energetic coercive actors. In my cursory examination of the

contrasting cases of DR Congo, the FATA region of Pakistan, and Somalia, I have endeavored to demonstrate how the influence of authoritative structure in the groups violently contesting in post-state environments (particularly traditional social groups) together with the shorter-run legacy of policies by the former state decisively pattern the violent struggle for dominance. For social scientists studying societies in the wake of state failure, this violent group analysis, informed by insights gleaned from securities studies and regional specialists, could provide a means of parsing the anarchy and evaluating the characteristics and predicting the fortunes of the violent groups freed by state collapse.

Part II

Preface to the Empirics

The case of Iraq following the 2003 US invasion, and specifically the story of the evolving security and political environment in al Anbar between the invasion and 2010, provides a unique opportunity to examine the consequences of state failure and the difficulty of creating security in a post-state failure setting. Between the Ba'athist seizure of power in 1968 and the American invasion of 2003, the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party dominated the government of Iraq, first under the leadership of Ahmed Hassan al Bakr (1968–1979) and then under the lengthy tenure of Saddam Hussein (1979–2003). The Ba'ath party was explicitly modernist and Arab nationalist in its program and sought to create a modern, totalitarian party-state mirroring that of the Soviet Union which would monopolize authority within the country (supplanting ethnic leadership, tribal chiefs, and religious (especially Shi'a) orders) and implement policies along a nationalist/developmental agenda.

Through a combination of ruthlessness, effective institutional design within the security apparatus, and abundant oil wealth, the Ba'ath largely attained their goal of creating an effective, modern state apparatus and achieved some successes in their developmental agenda. The security organs of the state went through a series of punishing tests beginning in the early 1980s, with the Iran-Iraq War, continuing through Operation Desert Storm in 1990-91 and the lengthy sanctions period that followed. Despite severe internal challenges — a massive rebellion following defeat in 1991, the de facto detachment of the Kurdish territories in the mid-1990s and severe economic dislocation as a result of the sanctions regime — the state security order survived, through effective use of its remaining resources and through important alliances with sub-state social groups. The Ba'athist state was ruthless, sectarian, factional, and brutal, but it did succeed in maintaining a stable internal security environment.

American victory in Operation Iraqi Freedom brought an end to not only the leadership of the Ba'athist state, but the Ba'athist state itself. While the institutions and the key mid-level personnel within the state structures (most importantly the security structures) had suffered considerably during the sanctions period and the US invasion, they remained in place until the promulgation of Coalition Provisional Authority orders 1 and 2, which disbanded the Iraqi Army and instituted De-Ba'athification — that is, the systematic purging of former members of the

Ba'ath party from all state structures. The result was the de facto elimination of the state, and with it, its control over domestic coercion.

The end of the admittedly tyrannical and overbearing Ba'athist state was intended, according to the neo-conservative hopes of the war's planners, to unleash the democratic impulses of the Iraqi people, who would spontaneously organize a liberal government. What in fact occurred was the flowering of dozens of armed militia based on existing social groups and movements, partly from within Iraq and partly from outside the region. US occupational forces were strong enough to smash the formal, identifiable Ba'athist state, but could not execute the democratic state-building project they had launched, which was immediately undermined by the violent contestation of aggrieved militants (as opposed to the civil contestation envisioned). The result was a multi-sided insurgency and a Baghdad-based official government with only nominal authority within the country, but official recognition by US occupational forces and the international community as the exclusive, legitimate political authority within the country.

Under these conditions the violent contest for political dominance took place. In al Anbar, the struggle mirrored the rest of the country, but the results were unequivocal. A variety of different actors wrestled for control – the security units of the reconstituted Iraqi state, their American partners, tribal militias and international jihadist groups. In a conflict between such heterogeneous groups, the deciding factor is not resource advantages but rather the institutional characteristics of the various parties, specifically in terms of their relationship with the local population. In this, the tribes enjoyed a decisive advantage.

American efforts were initially constrained by the imperative to work through official Iraqi state channels, locking the American leadership into a partnership with an institution with a weak coercive capacity of its own and with no organic connection to the people of al Anbar governorate. International jihadi groups boasted certain organizational advantages which made them formidable fighters: their foot soldiers were willing to die (both in battle and in suicide attacks), they could rely on regional networks for financial and other support, and they excelled at propaganda for Sunni/Salafist audiences. However, it was the tribes who emerged superior in the contest because of particular institutional advantages forged out of long- and short-term historical legacies. The following chapters examine this contest in depth, and seek to account for the institutional characteristics which gave the tribes of al Anbar their edge.

Chapter 3, the Anarchic Environment, introduces the specific events that flowed out of the destruction of the Ba'athist state and the arrival of the occupational force. It describes the specifics of the governorate, the geographic setting, and the security conditions and moves by US occupational forces that precipitated the events that shaped a political environment in which the sheikhs could unilaterally play the preeminent role.

Chapter 4, the Origins of Iraqi Tribalism, describes the institutional characteristics which made the tribes the formidable coercive actors that they are. It demonstrates how tribal structures were shaped over time by the realities of life in al Anbar, the traditional Arab pattern of egalitarian relations between sheikh and tribesmen gradually replaced by an authority relationship, in which sheikhs could issue orders and sanction recalcitrant tribesmen. It also examines the shorter-run

changes brought on by the interaction of tribes with the Ba'athist regime. While initially Ba'athism expressed hostility to tribalism, seeing it as an atavistic, pre-modern holdover to be replaced by pan-Arab solidarity, changing conditions and loyalty considerations forced a shift, first in recruitment practice for positions of authority, and finally in official social and political policy favorable to tribal leaders. Ba'athist policy resulted in the strengthening of tribal coercive capacity, especially in the waning days of Ba'athist rule, and directly translated into advantages in organized coercion. The current coercive effectiveness of tribes in violent contests stems largely from this shift.

Chapter 5, the Emergence of the al Anbar Quasi-State traces the emergence of the al Anbar Salvation Council and the ascent of the sheikhs in the governorate in the waning days of the US occupation. It looks in detail at the insurgent violence that spawned the Salvation Councils and led to de facto tribal control over the governorate. In the multi-sided conflict that followed the collapse of state institutions and the breakdown of the Ba'athist coercive monopoly, the sheikhs outmaneuvered other social actors and other large-scale armed groups to establish their dominance over the territory, creating a parallel authority structure unrelated to the formal central government in Baghdad.

Though the circumstances of al Anbar are very particular, there are lessons to be gleaned that can be applied well beyond the governorate. Tribes — or tribe-like structures — are a feature of many societies both in the Middle East and elsewhere. Together with other non-state groups, they represent a major understudied coercive and political force, especially relevant in conditions of state failure. With a better appreciation of the institutional characteristics of these groups, we gain insight into the life-or-death political struggle that follows the failure of established and recognized states.

Chapter 3: The Anarchic Environment

Operation Iraqi Freedom swept away the Ba'athist Iraqi party-state and ushered in a period of violent political competition, as various factions within Iraqi society contended with the US occupation and attempted to assert their authority over Iraq, in whole or in part. With the security structures eliminated, there were no longer any limitations to how groups could challenge others over control of territory or claim the obedience of local populations. In this type of contestation, the institutional characteristics of existing groups, such as political parties, religious communities, or tribes, determine their coercive effectiveness. In the case of al Anbar, the tribes enjoyed two institutional legacies — hierarchy through long-range institutional evolution and empowerment through collusion with the Ba'athist state — that allowed them to emerge as the de facto masters of the governorate.

This chapter examines the environment in which the sheikhs of al Anbar organized and established their preeminence. This includes both a description of the contours of the physical and human geography of the governorate, and a narration of the events leading to state collapse and anarchic political violence in Iraq.

The new environment was generated by outsiders. The result of decisions by the American occupational force in the initial stages of the takeover of the country eliminated the foundations of Ba'athist rule, fatally degrading the capacity of the central Iraqi government to establish its coercive authority over the country. American forces were enough to deter the overt intervention of foreign states and disrupt positive attempts by non-state actors to establish their own coercive domination, but not enough to make the central Iraqi government effective or to midwife an effective national electoral order (the stated political goal of American-led reconstruction). The result was an environment of state collapse: coercive actors associated with a variety of ideologies and social structures, foreign and local, contended with the Americans and with one another to further their interests and establish their own authority. From that struggle, it was not the massive resource and technological advantage of the Americans, nor the formal legitimacy of the Iraqi central government, nor the international networks and extreme motivation of international Islamist groups that prevailed, but rather the tribal sheikhs of al Anbar. Their success resulted from their connection to their locality, from the unique institutional characteristics they boasted in their tribal hierarchy, and through their tutelage while auxiliaries of the pre-collapse Ba'athist security apparatus.

This chapter thus consists of two parts. The first serves as an introduction to the specific features of al Anbar province, and how the characteristics of the territory shaped the development of the Arab tribes of al Anbar into the effective coercive institutions that established authority over the territory through the Awakening. The second consists of an account of the dissolution of regular state authority within the governorate and the struggle of the US occupational forces to reestablish stability. Ultimately, the US occupational forces' only effective strategy for pacifying the territory was the cooptation of tribal authority, a fate that essentially meant giving up the formal state reconstruction effort in al Anbar and recognizing tribal authority.

The physical environment of al Anbar played a crucial role for the *denouement* of post-state collapse violence in the governorate. The geography of the region patterned the ways in which violent contestation took place, shaping the insurgency and favoring the sheikhs, who enjoyed deep levels of authority over the concentrated population centers, characterized by their ability to exclude outsiders, whether American forces or al Qaeda-linked Islamists.

Characteristics of al Anbar Province

Vast, Sparsely Populated, and Homogeneous

Al Anbar, the largest by far of Iraq's 18 governorates, is defined by unique physical and geographic features that shape security and political maneuvering in the province. Access to a long, porous border with Jordan and Syria facilitates smuggling and infiltration; large empty spaces, both in the desert and along the Euphrates, permit irregular groups to marshal, organize and hide forces readily; and the long, linear network of desert highways creates ample opportunities for ambush or IED traps. Similarly, the unique demographics of al Anbar — unlike any other region in Iraq, it is homogeneously Sunni and Arab — facilitates general mobilization, and creates fewer cleavages between social groups. Although tribal identity can be used to pit Anbaris against one another, ethnic and sectarian difference (the great bugbears of politics elsewhere in Iraq) are not salient issues within the region. The tribes are the preeminent social institutions, and the sheikhs the exclusive indigenous leadership.

Al Anbar's area (138,501 km²) is approximately of the size of California. Geographically, it is dominated by the northward protrusion of the Arabian Desert and the eastward extension of the Syrian Desert. Together, they occupy the southernmost two-thirds of the governorate, and are organized into the barren and sparsely populated al Rutba District. The northeastern section of al Anbar follows the course of the Euphrates River, and contains a region that is fertile, agriculturally productive, and home to the vast majority of the population. The location of al Anbar on the western borderland of the country means that it links the population centers around Baghdad to the border with Syria and Jordan. Access to Syria is via the road that runs along the course of the Euphrates River, going through the cities of Hit, Haditha, and al Qa'im. Meanwhile, National Highway 10, the main route connecting Baghdad to Amman, Jordan, passes through the main urban centers of Fallujah and Ramadi before veering through the barren desert on its course to the Jordanian border. At the northernmost edge of al Anbar,

beyond the northern bank of the Euphrates, begins the region known as the Jazira, an area of low rainfall and sparse vegetation between Iraq's two major rivers.

Despite the large size of the governorate, al Anbar's population is only 1.5 million. The population is highly urbanized, with a cluster at the extreme east of the governorate in Fallujah, a significant Iraqi city (population approximately 350,000) close enough to the main conurbation around Baghdad to be closely tied to the political and economic life of central Iraq. Ramadi, home to 500,000 people, is the capital of the governorate and the largest population center in the region. It extends along the banks of the Euphrates River for approximately 60 kilometers, giving it a sprawling, low-density character that bleeds gradually into the desert. The remaining urban centers are much smaller and more provincial, serving as centers for an agricultural countryside. The only significant settlement in the desolate desert region of the south is the district town of Rutba, home to approximately 50,000 people. It is a way station and logistical point on the strategic Amman-Baghdad road.

Unusual among Iraqi governorates, al Anbar has a largely homogenous population composed of ethnic Arabs of the Sunni branch of Islam. Indeed, the vast majority of the population belongs to the Dulaym tribal confederation,¹⁶⁷ an association of related tribes so prominent in the region that they once gave the governorate its official name. In addition to the Dulaym, three other significant tribal groupings exist in the region.¹⁶⁸ The Anizzah and the Zoba are traditionally friendly with the Dulaym. The Anizzah have generally lived in the desert area near the Jordanian border, while the Zoba have been spread out along the Euphrates. The Jazira region in the north of the governorate is home to the Shammar Jarba, who do not belong to the Dulaym confederation and have not always enjoyed the warmest relations with them. However, the situation in the Jazira has drawn them further north toward Mosul, rather than involving the tribe too closely in the affairs of al Anbar. Taken together, the demographic profile of the governorate grants it a cultural, ethnic, and religious unity otherwise unknown in Iraq. In al Anbar, unlike other regions, tribal leaders did not have to contend with rivals drawn from Shia religious institutions, or Kurdish nationalist groups.

Desert Life Produces Tribal Politics

Accounts of al Anbar from the early twentieth century prior to industrialization, urbanization, and the creation of modern political boundaries show how the vagaries of desert life shaped future social and political organization.¹⁶⁹ The difficulties of pursuing a livelihood in the desert regions on either side of the Euphrates cannot be overstated. Likewise, the advantages of access to the river are tremendous. The only alternative available to those tribes without permanent place on the Euphrates was pastury and a largely nomadic way of life. Those who did inhabit the

¹⁶⁷ Todd et al., *Iraq Tribal Study – Al-Anbar Governorate*.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Bell, *Syria, The Desert and the Sown*.

well-watered ways around the river guarded their territory jealously under arms, with no real state guarantees for their tribal prerogatives.¹⁷⁰

These conditions gave rise to tribal politics par excellence. Sheikhs constantly needed to demonstrate prowess under arms, all the while weaving networks of mutual support and assistance in order to avoid being outmaneuvered or dispossessed by some combination of rivals. At this time, under the political domination of the late Ottoman Empire, the population was sparser and significantly lower, but the pattern of tribal life was set.

The Long Pedigree of Sunni Privilege

The characteristics of al Anbar — its relative remoteness from the population centers of Baghdad and Basra, its lack of significant oil resources, and the conservative Sunni Arab character of its population — all insulate its society from the upheavals experienced elsewhere. From the beginnings of Iraqi statehood under the British mandate in 1919, colonial authorities considered the Sunni minority to be the most politically reliable. Sunni Arabs were favored for positions of prominence in the state apparatus and political life.¹⁷¹ That reputation trickled down, and meant that government authority tended to treat Sunni communities with less suspicion and more favor. Even during the revolutionary period under Qasim (1958–1963) and the early Ba‘athists, when tribalism itself was seen as a reactionary atavism and targeted for elimination through modernization,¹⁷² the main targets were the tribal grandees of the Shia south, who also fell afoul of agricultural land reform.¹⁷³ Instead, the economic transformation of Iraq took place in al Anbar under conditions of social and cultural continuity. As the governorate’s population grew larger, more urban, and better educated, the tribal social framework, far from undermined, was transported into an urban environment and broadened to include new classes of educated professionals.¹⁷⁴ The persistence of tribal identity as a focal point in al Anbar is visible in the use of tribal names to refer to geographic areas in interviews and in everyday language. When referring to neighborhoods in Ramadi or particular districts in the countryside, Anbaris regularly use the names of the tribes that inhabit them.¹⁷⁵

While the evolution of the tribes of al Anbar in their contemporary form was a long-wave process related to the historical and geographical context of the region, the immediate precipitant for their emergence as the dominant coercive authority in the governorate was the collapse of the Ba‘athist state, which had successfully, through both intimidation and accommodation, established its superiority in Iraq by 1968. The Ba‘ath party came out on top during the years of coups and conspiracies following the abolition of the monarchy in 1958, and successfully consolidated its rule through a party-state bureaucratic apparatus in the 1970s. Between

¹⁷⁰ Wilson and Bell, *Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia*.

¹⁷¹ al-Heis, *The Tribe and Democracy: The Case of Monarchist Iraq (1921-1958)*.

¹⁷² Baram, “Neo-Tribalism in Iraq.”

¹⁷³ Fernea, *Shaykh and Effendi; Changing Patterns of Authority among the El Shabana of Southern Iraq*.

¹⁷⁴ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

¹⁷⁵ Todd et al., *Iraq Tribal Study - Al-Anbar Governorate*. This was also common in conversation with the sheikhs, who referred to regions within the governorate by tribal affiliation.

deliberate moves to eliminate rival sources of power, including curtailing the influence of tribalism in Iraqi society, and using oil royalties for institution building and development, the Ba'athists established a modern, albeit totalitarian, state structure in Iraq, linking together the whole country, including the Kurdish north.

The environment of al Anbar, with its concentrated, homogenous population, limited water sources, and remote expanses, served as an ideal crucible for the creation of unified, hierarchical tribal structures. Tribesmen lived close to sheikhs, in communities with strong perceived lineage links between their members, and in isolation from more cosmopolitan influences from the metropolis of Baghdad. Their religious uniformity combined with decentralized Sunni practice eliminated clerical figures as potential rivals for local leadership (as opposed to the Shi'a south, where religious institutions, shrines, and congregations produced a parallel authority structure to that of the tribes), leaving sheikhs to content with only two possible challenges – the central state or other sheikhs.

The Unraveling of the Central State

In the second part of this chapter, I will trace the unraveling of the central state as an antagonist to tribal authority. This process occurred in two stages: first, as the Ba'athist state experienced external pressure due to a series of disastrous wars (Iran–Iraq, Desert Storm, the sanctions period, and finally Operation Iraqi Freedom), it sought accommodation and partnership rather than subordination from tribal leaders. Second, after the American invasion of 2003, the central state was effectively abolished, giving tribal leaders an opening to establish themselves as the paramount authority in al Anbar.

Baathist Control Degraded from Outside

As the Ba'athist totalitarian security state came under increased pressure as a result of both the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988) and especially Operation Desert Storm (1991), its ability to control the population through the organs of the party-state and security apparatus was severely undermined. Its inability to secure a victory against either the Iranian or American nemesis undermined the fragile legitimacy of the Ba'athist ideology, built on modernization and nationalism, and revealed official propaganda as out-of-touch bluster.¹⁷⁶ The physical and economic devastation wreaked by those two conflicts, especially when compounded by post-war economic crises and the UN sanctions regime, revealed the weakness of Ba'athist leadership. Scarcity also ended the pre-war policy of purchasing social buy-in through improvements in material well-being.¹⁷⁷ In addition, the severe losses inflicted by those two conflicts on the personnel and infrastructure of the security apparatus strained its ability to impose repression effectively on a population now more restive and embittered than ever. The coping mechanism for the Ba'athist state under the

¹⁷⁶ Makiya, *Republic of Fear*.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

conditions of the 1990s was to roll back, as much as possible, its institutional footprint in non-sensitive areas of life and in geographic regions least threatened by instability.¹⁷⁸

Renaissance of the Tribal Sheikhs

The consequence for al Anbar was that tribal leaders, having survived the revolutionary period relatively intact, re-emerged in the 1990s as the main local authorities. In exchange for managing the governorate, the central government left tribal leaders to their own devices and remained fairly confident in the sheikhs' reliability.¹⁷⁹ The tribes then became vessels for the distribution of patronage to the local population. This patronage came in the form of prestigious jobs in both the security apparatus and in the commercial sector, which was dominated by state contracting to businesses controlled by tribal leaders. (Following a pattern common to the region, the official owners and heads of contracting firms often contributed little to the business. Instead, they collected a rent and acted as go-betweens for managers looking for public-sector disbursements.)¹⁸⁰

The sheikhs of al Anbar were indispensable partners to the Ba'athist regime between 1980–2003, delivering stability and order within their region and supplying reliable and motivated recruits for the security apparatus. These recruits were willing to carry out operations far from home against the Kurdish and Shi'a communities.¹⁸¹ However, the sheikhs could play this role on behalf of the Ba'athist government precisely because they were independent from its structure. They represented social units seen as *prior* to the Ba'athist state, more *authentic* than the party apparatus, and intimately *connected* through kinship and history to the lives of the local population.

This quality of cooperating with the state and being useful to the state without actually being a component of the state apparatus also allowed the tribal sheikhs of al Anbar to survive the demise of Ba'athism with their relevance and leadership intact. Indeed, when Ba'athist officialdom vanished in the wake of Operation Iraqi Freedom and the American occupational administration disbanded its surviving political and military leadership, the sheikhs, precisely because they were outside of the formal government apparatus – bearing titles and roles not granted by any state authority – abided and remained leadership figures within their communities.¹⁸² In 2003 and early 2004, during the first weeks of the occupation, they attempted gingerly to navigate some kind of relationship with American military forces in al Anbar.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁸ Baram, "Neo-Tribalism in Iraq."

¹⁷⁹ Baram, "The Iraqi Tribes and the Post-Saddam System."

¹⁸⁰ Jabar, "Shaykhs and Ideologues."

¹⁸¹ Sakai, "Tribalization as a Tool of State Control in Iraq: Observations on the Army, the Cabinets and the National Assembly."

¹⁸² Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

¹⁸³ In regular governing meetings with principals of the Iraqi Transportation Network, tribal leaders often lamented that it had taken so long to establish a working relationship with US forces. Some had worked with US military officers in the early stages of the occupation, only to have that cooperation derailed by short rotations and Baghdad-based democracy-building efforts.

While the American occupation was composed of groups and leaders from a variety of intellectual schools, it succumbed to the typical hubris of Western interventions. The swift defeat of the military forces of Ba'athist Iraq inflated the perception of American strength, while the combination of neo-conservative foreign policy perspectives with libertarian ideological beliefs resulted in an ambitious blueprint guided by a ground-up reconstruction of Iraq *ab nihilo*, based on the expected behavior of an individuated, self-interested (though enlightened) civil society. Through control of the capital and the elimination of a state-centric rival, the leadership of the US occupation fell under the illusion that they were the ultimate authorities within Iraq, and they could direct the manner and character of the reconstitution of the Iraqi state. This is evidenced by the issuing of Coalition Provisional Authority orders 1 and 2, which abolished the army and purged government structures of Ba'ath party members, essentially gutting the Ba'athist state as both an institution and authority, while promoting the US occupational force as its replacement. Through elections and collaboration with the Coalition Provisional Authority, a new, inclusive, democratic Iraqi state was expected to emerge. It did not, and authority was instead claimed by whichever non-state coercive actors had the wherewithal to grab it.

Parts of the US occupational apparatus were well aware of the prominence and importance of tribal leadership in western Iraq. A number of sheikhs, including several who had left the country in opposition to the Hussein regime, had been in contact with forward elements of the occupational effort.¹⁸⁴ This happened even before hostilities commenced in March 2003. Although the sheikhs themselves accepted Saddam's largesse and distributed patronage they received from Baghdad, they were fundamentally pragmatic about the outcome of a dedicated US effort at regime change. Recognizing the defeat of the Ba'athist state as a foregone conclusion, the vast majority of Anbari sheikhs remained at home during the actual invasion of the governorate in March 2003 and refused to mobilize on behalf of Saddam against American expeditionary forces. During Operation Iraqi Freedom itself, in marked contrast to what was to follow in late 2003 through 2005, al Anbar was not the site of significant fighting or conflict. When contact was made between local leaders and US occupational forces, it took place under relatively civil conditions.¹⁸⁵

At the moment of the American invasion in 2003, the Anbari sheikhs were powerful self-interested operators, what I call "fragmented pragmatists." The double shock of American and subsequently Al Qaeda incursion between 2003 and 2005 unified them into a powerful state-like structure capable of pacification and state-like administration by 2007–2010. When the Ba'athist regime fell to Coalition forces in 2003, the pragmatic Anbari sheikhs mostly stayed out of the fight, having predicted that Saddam would fall in the face of overwhelming American might. But in the absence of an American program for administration and pacification beyond merely sweeping away the old Ba'athist state apparatus, the Anbari sheikhs found their profitable and relatively stable sources of income threatened by chaos and a vacuum of state patronage. Al Qaeda's aggressive and ideologically foreign incursion into Anbar in 2004–2005 amplified the uncertainty of the sheikhs' situation. It was this chaos, which threatened the interests of the ever-

¹⁸⁴ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

¹⁸⁵ McWilliams and Wheeler, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

pragmatic sheikhs, that led them to unify in the al Anbar Awakening, forming the quasi-state that is the explanandum of this study.

Fragmented pragmatists

There was no dispositional unanimity across the tribal leadership toward the American reconstruction enterprise. Virtually all sheikhs had received patronage from Baghdad and were implicated in the Ba'athist state in one way or another. Many were also intimately linked to the former regime through kinship ties with Ba'athist leaders and high-ranking military officers.¹⁸⁶ These sheikhs tended to be skeptical – even hostile – toward US efforts in their country. Other sheikhs who had run afoul of Saddam at one point or another – a group that included returnees from exile in Amman, Jordan, and in Saudi Arabia – were more welcoming of the opportunity a fresh start seemingly promised.¹⁸⁷ There was also a minority who were ideologically and religiously predisposed to violent confrontation with the Americans. (The Islamist insurgency is typically imagined, following the al Anbar Awakening, to be in opposition to the tribal leadership. While this is generally true, there were, and continue to be, tribal leaders who are committed partisans of the Islamist cause.)¹⁸⁸ And still others, perhaps the majority, were simply pragmatic: anxious to maintain in the new emerging political environment the autonomy, prestige, and prosperity they had enjoyed under late Ba'athism.¹⁸⁹ Despite the potential offered by partnering with pragmatic tribal leaders, the initial US occupation opted to emphasize the formal structures of the central government over cultivating relationships with leaders who wielded substantive power locally.

The ability of tribal leaders to come to terms with the US-led reconstruction of Iraq was greatly complicated by the uncertainty and sudden policy changes that dominated the early occupation period of 2003–2004. In addition to a lack of a consistent and well-articulated plan in the early stages of the occupation, the communication of decisions made in the Green Zone to those affected by them – both in the US occupational apparatus and on the Iraqi side – was extremely poor.¹⁹⁰ Communication was further bedeviled by a lack of clarity as to which US military commanders had authority over civil affairs in their areas of operation.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁶ Sakai, “Tribalization as a Tool of State Control in Iraq: Observations on the Army, the Cabinets and the National Assembly.”

¹⁸⁷ Todd et al., *Iraq Tribal Study – Al-Anbar Governorate*.

¹⁸⁸ *Al-Furqan's Media – Spring Of Al-Anbar #1*.

¹⁸⁹ Bruce and Martini, “Whither Al-Anbar Province?”

¹⁹⁰ Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life in The Emerald City*.

¹⁹¹ This was a common complaint among US personnel operating outside the Green Zone in Baghdad, whether in regional commands situation on military bases or “beyond the wire” in zones outside direct US control. They expected and were used to considerable operational autonomy, but found decisions of their reversed if they had negative ramifications for the central state-building project.

The Anbar Sheikhs and the Americans: First Contact

The first contact most tribal leaders had with the US occupation was with operations-level officers in the uniformed services during 2003–2004.¹⁹² Occasionally, as with General David Petraeus and sheikhs of the Shammar Jarba, the initial relationship was good and seemed to have potential for constructive cooperation. The leader of the Shammar Jarba proposed forming a coalition of tribal leaders to work with General Petraeus by forming two battalions of armed tribesmen in order to monitor the Syrian border.¹⁹³

But both Anbari tribal leaders and American military officers alike discovered to their chagrin that agreements made between them could be overruled by US command in Baghdad; the plan was shelved in order to allay Shia and Kurdish groups concerns about creating an armed Sunni force. The need to run everything through Baghdad meant the inability of US field officers to forge on-the-spot agreements with tribal leaders, which was one of the major frustrations of the early occupation in al Anbar in the years 2003–2004.¹⁹⁴ Because the Coalition occupational staff lacked the ability to deal with the sheikhs and deliver convincing assurances regarding the issues most central to them – namely their personal freedom and autonomy, the official recognition of their place in Iraqi society, and the continuation of patronage through both contracting and a prominence in the security apparatus for their tribesmen – a rupture appeared by late 2003 between the US occupation and the society of al Anbar. Without that connection, Coalition military personnel in the region – those very people tasked with delivering security to al Anbar – were both without authority over the population and blind to what was taking place within Anbari society. Without the cooperation of the sheikhs, none of the crucial assignments of the occupational staff – controlling borders, providing security, delivering services – could be effectively executed.

Post-Invasion American Policy Sows Tribal Disunity and Opposition

Collectively, the tribal sheikhs of al Anbar held authority over the bulk of the population, and, as early as the mid 1990s, could raise armed militias of dozens to hundreds of men independently of any other agency or power.¹⁹⁵ It was through collective engagement with the tribal sheikhs as a class that the Ba'athists could stabilize the governorate. The Americans discovered that without buy-in from tribal leaders in western Iraq, governability on that territory was denied to them and to the agents of the central Baghdad-based authority with whom they cooperated. The counterfactual is unavailable to us, but it is plausible that, if the Americans had maintained the Ba'athist-era system of tribal engagement with its formal recognition of sheikh status and prerogative and its generous disbursement of patronage, then they could have brought peace to al Anbar in the wake of the 2003 invasion and avoided the bloodiest fighting of the Iraq War.

¹⁹² McWilliams and Wheeler, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

¹⁹³ Based on a meeting in Beirut between the sheikhs and ITN principals.

¹⁹⁴ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

¹⁹⁵ Baram, *Who Are the Insurgents?*

Whether or not such cooperation could have been made palatable to rising Shi'a political groups that dominated the formal state machinery is another question entirely.

We do, however, know what happened. By abolishing the Ba'athist system, and most spectacularly, by dissolving the military and launching the de-Ba'athification of the state apparatus in 2003, the American reconstruction forces eliminated the basis of social order in al Anbar, with no plan for its replacement. It was not until 2005 that US commanders recognized the value of a comprehensive tribal-engagement strategy; only later that year did they put one into practice. In the meantime, without the Ba'athist coordination mechanisms of tribal councils and Ba'athist tribe-state relations committees, the sheikhs not only lost their main avenue of access to central power but also the bodies that allowed them to coordinate effectively together.

In the immediate aftermath of the American invasion, once it became clear that a simple agreement with US forces protecting their interests was unavailable, the sheikhs fragmented. Each followed strictly local policies meant to entrench his personal power and prestige, sometimes at the expense of other tribes and other sheikhs.¹⁹⁶ Each sheikh pursued political projects according to personal preference, disregarding the attempts of other tribal leaders. Likewise, without a coordination mechanism to ensure sheikh collectivity, their control over the governorate was fatally compromised. It was during this period that some sheikhs sided with the Ba'athist insurgency – most notably, the 1920 Brigades¹⁹⁷ – while others sided with al Qaeda and facilitated the movement of foreign fighters into Iraq as well as the dissemination of jihadi ideological material.

As of 2003, many leading Anbari sheikhs eschewed direct involvement in politics and instead pursued personal and tribal enrichment through smuggling, protection rackets, and simple highway robbery. For example, Abdul Sattar Abu Rishah, prior to his star turn as the founder of the al Anbar Salvation Council and his heroic martyrdom in 2007 at the hands of al Qaeda extremists, was most famous for robbing travelers on the Baghdad-Amman highway with a band of tribal brigands.¹⁹⁸ Sheikhs who had originally been optimistic about cooperation with American reconstruction efforts, as well as those who lost out in the initial violent scramble for power, retreated from public life by late 2003. They often set up households in Amman and organized exiled tribesmen from the relative safety of Jordan.¹⁹⁹ The Amman location was also close enough to maintain links with developments in al Anbar.

Governance Fails

Without an accommodation with US occupational forces in the governorate, the sheikhs of al Anbar were unwilling to put their authority in the service of maintaining order. The American emphasis on electoral outcomes and reestablishing a central government in Baghdad were

¹⁹⁶ Todd et al., *Iraq Tribal Study – Al-Anbar Governorate*.

¹⁹⁷ While the Ba'athist insurgency, consisting of whatever segments of the party faithful still recognized the authority of the Ba'ath hierarchy, was considered the preeminent threat by the American administration in the early stages of the occupation, it is now clear that it never amounted to a significant force.

¹⁹⁸ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

treated as signs of a pro-Shi'a bias, leaving the sheikhs very limited options: either open revolt (alone or in tandem with internationalist jihadi groups) or withdrawal into private activity (either business in Jordan or smuggling operations in the border) as they bided their time. Further, without a functioning state to provide services, it fell to sheikhs to organize public goods for the sake of their tribesmen, through the distribution of what remained of their largesse or energetic leadership. However, as their local efforts ran afoul of US priorities – the boycott of the US-organized 2005 elections (turnout in al Anbar was a dismal 2%), collusion with al Qaeda in Iraq, smuggling operations into Syria and Jordan – tribes broke into open revolt against the occupation, and the governorate became a battleground as different groups sought to establish their own authority over the territory.

The Rift With al Qaeda

Those tribes who had cultivated links with the international Islamist movement by facilitating the movement of foreign fighters, arms, and money to western Iraq did so occasionally for ideological reasons, but more often as pragmatic power plays that would enhance their local standing and position them to gain an upper hand in parochial disputes. Their partners, however, were motivated by a radical program marked by the violent opposition to American hegemony in the region and, more, by the rehabilitation of Arab Muslim culture along the lines of a reactionary religious ideology.²⁰⁰ Once al Qaeda had established itself inside al Anbar province in 2005, it took to targeting not only tribal leaders deemed insufficiently enthusiastic for the ideological mission, but also any everyday Iraqis whom they felt bore the slightest hint of contamination through contact with the Americans.²⁰¹ They even went as far as to proclaim in 2006 the Islamic State of Iraq, a Salafist emirate that claimed legitimate authority over the whole of the country in direct defiance of both the Baghdad-based government and the prior continuity of Iraqi statehood. (They jettisoned the Iraqi tricolor for the black flag of international Islamism, and their public announcements justified them not in the language of Iraqi nationalism but of international Islamist struggle.)²⁰²

The revolutionary project of Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) eventually clashed with al Anbar's tribal power structure. In an interesting parallel to American reconstruction, al Qaeda's vision included no place for uncooperative tribal elements. As a result, while still fighting American forces based in the region, the jihadi fighters of al Qaeda also targeted established tribal leaders. Although the exact reasoning that led the leadership of AQI to embark on such a revolutionary program while still battling US forces is unavailable, it is likely that they intended a divide-and-conquer approach, using tribal divisions as a means of breaking the power of sheikhs. The Islamists' tactics, however, had exactly the opposite effect. By 2006, al Qaeda's violence against

²⁰⁰ *Al-Furqan Media Présente* "Avoir Une Forte Motivation D'une Grande Importance."

²⁰¹ *Al-Furqan's Media – Spring Of Al-Anbar #1*; Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

²⁰² *Al-Furqan's Media – Spring Of Al-Anbar #3*. The replacement of Iraqi national colors with Islamist ones was not a trivial development – the Iraq-Iran war, and the great sacrifices the country had endured to fight it, had created a strong identification on the part of many Iraqis, especially Sunni veterans, with the

Anbari tribal grandees and their fighters created clear incentives for sheikhs to recognize their collective interests as a class and to coordinate together against Islamist usurpation.

The al Anbar Salvation Council

The al Anbar Awakening is perhaps one of the best documented episodes of modern insurgency. The second Iraq War itself occurred under a media spotlight, not just for Western journalists but also for recently-matured international media syndicates such as Al Jazeera. Further, all of the major contestants involved – the American occupational force, the Iraqi tribal leaders, the international Islamists and the government of Iraq – understood the importance of propaganda and media operations. As a result, competing narratives have ample opportunities to emerge through multiple channels to reach sympathetic audiences.

Given those conditions, it is remarkable that, at least in terms of the factual depiction of the events of the Awakening, there is widespread consensus across political lines, including not just the sheikhs and their American counterparts, but even the Islamists as well. Every account contains the same broad outlines – an initial anti-American alliance between Islamists and tribal leaders, the defection of tribal leaders precipitating the decisive defeat of the insurgency in al Anbar (with Islamist forces either destroyed or routed to other parts of Iraq) and stability returning to the province through tribal-American cooperation.

The advent of the al Anbar Salvation Council in 2006 did not entail any radical institutional innovation or any transformational political agenda. It was quite simply a voluntary association of tribal leaders in a coordinating body in which they could (a) pledge mutual aid, (b) promulgate a unified set of goals and principles, and (c) bargain collectively with the American occupational forces and the government of Iraq.²⁰³ These objectives were not radical, and did not come with the trappings associated with state formation.

However, as the al Anbar Salvation Council demonstrated its effectiveness in pursuing them, it created state-like conditions in al Anbar governorate over the course of 2006 and 2007. The sheikhs collectively – through the Salvation Council itself and similar organizations such as the Anbar Tribes Revolutionary Council – functioned as a de facto sovereign. While individually, tribes could be balanced against one another, through cooperation or, at the very least, a tacit strategy of non-interference, tribes collectively determined the political disposition.

The Advantages of Inter-Tribal Collaboration

Fighters owe their allegiance to leaders based on kinship networks, and the effective display of force by a leader. Such allegiance help in turn to reinforce and amplify leader's authority. "Lots of sons, with tons of guns" is how American regulars began to describe the secret of sheikly power, but even the most fecund, polygamist tribal leader is limited in the size of his

²⁰³ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

household.²⁰⁴ Pooling coercive capacity, first among the many households and subsidiary families within the tribe, and then among tribes in al Anbar, amplified considerably the force available to pursue the tribal political agenda in the province. Further, once the principle of tribal solidarity against outside forces was established, tribes were freed from debilitating inter-tribal competition, further augmenting the force at their disposal. The net result of cooperation was the accumulation of enough coercive capacity in the hands of the sheikhs collectively that they could enforce order within their province, effectively supplanting the Iraqi central state.²⁰⁵

As important as the pooling of coercive capacity was the consolidation of tribal interests around a single political program. While personality clashes and disputes prevented institutional unification, through their public statements, the mobilization of tribesmen for security purposes and selective engagement in the political process, the tribal leaders of al Anbar coalesced around a shared position on the big questions of Iraqi governance. They sought to ensure recognition of the place of tribal leaders within Iraqi society, amnesty for captured Sunni fighters and influence for the Sunni minority at both the level of government and through participation in the security apparatus.

By and large, the sheikhs of al Anbar succeeded in gaining their demands in the late stages of the occupation. In the US military, they found a partner eager to legitimize their social and political role, and one who viewed their coercive capacity as an asset rather than a threat. As tribal leaders demonstrated that they were able to expel al Qaeda from the province and stabilize the region, tribal engagement and counterinsurgency became central doctrine regarding the stabilization of the country. Through that partnership, the Americans gained freedom of operation in the governorate, and a partner who could both identify al Qaeda operatives for neutralization and engage in anti-AQ operations itself. The sheikhs received what were perhaps even greater benefits — a secure environment in which to organize and consolidate their authority, the prestige of recognition from US leaders, amnesty for their fighters and a promise of a place at the table of Iraqi political leadership. Perhaps the most significant expression of the sheikh's success was the creation of the Sons of Iraq program, which provided a salary for tribesmen who registered to fight al Qaeda. The practical effect was that American money paid to perpetuate tribal coercive power.

Institutionalizing Tribal Power

The success of the Salvation Council in achieving these three general principles — a success that was unavailable to any other power in al Anbar, be it the AQI, the Baghdad government, US occupational forces — created in the governorate a situation in which the Salvation Council,

²⁰⁴ The phrase was taught to me by an Iraqi translator who, prior to his work with the ITN, had operated with a variety of front-line units during the US occupation. Unabashedly pro-American (he covered his arms in tattoos that included American eagles and the Stars-and-Stripes, nothing if not a bold move), he spoke the expression with approbation, and related with awe the violent revenge that sheikhs with sizeable households could mete out to their enemies.

²⁰⁵ Giustozzi, *The Art of Coercion*.

without a formal declaration claiming sovereignty or seeking international recognition, exercised the powers and prerogatives of a de facto state.

By late 2007, the Salvation Council enjoyed a monopoly of legitimate violence in the territory. Despite a heavy US presence, American forces would not act unilaterally. Instead, they sought the cooperation of sheikhs and Council members.²⁰⁶ Security units of the Iraqi central government, meanwhile, were simply excluded from the territory. Police units in the governorate were all staffed by tribe members who were often hand-picked by their sheikhs.²⁰⁷ The Sons of Iraq program, meanwhile, also created and maintained a substantial body of informal fighters loyal to sheikhs of the Salvation Council.²⁰⁸

Civil administration resumed after the expulsion of Al Qaeda in late 2006. The Salvation Council vetted and selected council members and civil servants, employing their control over the composition of organs of civil governance.²⁰⁹ Thus the sheikhs enjoyed an effective veto over matters of public policy. (As Stalin said, “Cadres determine everything.”) Further, as the intermediaries between the governorate and US reconstruction efforts, tribal leaders could determine how aid and reconstruction money would be used. This was immediately visible to me in the operation of the Iraqi Transportation Network, the Department of Defense project on which I worked from 2008 to 2010. The design of the project was intended to incentivize sheikhs to cooperate with US occupational staff through the tender of logistics contracts at a considerable premium once certain conditions had been met regarding security. Sheikhs used that opportunity to distribute jobs within the freight operation to favored tribesmen. The profits from the operation, even when they were spent on consumption by the sheikh’s household, likewise helped increase the prestige and influence of tribal leader’s among their people. There was some variety in response, of course – the best organized sheikhs (nationally, these were a Sunni from al Anbar and another from Mosul) effectively maneuvered for the lion’s share of contracts, which they used to bolster already impressive private authority, eclipsing that available to the agents and appointees of the central government.

And indeed, in all matters regarding al Anbar, it was to the sheikhs – sometimes individually, but most often through the Salvation Council – that the Americans turned to between 2007 and 2010. Regarding security cooperation, the establishment of civil governance, aid, and reconstruction efforts – indeed, all areas of security policy and civic governance – the US military occupational forces sought the buy-in of the Anbari tribes.²¹⁰ One of the most significant achievements of the Salvation Council with respect to relations with US forces in their governorate was the concession of removing American troop positions from major city centers in 2007, which were moved from the city center to the outskirts. If the tribes and the Salvation

²⁰⁶ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*; This consultation was the most highly valued of the concessions won by the sheikhs. Sheikhs recognized both the practical value of staying informed of US plans and also the enhancement to their status that came with these consultations.

²⁰⁷ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

²⁰⁸ Harari, *Uncertain Future for the Sons of Iraq*.

²⁰⁹ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

²¹⁰ Lynch, “Explaining the Awakening.”

Council were effective partners with US flag officers, they were effective rivals of the Baghdad government, consistently frustrating its ability to extend its reach over their territory.

To this day, the issue of who enjoys ultimate control in al Anbar is unresolved. Even prior to the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, though it has recently rechristened itself as a pan-Islamic Caliphate known simply as the “Islamic State”),²¹¹ the sheikhs of al Anbar chafed at what they perceived as the sectarian misrule of the government of Nuri al Maliki,²¹² maintaining a significant coercive capacity at their disposal.²¹³ Tribes remain the de facto authorities in the governorate, but the personal rivalry between Ahmed abu Risha (of the Awakening Council) and Ali Hatem al Suleiman (leader of the Tribal Revolutionaries) has precipitated a civil war within the de facto tribal state of al Anbar, as the two leaders square off against each other, each partnered tactically with an outside power (abu Risha with the al Maliki government, despite his harsh criticism of its rule; ali Suleyman with ISIS). The balance of forces is uncertain, with Ramadi contested by both sides but much of the rest of al Anbar in the hands of Dulaym fighters loyal to ali Suleyman, and, while both leaders see their external allies as temporary expedients, it is unclear how easily they can disengage from them should they prevail over their current enemies.

Conclusion

After decades of autocratic rule, the Ba‘athist system was swept away abruptly through American intervention and occupational policy in 2003, ushering in fundamental breakdown of the political, security, legal, and economic order. Under those anarchic conditions, the tribal sheikhs of al Anbar were able to mobilize the manpower and resources to counter the rise of any competing center of power: most notably the Islamists of AQI, but also the gradually coalescing Baghdad government and the US military occupier. The sheikhs re-establish the basics of an effective state-like authority. They achieved this through indigenous pre-existing institutions generated in the specific physical and human environment of al Anbar, relying on a minimum of outside aid and virtually no outside guidance on political or civic structure. American occupational policy, when it worked against these structures in al Anbar, faced an intractable, irrepressible insurgency, prompting US generals to declare the governorate “all but lost”; once occupational policy acknowledged the primacy of the tribes and expressed willingness to work with them, stabilization and the purge of AQI from the territory was quickly effected. Despite their bluster, it was not the Americans but the tribes that wielded real authority in al Anbar, authority they institutionalized through a number of Awakening Councils and organizations.

The resulting polity appears ungainly to international observers, difficult to classify along the conventional scheme of nation-states. However, unlike some of those nation-states, which enjoy

²¹¹ “The Political Implications of ISIS’s Caliphate.”

²¹² “Iraq: Mutterings of Tribal Revolt”; Ashraq al Awsat, “Anbar Sheikhs Denounce Maliki Unity Conference Initiative.”

²¹³ “Iraqi Sunni Tribes Call for Their Sons to Quit the Army.”

international recognition and occupy seats in the United Nations, the sheikhs of al Anbar enjoy primacy over their homeland.

This, then, is the explanandum of this study – what happens when states collapse, and societies are left without limitations on the form and intensity of contests over authority? Why were the sheikhs of al Anbar able to emerge as successful and competent political contenders in the harsh environment of Iraq post-state-collapse? This section sought to describe the underlying environment in which that competition occurred in al Anbar. To answer this question, it is necessary to look at the long-wave characteristics of the institutions of Arab tribal life and identify the characteristics within them that contribute to their effectiveness as political and security agents. It is also necessary to look at the proximate environment, meaning the conditions under Ba‘athism, which gave the tribes of al Anbar important advantages over their rivals from the very beginning of the post-conflict scramble. Having examined the long- and short-term legacies that empowered the sheikhs as political forces, we can then begin to draw conclusions regarding the manner in which violent political competition in failed states can be analyzed and predicted.

Chapter 4: Origins of Iraqi Tribalism

The Arab tribes of al Anbar can convincingly trace their roots back to nomadic migrations from Yemen and the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, placing them among the oldest continuous social formations in the Middle East. While their antiquity for them is a point of pride, and while they place a great deal of emphasis on the perceived primordiality of their traditions, their mores, and their tribal kinship, Arab tribalism in reality has undergone profound and recent change, nowhere more so than in Iraq. While originally tribes were kinship groups based on an egalitarian, pastoral ethic in which leadership, hereditary only in the loosest possible sense, conferred little coercive authority and was limited to preeminence in consensus building, this socio-political model was grounded in the practical realities of camel pastury, raiding and desert subsistence. So long as tribes maintained such a lifestyle, they preserved political equality among their members, as attested to both in the medieval sociological analysis of ibn Khaldun and the 20th-century chronicles of T. E. Lawrence. Once the process of settlement was initiated, however, and the material base of the tribe shifted first from camel husbandry to agriculture and later to different forms of redistribution of state resources, economic power became concentrated in the hands of tribal sheikhs, who solidified their coercive power and established hierarchical authority within the tribe. This process was abetted by colonial, independence-era, and Ba'athist regimes, who coopted tribal leaders into their political projects over the country, setting the stage for the emergence of sheikhs as crucial power players in the post-state anarchy that followed US intervention in 2003.

Tribal History (*longue durée*): Where the Tribes Come From

Arab tribes are social units linked together by a shared belief in common kinship, traditional practices and a recognized external identity. Hourani distinguishes between two uses of the term, separating the usage of the word denoting the form of social organization related to subsistence in the marginal desert, scrub and oasis territory that abounds in the Middle East from the

political use denoting a particular pattern of patrimonial authority.²¹⁴ The distinction is an analytically useful one, though a complete understanding of tribalism requires that both components be treated briefly.

The basic social division within the Arab world, recognized as the fundamental cleavage within human civilization, is between settled, urban communities and the nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralists of the arid and hostile hinterland.²¹⁵ Urban populations were embedded in market relations, subject to political control by settled governments, and rarely carried a tribal character.²¹⁶ It was among the populations of the hinterland, adapted to the harsh realities of desert life, that tribalism flourished and patterned social interactions. The argument that the patterns of subsistence resulting from geographic conditions determine patterns of political development is nothing new (Tilly's description of state formation in early modern Europe is based on intense competition for highly productive agricultural land²¹⁷; Herbst's account of power and authority in Africa revolves around relative land abundance there, and the resulting need to control populations²¹⁸), and a sound understanding of the survival imperatives of the distinctive terrain type of the Middle East – marginally productive desert and scrub – accounts for many of the features of tribal social organization. While a variety of livelihoods were possible in the desert – settled cultivators survived around oases and water-abundant valleys, and some areas had enough vegetation to permit pasturage for goats and sheep – it was the Bedouin camel-herding nomads that dominated in desert conditions.²¹⁹ Camels could survive in harsher conditions than other livestock, and were the only pack animals capable of crossing long distances through arid regions. They thus provided not only a livelihood (through the production of meat, milk and leather), but also mobility²²⁰.

Camel nomadism also imposed on the internal organization of tribes. A small number of animals represented a perfectly viable herd – there was no need to super-aggregate for the sake of productivity. Further, this bedrock form of Bedouin wealth was completely mobile – tribesmen dissatisfied under the leadership of a particular sheikh could vote with their feet, and set off into the desert to protest. As a result, the basic unit of Bedouin life could be very small – a household representing a family, together with slaves effectively controlled, enjoyed in the desert a life with few positive constraints. Tribes, as a result, had a segmentary structure, with the patriarchal household at its base and expanding through the addition of other related households into clans. Clans believing themselves to be patrilineally related aggregated further into tribes,

²¹⁴ Hourani, "Conclusion: Tribes and States in Islamic History."

²¹⁵ ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*.

²¹⁶ Ibid. Even when the population resulted from tribal conquest and settlement, tribal identity and mores would last no more than two or three generations.

²¹⁷ Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime."

²¹⁸ Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*.

²¹⁹ Hourani, *History of the Arab Peoples*.

²²⁰ ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*. Indeed, camel husbandry forced mobility on the tribes that practiced it, as they migrated seasonally between pasturages and foaling grounds.

and tribes into confederations. The result was a matryushka-style structure of nested groups hierarchically arranged.²²¹

If the structure of Arab tribes reflects constraints imposed by making a living in the desert, the patterns and practices of Arab tribalism reflect the imperatives of staying alive there. It is perhaps stating the obvious to point out that one of the basic social characteristics of the desert is the absence of conventional, enforceable law and order — this is an observation as old as ibn Khaldun.²²² Without a single authority — a Hobbessian Leviathan — to impose order, the threat of violence is ever-present. In such an environment, small groups are at constant risk from the depredations of larger ones: while small familial groups may be perfectly viable in terms of making a livelihood in the desert through camel husbandry, the threat of aggression made association into larger-level kin groups attractive. Conflict in the desert — and in the borderlands where desert tribes and settled communities came into contact — patterned the culture and values of the Bedouin Arabs.

Nor was the tribal experience of conflict purely defensive: raiding was an important supplement to the livelihood of tribes and an opportunity for young men to display prowess and test their mettle. The *ghaz* (raid) is still celebrated in classical Arab poetry, and a cognate of the word is applied as an honorific to describe the battles fought by Muhammad and his companions in the early stages of Islamic expansion. The scaling up of kinship ties from family to clan to tribe allowed tribesmen flexibly to raise manpower as necessary for the purposes of defense or attack.

The foundational connection to violence helps explain many of the characteristics of tribal culture and tribal practices. One key feature of tribalism is the emphasis on blood relation. Ibn Khaldun's work takes it as axiomatic that the strongest basis for solidarity is blood relation, with any other basis of association a weak and inadequate substitute.²²³ Arab tribal mores reflect this fixation, with increasing consideration due to proximate relations and greater hostility to strangers. The well-known proverb “me against my brother, my brother and me against my cousin, me and my cousins against the world”²²⁴ is perhaps the pithiest formulation of Bedouin familialism. The importance of kinship links was also noted by foreign observers among 20th-century Bedouin — T. E. Lawrence complained at the need to display an “encyclopedic knowledge” of the lineage connections between the various Arab groups among whom he travelled,²²⁵ while Gertrude Bell was relayed across the Levant, vouchsafed from one sheikh to another via letters of introduction to distant, sometimes unmet relations.²²⁶ In the desert, where populations were on the move, everyone travelled armed, and no overarching power kept watch, it was kinship that delineated social obligations and distinguished friend from foe from fair game. The unproblematic, deeply-held solidarity that results out of kinship was labeled *asabiya* by Ibn

²²¹ Jabar, “Shaykhs and Ideologues.”

²²² ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Bell, *Syria, The Desert and the Sown*.

Khaldun, a term in ubiquitous use by tribesmen and the scholars that study them. It is difficult to overstate how self-evident and natural kinship obligations are among tribal Arabs — perhaps the concept of self-interest could be considered analogous as to how foundational it is in Western thinking about human motivation, if indeed it has virtually the opposite content. It is important to note that the reverence and sanctity with which kinship ties are treated does not necessarily reflect true biological relation. Tribesmen treat their genealogies as sacrosanct, and claim certainty in tracing their descent to famous figures of classical Arab history, including the Prophet and his companions,²²⁷ but in reality, especially prior to settlement and modern state formation, it was unlikely that “illiterate tribesmen knew their own descent for more than two or three generations,”²²⁸ especially since practices of adoption were not unknown.²²⁹ The commitment to the demands of blood loyalty (which is reflected even in the terminology of tribe, where subdivisions and clans have names based on anatomical metaphors²³⁰) is real, as is the belief in the factual veracity of genealogies tracing a tribe’s origins back to Biblical progenitors, but these are of course myths, creating wiggle room for when rules need to be bent.

Kinship serves as a basis to expect loyalty and consideration in a reciprocal basis from others within the tribe. As a result, conflicts within the tribe — as opposed to conflicts with outsiders — are tractable, and subject to adjudication and peaceful resolution. It is in the role of arbiter and judge that the leadership of the sheikh has the greatest impact within the tribe: since his prestige and position are recognized within the tribe, he has the status necessary to settle disputes and resolve grievances. However, even here, without a dedicated, personally loyal staff to enforce his decisions, he serves as *primus inter pares*, needing to deliver his opinion with enough persuasiveness and tact so that the parties involved accede to it peacefully, or so that other tribesmen can be cajoled into helping enforce the resolution if necessary.

With outsiders, *assabiya* plays a different role. That solidarity is expressed in mutual defense among relations and, in cases where defense has failed to prevent injury or death, the practice of *tha’r*, or collective vengeance. If a tribesman is victimized by outsiders, any kinsmen of that tribesman is required, if granted the opportunity, to execute vengeance against any kinsmen of the perpetrator. Since on the other side is under an identical obligation, often revenge triggers a cascading cycle of calls for revenge. Given that it provides a great pretext for raiding, and that the separation of tribes by the desert can mitigate the destructiveness of the cycle, often the feud persists for generations,²³¹ only to be set aside in case of an extraordinary opportunity or threat. In cobbling together the Arab coalition to storm the Ottoman Empire during WWI, a major challenge for the Sharif of Mecca and his sons was resolving the knot of feuds among the tribes they led.²³² These feuds also emerged in al Anbar, where tribal rivalries posed the greatest initial

²²⁷ Jabar, “Shaykhs and Ideologues.”

²²⁸ Hourani, “Conclusion: Tribes and States in Islamic History.”

²²⁹ Conte, “Agnatic Illusions: The Element of Choice in Arab Kinship.”

²³⁰ Jabar, “Shaykhs and Ideologues.”

²³¹ Bell, *Syria, The Desert and the Sown*. It’s notable how often her progress through the Levant is complicated by the inability of her companions to cross territory belonging to rival tribes, or the gnawing unease of tribesmen realizing that, though they have the protection of hospitality, they sit with men that they are sworn to kill.

²³² Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

obstacle to the emergence of the Salvation Council. That is actually the role in which the traditional Arab sheikh has the greatest potential to translate his titular headship of the community into real force: careful diplomacy, identifying threats to be neutralized or opportunities for plunder or conquest, and painstaking coalition building can allow a particularly persuasive or charismatic sheikh to cobble together a significant force of armed tribesmen. The greater challenge is maintaining that authority through both defeat and victory – defeat because it tarnishes the charisma of leadership, victory since it brings spoils and the temptation for tribesmen to drift home and enjoy them.²³³

It is this highly circumscribed space where sheikhs could assert authority that produced the tribal egalitarianism for which Bedouin tribes were famous. If a sheikh was to be anything more than the well-regarded head of a particularly prosperous household, he had to cultivate personal connections with his subordinates and a broader reputation as an exemplar of Bedouin virtues (hospitality, piety, courage, etc.). The ready access that rank-and-file tribesmen had to the attention of their sheikh (the practice of the *majlis*, or council), the candor with which they could present grievances and care sheikhs displayed for the opinion of guests and tribesmen²³⁴ all reflected the underlying weakness of sheikhs as leaders. Sheikhs held wealth but could neither claim nor control the wealth (and with it the means of both subsistence and flight) of their tribesmen; they nominally led the tribe, but could not compel any follower to act against his own wishes (even in a popular war, service was voluntary, and tribesmen could quit at any time without any disciplinary repercussions).²³⁵ While Ibn Khaldun argues that *assabiya* is the hidden engine of tribal cohesion and military effectiveness, even he must grant that for conquest movements to rally sufficient forces to break over organized, settled states, tribesmen must be held together by another, higher force capable of overcoming the fissiparous impulses of envy, suspicion, and feud. For him, it is religion,²³⁶ while other scholars see enough incentive in political and economic motivations.²³⁷

Arab culture and civilization has its origins in deserts and oases of the Arabian peninsula. The inhospitable climate, remote geography, and sparse population effectively deterred conquest or colonization by the dominant regional powers of the pre-Islamic period, most notably the Romans (later, the Byzantines) and the Persian empire.²³⁸ A variety of climates and conditions incubated early Arab civilization – while the Bedouin, the camel nomads of the desert, would emerge as the most influential manifestation of Arab culture, and carry it beyond the peninsula to play a prominent, world-historical role, settled communities existed in the well-watered mountain valleys of Yemen and the Hadramaut, creating conditions for the emergence of stable

²³³ Bell, *Syria, The Desert and the Sown*; ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*; Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

²³⁴ Bell, *Syria, The Desert and the Sown*.

²³⁵ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

²³⁶ ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*.

²³⁷ Lapidus, "Tribes and State Formation in Islamic History."

²³⁸ Hourani, *History of the Arab Peoples*.

polities and the creation of a literate, sophisticate culture.²³⁹ Other permanent communities emerged around trading centers and shrine towns, the most notable being, of course, Mecca.²⁴⁰

The oldest traces of Arab culture can be found in Yemen, and to this day that country enjoys a position of prestige among traditionalist Arabs as the most authentic and pure manifestation of their culture. It is in this region – including not just modern-day Yemen, but parts of Oman and southern Saudi Arabia – that can be found the ruins of pre-Islamic states and settled communities such as Saba,²⁴¹ Himyar, A’ad and Thamud, and through their history contemporary tribes continue to maintain a connection to Biblical lineages, all the way to Noah and the flood. Tribal Arabs, at least the beginnings of their culture,²⁴² likely originated there, to be pushed out of the well-watered regions of dense settlement and into marginal land, where pastury and camel husbandry took root. As T. E. Lawrence puts it rather vividly, with weaker families and kin-groups pushed out – banished – as a result of resource pressure, and through a process of constant outward pressure, weaker groups pressed ever outward into more marginal territory, oases and desert, moving north and east.²⁴³ He describes a migration through the very limited number of water sources, upwards through the Arabian peninsula, culminating in the Syrian desert, or in the Jazirah region between the Tigris and Euphrates, areas rugged enough to stay marginal but close enough to settlement and water to make tribal life sustainable, if not comfortable. Here, and he reports this dynamic to still be operating as he wrote in the early 19th century, the power dynamic between nomad and cultivator has been reversed – weaker tribes and communities settle, losing their tribal character and becoming peasants (*fellahin*), while stronger groups remain nomadic and are able to extract their surplus, as well as supplement their livelihoods through their interaction with commercial communities, through trade, extortion, and plunder.²⁴⁴ This migration, driven by the push of resource (especially water) scarcity in the Yemen and the pull of opportunity for trade and plunder in the north, extended Arab tribalism beyond its desert home to the very borders of settled civilization in Mesopotamia, Persia, and Palestine. This process was underway well before the advent of Islam,²⁴⁵ but once Muhammad was able to unify the squabbling tribes of Arabia and bring them into cooperation with the settled communities there, his forces were able to break the power of the settled empires that dominated the region – Christian Byzantium in the west, Sassanid Persia in the east – and usher in a period of Arab, Islamic ascendancy.²⁴⁶ His forces, consisting of armed tribesmen in great

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*.

²⁴¹ Hourani, *History of the Arab Peoples*. Saba is widely considered to be the Biblical Sheba,

²⁴² Among tribal historians and tribesmen themselves, a distinction is drawn between Qahtanite tribes (or “Pure Arabs”) originating in Yemen, and Adnanite tribes (“Arabized Arabs”) from further north. Apart from a geographical distinction, the purported difference extends to post-diluvian genealogy – the Qahtanites are descended from Qahtan, a great-great-great-grandson of Noah through Shem, while the Adnanites progenitor is Ishmael, first son of Abraham.

²⁴³ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Hourani, *History of the Arab Peoples*.

²⁴⁶ Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*.

number, essentially retraced the steps of prior, less martial migrations. Their decisive advantage was the geography of the region: unlike Europe and China, where rivers, forests, and mountain ranges created chokepoints limiting the mobility of mounted forces, or, where they did not exist, densely-populated agriculturally productive land permitted for a pattern of man-made fortifications,²⁴⁷ the desert and marginal land that cuts throughout Mesopotamia and Palestine served not as a barrier to the Arab forces (though it was a formidable one to armies using horse cavalry), but as a highway, allowing them to penetrate directly from the borderlands to the doorstep of the major settlements of the region.²⁴⁸ While the Arab conquests were the most famous example of this dynamic of invasion, they would not be the last.

The Arab Muslim conquests of the Middle East, Persia, and North Africa transformed the political environment of the region. Previously the area was characterized by two separate settled empires with core regions at the margins of the area, with Mesopotamia see-sawing between their spheres of influence. That equilibrium, which had proved durable for centuries, broke permanently as a force of Arab tribesmen, unified by their new religion, broke through into the settled heartland of the Middle East and established a single political-religious unity from Spain to the borders of India. However, with the death of Muhammad, the thorny issue of the succession of leadership undermined the unity of the Arab Muslim forces – the charisma of the religion he founded was great enough to prevent fragmentation under the first four (the so called “rightly guided”) Caliphs, but soon after sectarian and factional strife broke the early unity of the Muslim sacral state. Religious breakdown at the highest levels mirrored the local political fracture of the Caliphate. The Arab tribesmen that had provided the military power to conquer the region proved unequal to governing it, especially to the daunting task of maintaining discipline and unity of purpose among their tribal followers. Thus was inaugurated a period of local strife and rotation of power between various dynasties and tribal units, described by the contemporary scholar ibn Khaldun.²⁴⁹ While Lapidus is correct in noting that larger-scale conquest movements were unified by religious reform and included tribal and non-tribal elements,²⁵⁰ on a more local level, Khaldun argues that tribal rivalries between lineages and clans created a cycle of conquest and overthrow. Groups still nomadic, possessed of a basic kinship solidarity and well-acquainted with the ruggedness of struggle challenge the complacent rulers of settled communities (whether commercial towns or agricultural regions) and succeed in replacing them. However, settlement and the privilege and prosperity that came with power undermine the very tribal traits – loyalty, courage, simplicity of taste – that permitted the initial conquest, creating an opportunity for the next group of hungry nomads.²⁵¹ As a rule of thumb, Khaldun suggests that a direct lineage lasts for approximately four generations in power, with a limitless supply of potential usurpers either

²⁴⁷ ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*. Ibn Khaldun, while marveling at the success of the early Islamic conquests, devotes an entire chapter to pointing out that the main strategy was mobility and the swarming, rather than the storming, of strong points. He also points out a flawless defense against Arab conquest – live on the other side of a mountain chain.

²⁴⁸ Barfield, *Afghanistan*.

²⁴⁹ ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*.

²⁵⁰ Lapidus, “Tribes and State Formation in Islamic History.”

²⁵¹ ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*.

from rival clans within the tribe or new arrivals moving as nomads through the internal frontier. That frontier – the marginal lands of desert and scrub that vein the heartland of the Middle East – serves as a perpetual repository of nomadic tribes. There, they keep their way of life intact, too distant and mobile to fall under the thrall of established governments and thus politically independent, and likewise free to go armed and practice brigandage or inter-tribal warfare, all contributing to their advantage in armed conflict. The persistence of tribal autonomy at the edges of settled polities, and the inability of conquering tribes to parlay their control over settled wealth into the subjugation of the interior frontier is one cause for Khaldun's rather critical assessment of Arab leaders in power; indeed, he devotes an entire section of his *Muqaddimah* to the contention that "places that succumb to Arabs are quickly ruined." It may be tempting to dismiss Khaldun's assessment as outdated if not antique, but T. E. Lawrence echoes his skepticism about government by tribal Arabs despite his tremendous personal fondness for their culture and sympathy for their cause,²⁵² and the conditions of perpetual tribal rivalry reported by him and Gertrude Bell in Arabia and Mesopotamia likewise match Khaldun's.²⁵³ More recent works argue about his contemporary relevance in assessing political developments in Mauritania and Western Sahara.²⁵⁴

Over time, in the region more centralized states emerged that were able to overcome the shortcomings of post-Caliphate instability. Tellingly, they were based in densely-settled regions at the margins of the region – the Mameluke state in Egypt, Ilkhanids and their successors in Persia, and, perhaps the most influential and dominant polity, the Ottoman Empire in Anatolia. Tellingly, these were states with origins outside the Arab tribal system – the Mamelukes were slave soldiers originally hired by the rulers of Egypt who created their own dynasty, without breaking their system of slave recruitment and promotion; and both the Ilkhanids and Ottoman Turks had their origins in Turkic tribal confederations, much more centralized and hierarchical than their Bedouin counterparts. In the case of the Ottoman empire, Turkic tribal origins were combined with elements from the Mameluke system – cadres for key military and civil administrative roles were not selected on the basis of kin proximity (indeed, the tradition of fratricide upon accession practiced by the Sultan resulted in a dearth of such candidates) but instead were raised in a slave levy on the non-Muslim population, and cultivated under conditions of meritocratic competition and indoctrination towards regime loyalty. This new imperial service elite eliminated tribalism within the state; beginning in the later half of the 19th century, through the introduction of modern technology and the administrative reforms of the *Tanzimat*, they would take steps to undermine the ability of classical tribalism to survive in marginal and rural areas as well.²⁵⁵

²⁵² Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

²⁵³ Iraq. Civil Commissioner, Wilson, and Bell, *Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia*; Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

²⁵⁴ Lapidus, "Tribes and State Formation in Islamic History."

²⁵⁵ Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922*; Gellner, "Tribalism and the State in the Middle East."

The Ottoman Empire also shifted the political relationship between tribes and states; whereas the Mameluks treated tribes as “equals among equals,” autonomous partners in the business of securing and organizing the realm, the Ottomans insisted on asserting lordship over tribal leaders and forcing them to recognize the formal authority of the Sublime Porte.²⁵⁶ In the 19th century, technological changes, economic development and government-led reform efforts all contributed to the erosion of the last refuge of tribal independence in Iraq – nomadism and the desert.²⁵⁷ The introduction of steamships and railroads reduced the value of caravan routes for tribes and also increased the difficulty of brigandage. The effectiveness of Ottoman military forces prevented plunder of settled populations, while improved communication and the development of large-scale manufacturing shifted the economic reality even of nomadic tribesmen decisively away from simple subsistence towards a greater reliance on the market. (Note: ibn Khaldun himself observed that, even in the classical Middle East, the tribes were reliant on cities for crucial manufactured goods that they were unable to produce. That precocious marketization, however, did not apply as much to foodstuffs and could be evaded by recalcitrant tribes willing to resort to plunder.)²⁵⁸ Having already done away with the political and security roles of tribes within their borders, the Ottomans chipped away at their economic foundations, both through the disruptive forces of technological change and later through direct reforms. “Tribes were encouraged to embrace sedentary agriculture, or settle in newly created mercantile towns, as was the case with Suq al Sheyukh, or Nassiriya, established respectively by Sheikh Thuwaini and the Sa'doon house (bayt) of the Muntafiq confederation in the late 19th century.”²⁵⁹ Land holding was reorganized, with regular property rights established that heavily favored tribal sheikhs, changing them from titular leaders and adjudicators into landlords over their fellow tribesmen. In their roles as landholders, sheikhs also took on responsibilities for tax collecting on behalf of the state; thus, while the military relationship between the state and tribes (in which sheikhs cajoled and persuaded tribesmen into military service) was ruptured by settlement, it was replaced with a role for sheikhs as tax farmers, entrusted with the legal property rights and the economic means to squeeze their tribesmen for rents and taxes (to add insult to injury, the squeezing was often done by hired household goons, the *zirim* or *hoshiya*, rather than handled through traditional tribal channels.)²⁶⁰ It is worth pointing out that during WW1, the defense of Mesopotamia was undertaken by the regular Turkish army, while it was only the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula – the newest-one and most weakly reformed region within the Ottoman Empire – that rallied in customary fashion to the call for plunder and independence.²⁶¹

By the eve of WWI, the structural economic and political reforms imposed by the Ottoman Empire were actively undermining traditional tribalism. In the Ottoman heartland of Anatolia

²⁵⁶ Jabar, “Shaykhs and Ideologues.”

²⁵⁷ Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922*.

²⁵⁸ ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*.

²⁵⁹ Jabar, “Shaykhs and Ideologues.”

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

(and even in the more remote and mountainous east), nomadism was effectively eliminated, at significant human cost.²⁶² In Mesopotamia, a more remote and weakly integrated region of the Empire, transformations were likewise underway, with the settlement of the tribes the most notable achievement of Ottoman administration. However, the effect was paradoxical: while the political reforms reduced the status of sheikhs in the polity and economic transformation fundamentally altered the means of subsistence of the tribesmen, culture and mores (as we will see time and again) did not immediately follow suit. Tribes maintained their identities, the maintained their arms and, most importantly, they maintained their leadership. Sheikhs adapted to the change in circumstances and took advantage of the opportunities provided by sedentary agriculture to amplify and consolidate their authority over their tribesmen. The self-image of tribesmen as free-spirited nomads, valorous in battle, hospitable and generous, unified by ancient blood ties and led – not ruled – by accessible and wise sheikhs survived settlement – indeed, it survived industrialization and modernity and remains the dominant self-image of Arab tribesmen²⁶³ – but the underlying reality tilted heavily towards hierarchical governance and coercive authority on the part of sheikhs.

Ottoman domination over Mesopotamia ended abruptly and dramatically as a result of the Empire's defeat in World War I. In the Middle Eastern theatre, British victory was brought about largely through an alliance with the Sharif of Mecca, who, along with his sons, organized a confederation of tribes out of the Arabian Peninsula and greater Syria to intervene on the Allied side.²⁶⁴ Incidentally, this Arab revolt was the last successful tribal movement of conquest in the region, following the same patterns as those previous, including the original Islamic conquests.

The victorious Allied powers carved up the region among themselves, rejecting demands from the erstwhile tribal allies for an independent Arab state beyond the Arabian peninsula (where they were willing to tolerate tribal sovereignty over the desert interior, and the continuation of the custodianship of the Sherif of Mecca, Hussein bin Ali, over the Islamic holy cities). However, in imposing their colonial administration upon their new acquisitions of Transjordan and Mesopotamia, the British displayed consideration for the tribal forces that had brought them victory, installing the sons of Hussein bin Ali, Abdullah and Faisal, as kings over the two mandate territories.²⁶⁵ Further, in establishing control over Mesopotamia in the wake of its annexation, the British, stretched thin on the ground, found it expedient to work with local tribal authorities, recognizing their traditional prerogatives in exchange for their cooperation in stabilizing and administering the territory.²⁶⁶ This arrangement included delegating judicial

²⁶² Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922*.

²⁶³ During personal meetings with sheikhs from all regions of Iraq, sheikhs would reiterate the need to provide patronage from their tribesmen and present themselves as humble – sometimes reluctant – leaders looking after a desperate and occasionally undisciplined people. In practice, they exercised coercive power over their tribesmen – a pair of drivers caught purloining air conditioning units from a US shipment were seized, and their sheikh inquired if restitution and banishment from further US programs would be enough, or if their American partners would like to receive the two men's hands as well.

²⁶⁴ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

²⁶⁵ Hourani, *History of the Arab Peoples*.

²⁶⁶ Iraq. Civil Commissioner, Wilson, and Bell, *Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia*.

responsibility to tribal sheikhs; confirming the right of several armed, nomadic tribes to extract tribute from settled communities in their region; and rebalancing the tax obligations and arrears owed by tribal landlords to the Ottoman administration in favor of the sheikhs.²⁶⁷ These early decisions, made under conditions of post-conflict turbulence (for instance, it was unclear if the tribal confederation mobilized by the Sharif and his sons would accept the post-war settlement, or whether they would enforce their demands for independence by force)²⁶⁸ set the parameters for the subsequent British administration of the region. While the structural transformations begun under the Ottoman Empire were irreversible — tribes that had been settled did not return to nomadism, and urban centers and trading villages that had been established were not abandoned — the political preeminence of the imperial state over local tribal authority was undone. London, much more remote than Istanbul, contented itself with control over foreign policy, trade and oil, granting generous leeway to Faisal and his loyalists in running strictly local affairs. Thus the Ottoman *vilayet* system, with an appointed governor (*wali*) responsible to the center, gave way to local rule organized on Arab tribal lines. At the apex was the Hashimite royal family, as well as the so-called Sharifan officers who had supported Faisal in his bid for independence, largely composed of Sunni sheikhs of western Iraq, prominently including the Shammar Jarba. While they monopolized political authority and posts in the military,²⁶⁹ other tribal leaders were not excluded. The British colonial policy of indirect rule aligned perfectly with the political preferences of the tribal elites comprising local government, and it translated into a legal regime tilted heavily in favor of sheikhly authority and privilege.

Far from contesting sheikhs for authority over their tribesmen, the Hashemite monarchy codified their superiority over their tribesmen. Rural areas were officially excluded from the jurisdiction of the national-level judiciary, with sheikhs officially empowered to dispense justice in their territories, while also enlarging their landholdings at the expense of their tribesmen. These arrangements were formalized in the Land Settlement Law and the Law for the Rights and Duties of Cultivators passed in 1933, during the height of the mandatory period.²⁷⁰ Further, the emerging institutions of the modern state, far from diluting the power of tribal leaders, instead became vehicles to perpetuate them. The Iraqi parliament, set up originally by the British as a stepping stone towards the modernization of the Iraqi state, began with a membership primarily representing educated and urban classes, but sheikhs and other tribal notables quickly increased their numbers until they dominated a third of the institution.²⁷¹ The vestigial habits of tribal

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid. The report details repeated incursions by unmobilized tribal forces aimed at securing Syrian independence and fomenting uprisings in al Anbar against British rule over Mesopotamia.

²⁶⁹ Sakai, "Tribalization as a Tool of State Control in Iraq: Observations on the Army, the Cabinets and the National Assembly."

²⁷⁰ Jabar, "Shaykhs and Ideologues."

²⁷¹ al-Heis, *The Tribe and Democracy: The Case of Monarchist Iraq (1921-1958)*.

egalitarianism could not survive such a massive structural and political shift, and the practice of tribal authority came to include control of economic resources and mediation with formal state structures.

The formal and economic power of the sheikh-cum-landlord reached its zenith under the Hashemite monarchy, and tribal leaders enjoyed increasing economic, political and social preeminence throughout the period. However, while tribal leaders and the conservative-patrimonial government effectively maintained control on the institutions of power and the commanding heights of the economy, they lost ground in terms of controlling the press and educational institutions. In a classic case of losing the Gramscian war of position, as memories of the Arab revolt faded and continued British domination belied official independence in 1932, modernist pan-Arab nationalism spread rapidly among educated, politically engaged Iraqis, becoming the hegemonic ideology for younger Iraqis and fatally undermining the legitimacy of the monarchy. Inspired by the example of Nasserism in Egypt, and prompted by the announcement of a merger of the Hashemite monarchies of Jordan and Iraq concocted as a riposte to Nasserist pan-Arabism, a group of modernist military leaders, led by Qasim and the `Arif brothers launched a quick but bloody coup in 1958 which ended the monarchy and ushered in republican Iraq.

The republican coup was self-consciously modernizing and nationalist in its aims. Its leadership consisted of military officers who owed their rise to a modern educational system, and

%	Total Number of MPs	Number of Tribal Sheikhs and Aghas	Parliament
19.3	88	17	1925
14.8	88	13	1928
15.9	88	14	1930
20.5	111	18	1933
18.9	116	21	1937
31.9	135	37	1943
33.3	135	45	1947
34.1	135	46	1948
36.3	135	49	1953
36.3	135	49	1954
37.8	135	51	1954
35.9	145	52	1958

who had little affection for tribalism, tainted as it was by its associations with backwardness and a lengthy history of tribal cooperation with the British. A number of significant programs emerged out of this period, all intended to hasten the modernization of the country in a roughly socialist direction. Almost all of these were inimical to traditional tribal patterns of authority. Most significantly, a thoroughgoing program of land reform was introduced soon after the 1958 revolution by Qasim, aimed at breaking up large estates and empowering tribesmen-tenant farmers by allowing them to keep more of their harvest. Although it would never be fully implemented, land reform continued to be a live issue throughout the period and into early Ba'athism, and represented a very real challenge to the rural dominance of tribal sheikhs. Likewise, alongside the shift from an official culture that promoted conservative mores and traditional behavior to an overtly modernist national project (complete with attempts at equalizing the status of women), tribalism was significantly weakened as a social force. Among the educated elite, and especially within the military junta that oversaw the state, expressions of tribalism were heavily disfavored as a cultural atavism and a bit of an embarrassment. The revolution of 1958 was intended to be a bold break with the past and the beginning of a complete modernization of state and society. While, as we shall see, tribalism was never vanquished, from 1958 through the 1980s it was, on a popular level, on the defensive against a state nominally committed to its eclipse and eventual passing.

Despite the popularity of the 1958 coup, the regimes that followed were characterized by fragility, suspicion and intrigue. Although officially declared a revolution, the seizure of power in 1958 by the Free Officers of Iraq had the character of a coup — conspiratorial, sudden, and small in scale. The coup plotters could count on the loyalty of their military subordinates, but they did not enjoy deep connections with domestic constituencies,²⁷² nor could they necessarily trust each other. Qasim's commitment to modernization alienated sheikhs and traditional authorities; his strident nationalism precluded cooperation with the West; and his pan-Arab agenda agitated the Kurdish minority. As a result, he cut himself off from most potential organized sources of support and had to rely on the army (riven with intrigue) and the Communist Party of Iraq to govern. Ultimately, he would be undone by a Kurdish uprising and disputes over alignment with Nasser, leading to his deposal by his former co-conspirator, `Arif in 1963. `Arif would rule until his death in 1966, governing in a complicated dance with the Iraqi Ba'ath party and the military, with his brother succeeding as president until 1968, when the Ba'ath succeeded (after many abortive attempts and the half-success of 1963) to seize power for itself.

The reforms emerging from the transition to Arab Nationalism (and, later, Ba'athist Arab Socialism) eliminated tribal leaders from the center of political leadership, but they did not succeed in breaking the tribes as social structures.²⁷³ For tribal leaders, and for tribesmen, life

²⁷² Arab nationalism as an ideology enjoyed tremendous popular support, and the coup itself — representing a break with monarchical inertia and the emergence of governments, theoretically at least, based on popular sovereignty — was backed by the overwhelming majority of Iraqis. However this was disorganized ferment, not orderly, regular endorsement, and the Iraqi public was fickle as to personalities, and divided as to a specific program for realizing the program of Arab nationalism.

²⁷³ Jabar, "Shaykhs and Ideologies."

went on despite the political turmoil, and they sat out the struggles playing out in Baghdad and the Kurdish north. Indeed, they had the luxury of watching different configurations of their political antagonists – Qasim and the Communists, the `Arif brothers and the Ba'athists, the Kurds in the north – all tear into one another, with the power of each group cresting and waning with a steadily escalating body count. It was not until the consolidation of Ba'athist rule that the state stabilized enough to finally make good on the promise of modernizing Iraq.

Ba'athist Neo-Tribalism: Tribe-State Collusion

Jabar identifies the precariousness of the Ba'athist elites hold on power as the principal motivator for the turn towards tribalism within the regime.²⁷⁴ As a small, isolated conspiratorial elite, the Ba'ath seized control lacking a power base in any significant social groups or institutions. (This was far from a unique Iraqi problem. In Syria, the Ba'ath found itself in a similar precarious position, only there the turn was towards sectarian Allawite support.²⁷⁵) Further, the modernizing, Arabist socialist ideology of the Ba'ath, while appealing to a segment of the educated, Arab nationalist population, represented a radical challenge to entrenched local interests, including tribal leaders, Shi'a clerics, Kurdish nationalists, and bourgeois business elites. Existing social groups were threatened by the Ba'athist program; further, because of the significant degree autonomy afforded the state by the combination of the effectiveness of the British-trained and outfitted military and the availability of oil royalties, the reliance of the state on social groups for either security or financial resources (and therefore its sensitivity to pressure from them) was minimal.²⁷⁶ Due to its program, the ruling elite had no natural constituency in Iraqi society; due to its autonomy, it had no need to adjust its program to find a constituency. This circumstance represented both a challenge and an opportunity for the regime – the opportunity to enact an ambitious, transformational agenda for the country, the challenge to develop enough cohesiveness and solidarity among its cadres in order to avoid infiltration or subversion by existing social forces or rival conspiracies. Jabar identifies four crucial features in the new (post-1968) Ba'athist elite:

As they descended from provincial, semi-Bedouin small towns and villages, where primordial solidarities are the strongest, they were in a position to comprehend tribalism and exploit it;

The civilian part of this group was all too aware of the powerful role of the military and was concerned about the disruptive and sundry nature of the latter.

They were also leaders of mass politics who appreciated modern organization.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Bowden, "Tales of the Tyrant."

²⁷⁶ Anderson, "The State in the Middle East and North Africa."

The group was also aware of its own segmentary and thin nature given the complex structure of Iraqi society, and the fact that the Ba'th [sic] membership was only 150 or so; some say estimates vary between 300-400.²⁷⁷

The end result of Ba'athist power consolidation was the emergence of a novel form of political organization, "the single party, single clan systems fused into one and based on rentierism." Oil revenues would fund the state, a massively expanded mass party would staff the state apparatus, and a small clique of trusted cadres recruited on the basis of kinship networks and clan solidarity (the so-called Tikritis or Bejjats) would command the system. At the same moment that the Ba'athist regime was conducting land reforms and usurping the prerogatives of rural sheikhs in favor of its own party functionaries, it was busy entrenching the Bejjat clan of Saddam Hussein's extended family into the upper echelons of the party leadership, while less distinguished kinsmen staffing the security apparatus. Jabar dubs this particular arrangement "etatist tribalism," emphasizing the importance of regime considerations in this form of tribal solidarity.²⁷⁸ As he points out, by bringing tribal affinities out of their original social and economic context — that of rural, or at least small-town Iraq — and implanting them within the bureaucratic and administrative hierarchies of the state, the Ba'athists had severely distorted tribal traditions and values.

The adoption of this particular strategy for regime security provoked a reaction from Ba'athists outside the circle of select Sunni tribesmen. Ba'athism was not originally a cynical vehicle for the promotion of Saddam Hussein and his extended kinship network, but instead a transformational ideology that had attracted true believers in its particular variant of Arab nationalism. This included a number of better-educated Shi'a, often secularized, from the center and south of the country, with a military or technical background.²⁷⁹ This old guard and the protégées that they had subsequently brought in were incompatible with the tribal-based loyalty expectations emerging in the Revolutionary Command Council and other key agencies, and found themselves frozen out of the party leadership. In 1973, precipitated by mounting anxiety at their exclusion, they staged a failed coup to take control of the party. The attempted coup offered the Bejjat-affiliated leadership the pretext to purge outsiders from leadership and reinforce their supremacy inside the Ba'ath. Another opportunity was afforded in 1979, with the transfer of leadership from al Bakr to Saddam Hussein. Shortly after al Bakr's resignation, the lingering outsider elements within the Ba'athist leadership were accused of complicity in a Syrian plot against the regime, tortured, subjected to show trials and video-taped confessions, and, in a grisly twist, personally executed by Saddam Hussein and the surviving members of the Regional Command Council.²⁸⁰

However, the security sought by concentrating political power in the hands of a single kin-group proved illusory. As Jabar puts it, far from unproblematically guaranteeing the obedience of followers, asabiya-style kinship solidarity is "prone to the fiercest, Macbethian bursts, breaks

²⁷⁷ Jabar, "Shaykhs and Ideologues."

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Makiya, *Republic of Fear*.

²⁸⁰ Bowden, "Tales of the Tyrant."

and ruptures. Power struggles, conflicting marriage alliances and sundry economic and social interests plague primordial, clannish groups and rip them apart.”²⁸¹ Already in the mid-1970s, al Bakr and Hussein began purging their Takriti kinsmen (more distant relations, belonging to the same tribe but outside the Beijat clan). The resignation of al Bakr represents a similar rupture — he was bundled off under the threat of force in order to make way for an ambitious younger man in the ultimate MacBethian denouement. Finally, there was the spectacular case of Saddam’s two sons-in-law, Hussein Kamel al Majid and Saddam Kamel al Majid, who had both enjoyed proximity to Saddam personally as well as positions of leadership in the elite Republican Guard. Finding themselves dismissed from leadership and frozen out in favor of the two natural Hussein sons Uday and Qusay, they defected to Jordan along with their wives, declaring their commitment to the overthrow of their father-in-law and cooperating with US, UNSCOM and other agencies by revealing information about Iraqi security and its secret weapons program. Less than a year later, under unknown inducements, they accepted assurances of a pardon from Saddam and returned to Iraq with their wives.²⁸² Within three days, they were divorced from Saddam’s daughters, branded traitors and killed (along with their father, brother and sister) in a raid on their home by other kinsmen, who declared it an honor killing of enemies of the state.²⁸³

While the details of the violence among the ruling clique of Ba’athist Iraq have a certain lurid cast, the patterns they follow reveal the logic of clan rivalry at work at the apex of the political system. Jabar identifies the execution of Saddam’s sons-in-law as part of a pattern of succession contestation within the ruling Beijat clan, divided into three factions: the Albu Khattab houmla including the half-brothers of Saddam Hussein (Watban, a former Interior Minister; Sab’awi; and Barzan, both leaders of the Mukhabarat), the sons-in-law from Saddam’s own al Majid house (also his second cousins); and finally Uday and Qusay, his sons proper.²⁸⁴ Saddam’s half-brothers were retired from political leadership in the 1990s, though they continued to be close to Saddam, occasionally serving on an ad hoc basis as advisors or agents. The sons-in-law, being younger and more ambitious, and possibly fearing for their own lives in case of the succession of either Qusay or Uday (given what befell Saddam’s contemporaries on the RCC at his accession to power), resisted attempts to remove them from political life, and so were purged along with most of their family. The US-led invasion of 2003 rendered any question of the continuation of rule through Saddam Hussein’s lineage or kin-group moot, but the successions of his sons would likely have triggered another round of purges and the pruning of more distant kinsmen from the inner circle as the younger generation sought to consolidate their own authority.

While this Shakespearean family drama was playing out at the very center of political power, with public and private life collapsing for the Hussein-era elite into a single fratricidal struggle for supremacy, the official Ba’athist policy from 1968 through the 1970s and early 1980s continued to be hostile to tribalism in broader society. Use of the *laqab* or *nisba* (tribal titles and lineage titles)

²⁸¹ Jabar, “Shaykhs and Ideologues.”

²⁸² Ibid. See also Bowden, “Tales of the Tyrant.”

²⁸³ Baram, “Neo-tribalism in Iraq.”

²⁸⁴ Jabar, “Shaykhs and Ideologues.”

were forbidden, and tribal names were banned from use in party documents.²⁸⁵ In short, while using kinship and tribal ties to attempt to solidify unity within the inner circles of power, early Ba'athist policy was to undermine the prevalence of that sort of solidarity in the broader society. Clan and kinship were the only unifying forces strong enough to maintain cohesion among the Ba'athist elite (largely by drawing essential, insurmountable barriers between members of the elite and outsiders), and for that reason they were far too strong and exclusive to be tolerated anywhere else.

Instead of working with the traditional tribal, clan, and kin networks in broader Iraqi society, the early Ba'athist regime applied the totalitarian model adapted from the Soviet example of social control and introduced and ubiquitous party state.²⁸⁶ The model required a mass membership unified by shared ideological commitment, organized into a hierarchal party structure. Civil society organizations — unions, student groups, professional associations, etc. — would be stripped of their independence and subsumed under the party-state umbrella, with leadership drawn from cadres, internal promotion based on political reliability as much as merit, and through-going surveillance carried out for dissent or opposition.²⁸⁷ Unlike the Communist Party in the Soviet Union, the Ba'athists had to contend with entrenched traditional institutions. Coming to power through coup and conspiracy, as opposed to an outright Civil War victory that entrenched Soviet power, the Ba'ath did not have the mass following or the coercive capacity to eliminate religious or tribal elites root and branch.²⁸⁸ Instead, in the first instance ulema and tribal notables were cowed by party authorities, their social prerogatives arrogated to apparatchiks, while the state-directed organs of mass culture attempted to shift public attitudes enough to undermine the authority of these traditional institutions.

The demands — in terms of manpower and mobilization — of the totalitarian model ran in to severe problems even early on in its implementation. While oil revenues did provide the Ba'athist state with enough financial autonomy to avoid reliance on broader taxation and development in order to offer material inducements to potential cadres, the level of ideological motivation in the society for the radical Ba'athist agenda was not sufficient to create the sort of party apparatus that the system required. In part, with respect to potential dissidents at least, this insufficiency could be (and was) compensated by the liberal application of terror: Communists, rival internal factions, and recalcitrant Kurdish and Shi'a elements were all subject to measures stern in their application and baroque in their cruelty.²⁸⁹ However, as Weber observes, even the most ruthless and predatory system requires dedicated, genuinely loyal cadres in order to carry out the terror and predation.²⁹⁰ Recruitment for the most sensitive positions within the Ba'athist system — that is, the security apparatus which would maintain the system of surveillance,

²⁸⁵ Sakai, "Tribalization as a Tool of State Control in Iraq: Observations on the Army, the Cabinets and the National Assembly." See also Jabar, "Shaykhs and Ideologies," and Baram, "Neo-tribalism in Iraq."

²⁸⁶ Makiya, *Republic of Fear*. Offers a book-length treatment on the Ba'athist totalitarian model for Iraq. Bowden, "Tales of the Tyrant" forwards the same argument through interviews with relevant activists.

²⁸⁷ Makiya, *Republic of Fear*.

²⁸⁸ Jabar, "Shaykhs and Ideologies."

²⁸⁹ Makiya, *Republic of Fear*.

²⁹⁰ Weber, *Economy and Society*.

enforcement and terror — was tribalized from the start, with dedicated institutions creating a pipeline that would draw young men from tribal origins considered to be loyal into the branches of the Ba'athist security services (an analogy here to the Soviet Union may be illuminating, as class origins testified to the loyalty of a recruit, with peasant or proletarian backgrounds favored and bourgeois or aristocratic ones counter-indicated. However, it is important to consider the implications of the choice of these two principles: in the Soviet case, class was perfectly consonant with the ideology and represented an attempt to try to operationalize the theoretical goals of the party. Tribal loyalty, by contrast, was explicitly disfavored in classic Ba'athist ideology; its use by the leadership as a decisive criterion for recruitment both testifies to its profound hold in some segments of the Iraqi population and begs the question as to the extent the ruling elite was committed to their own transformational agenda. As Batatu quips, from all appearances it was not the Ba'ath exploiting Takriti and Bejjat loyalties to carry out their program, but Takriti and Bejjat tribesmen taking advantage of the Ba'athist coup to entrench their position at the apex of Iraqi society).²⁹¹

The party-state system operated relatively effectively to the exclusion of tribal forms of organization until the early eighties. At that point, two major developments resulted in the accelerating reversal of the regime's anti-tribal measures. The first was Saddam Hussein's accession to the presidency of Iraq, effectively eliminating any division of power in the country and reducing the Ba'athist party to a personal administrative staff rather than an ideologically driven party-state. The second was Hussein's decision in September 1980 to launch a surprise invasion of Iran, triggering the eight-year Iran-Iraq War.

It is unclear what his exact calculations were in taking on his much larger and more populous neighbor — his background was in the conspiratorial, civilian wing of the Ba'ath party and, as demonstrated by his subsequent miscalculation in invading Kuwait, he was prone to underestimating his enemies — but the relationship between the two countries has always been tense. Apart from its traditional claim on Kuwait as an amputated 19th province, Iraq has (even prior to the Ba'athist regime) forwarded irredentist claims on Iran's Kurdish territories as well as Khuzestan, the site of both a large Arabic-speaking population and significant oil wealth. The Islamic Revolution in Iran also represented a significant threat to the hegemony of other incumbent regimes around the Gulf — apart from Iraq, Kuwait and Bahrain are majority Shi'a though ruled by Sunni dictators, while Qatar and Saudi Arabia both have substantial Shi'a minorities with legitimate social, economic and political grievances. The Islamist system in Iran, committed to the export of its revolution and empowered through oil revenues and the zeal of recent revolutionary success would constitute a real and growing threat to Ba'athist Iraq that would require eventual confrontation. In 1980, the regime of Ayatollah Khomeini had not yet consolidated, with ongoing purges of leftists and other dissidents creating political chaos within the country. It is likely that Hussein viewed this as an opportunity to nip the Islamic Revolution in the bud, striking hard with the backing of other Arab powers and securing a rapid victory over a disorganized Iranian military purged of most its senior officers and cut off by international

²⁹¹ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes & the Revolutionary Movement in Iraq*.

sanctions from equipment resupply. This rapid victory failed to materialize — instead, the Iraqi invasion produced a "rally around the flag" effect in Iran, uniting the public behind the regime and inspiring ingenuity and valor on the part of Iranian forces. Iraq's offensive pushed into Iranian territory, peaking in 1982 when both Khormanshar and Abadan were held and the outskirts of the Khuzestani cities of Darful and Awahz were reached. After that, the Iranians seized the initiative and Iraqi gave up all of its gains. By 1985, Iranian troops had entered Iraqi territory, pushing in as far as the edge of Basrah. The war would continue, at great cost to both nations, until 1988.

The war effort strained the limits of the Ba'athist system, forcing the turn away from developmentalism towards the total mobilization of the domestic economy and population for war. Fewer resources were available to maintain the Ba'athist party apparatus, forcing flexibility on the part of the regime in terms of where it found its social base.

The Iraqi armed forces under Ba'athism had adopted the commissar model from the Soviet system. As the number of troops under arms expanded in order to make up for losses sustained and bolster the forces at the front, cadres were stripped from their civilian duties and embedded instead into the armed forces. The result was the denuding of the countryside of Ba'athist supervision. Similarly, the need to increase the number of soldiers under arms required mobilizing new segments of the population beyond the traditional Tikriti base of the armed forces. Rather than an indiscriminate *levée en masse*, the strategy was to target certain Sunni Arab tribes considered to be the most sympathetic to the regime and to concentrate recruitment efforts with them. The result was the enrollment of tens of thousands of al Jubouri tribesmen for service in the Presidential Guard, the Republican Guard and the Special Republican Guard.²⁹²

If the need for the new recruits and the weakening of the regular party apparatus as an instrument of supervision and control were the motivations for going beyond the existing system, what were the factors that favored neo-tribalism as the alternative form of structuring power? Baram, who coined the term, examines the speeches, official pronouncements and media output from the Ba'athist regime and party apparatus and concludes that simple cultural stereotypes and prejudices were a significant factor.²⁹³ In a war effort that was pitched as a cultural clash between Arab and Persian civilizations (given the overwhelming Shi'a majority in Iraq, sectarianism was unavailable as a mobilizing principle), the Bedouin roots of tribal culture allowed the regime to play up the Arabness of tribesmen, drawing a stark contrast with non-tribal, culturally Persian Iranians. Further, given the longstanding association of tribesmen with valor and martial prowess, both the regime and the broader culture accepted the notion that traditional, tribal Iraqis would make superior soldiers to their "modern," detribalized compatriots. (One rather refreshing quality about Ba'athist dictatorship in Iraq was its willingness to face up to the reality of its isolation and lack of legitimacy, even while spewing the usual propaganda about the unity of regime and nation. Saddam was under no illusions about his personal popularity or the level of public support for the Ba'athist system — quite the contrary, he was well aware of the large

²⁹² Baram, "Neo-tribalism in Iraq."

²⁹³ Ibid.

number of opponents, both individual and collective, that his regime faced²⁹⁴. Iraqis had no general reason — as Iraqis — to risk their lives for his regime. Instead, he sought to play to traditional prejudices and values — ones long predating Ba'athism — to motivate resistance to the Iranians. Hence appeals to anti-Persian racism; hence, too, attempts to exploit the self-image of traditional tribesmen as paragons of martial virtue as a motivator, without making the pragmatic case for war.)

These perceptions received dramatic confirmation in 1982. Jabar, in elaborating the model of Ba'athist neo-tribalism, takes issue with the contention that it was a state-directed invention. Instead, he describes it as a “rediscovery” of the persistent strength of tribal forms of identity and solidarity by the Ba'athist state, with 1982 as a watershed moment. It was in that year that the Iran-Iraq war turned temporarily in Iranian favor, with incursions by Iranian forces into Iraqi territory.²⁹⁵ This was particularly sensitive since the southern regions around Basrah were majority Shi'a, and therefore suspected of disloyalty by the Ba'athist regime. Quite against expectations, rather than collaborating with Iranian forces or even standing aside, the tribes of the southern borderlands, in the marshes and in the Qurna region, mobilized against the Iranian advance. Jabar points out two novel elements of this Arab Shi'a military tribalism: “it was of an Iraqi nationalist character, and it was spontaneous.” Once identified, it was too good an opportunity to pass up, and close collaboration on tactical and security issues during the war ensued between the local tribal leadership and the Ba'athist command.

The rehabilitation of tribalism as a state-sanctioned social force began in the 1980s with the publication of new works detailing Iraqi tribal histories and geographies. This had once been an active field of indigenous Iraqi scholarship — the canonical work on the subject, Abbas al Azzawi's several-volume set titled *Iraqi Tribes*, was published in Baghdad in the mid-1950s — but had been explicitly suppressed by the Ba'ath as an embarrassing obstacle on the road to modernization. As a result, the publication of new research on tribes in the 1980s (much of it reheated or updated material from al Azzawi) represented a volte-face on the part of the regime. Of course, the content of the research, no less than the timing of its release, was partly shaped by Ba'athist political considerations; the new research included a bulked up section on Saddam Hussein's own Albu Nasir tribe, which was claimed to possess *sayyid* status (that is, descent from the Prophet Mohammed).

While coordination between tribal groups and military forces continued throughout the Iran-Iraq war, and tribal scholarship escaped proscription and re-emerged in the 1980s, it was the confrontation with the United States in the first Gulf War and the experience of the Shi'a uprising in the South in the wake of Iraqi defeat that catalyzed the emergence of neo-tribalism as a complete system. In terms of its effects on the Ba'athist military and security system, the conflict with the United States represented a much more extreme, concentrated, and one-sided replay of the Iran-Iraq War. During that conflict, attrition within the armed forces and the need to mobilize ever greater numbers of troops stretched the Ba'athist security apparatus. The challenge from US and coalition forces during Operation Desert Storm was infinitely more severe. The

²⁹⁴ Makiya, *Republic of Fear*. See also Bowden, “Tales of the Tyrant.”

²⁹⁵ Jabar, “Shaykhs and Ideologies.”

technological capabilities available to US commanders were incomparable to those of the Iranians, with unchallenged air superiority over the whole of Iraq, including Baghdad; first-order intelligence across a broad spectrum of platforms; and sophisticated, well-equipped, professional, and numerically superior forces. The futility of Iraqi resistance was demonstrated almost immediately, triggering mass surrender and desertion among Iraqi forces. Further, the command-and-control structure of the Ba'athist regime, in accordance with modern American military doctrine, was one of the primary targets of US forces. Air strikes degraded regime communications and hit at regional command centers and destroying crucial modern infrastructure, disrupting the ability of the Ba'athist security apparatus to oversee the country.

The deployment of key Ba'athist leadership to the occupation of Kuwait, removing them from their in-country duties, also diluted central control in Iraq. These factors all contributed to the unravelling of Ba'athist party dominance. Even under conditions of victory, or even a status quo ante armistice such as that which ended the Iran-Iraq war, it would have been difficult, but not impossible, to reassert party control. In the wake of a disastrous, self-evidently catastrophic defeat such as that following Desert Storm, the conditions were set for crisis and revolt.

The causes of Shi'a grievance in Iraq are too numerous to go over in detail in this study. They include, for educated, pragmatic Shi'a, exclusion from the commanding heights of the nominally modernist, non-sectarian state and party apparatus; overt discrimination within the security services; prohibition against Shi'a religious rites such as Ashura; the disruption of flows of pilgrims and seminary students between the shrine-cities of Iraq and Shi'a religious centers in Iran; expulsion from Iraq of Shi'a considered politically unreliable during the Iran-Iraq War; and the persecution of the clerical and political leadership of the community. Whether this maltreatment was the result of sectarian chauvinism or hard-nosed political calculation is irrelevant – the injuries sustained and the insults endured by the Shi'a majority were very real, and the sense of grievance they engendered very powerful. Defeat at the hands of the international coalition had demonstrated the weakness of the Ba'athist regime, while simultaneously creating, in the form of hurriedly-conscripted Shi'a recruits, an armed, fighting force capable of confronting the organized central authorities. Further, Iranian-backed Shi'a activist groups (most notably SCIRI and the Da'wa party) could exploit the breakdown of order in the south to infiltrate across the border, and bolster the anti-Ba'athist cause. The stage was set for what would come to be known as the *Intifada* as Shi'a from across the south rose up against the Ba'athist regime.

The revolt represented a near-fatal shock to the Ba'athist party state. In addition to revealing the depth of Shi'a opposition to the regime and the intensity of the sectarian rift (the Kurdish-Arab conflict was one thing, but this was a clash between Arabs), it all showed the weakness of the existing apparatus of coercion. In the south, as units of deserters joined with urban-based rebels, the local Ba'athist party structure melted away. The central government retained the allegiance of the Republican Guard (and the even more elite Special Republican Guard) as well as the more advanced regular army units with their heavy weaponry, but in the Shi'a provinces of the south it lost control over the typical security agencies. In these areas, the police, *mukhabarat*, and Ba'athist party cadres were all defeated, were driven out, or deserted.

In this moment, when the regime was at its weakest, the behavior of Iraqi tribal leaders proved decisive. In the north and the center, tribally-recruited units of the regular armed forces proved loyal, and helped maintain order in Baghdad, later pivoting north to confront the Kurdish insurrection. In the south, tribal sheikhs were, with several notable exceptions, unenthusiastic about the revolt. Many held back in the initial stages, biding their time to determine if the US or its coalition partners were going to intervene, and to see how the balance of forces were to develop within Iraq. Those tribes which had connections to the regime in the form of highly-placed members in the political or security systems were willing to entertain discussions with the regime about intervening against the rebels, which were largely detribalized urban Shi'a. Perhaps, too, the presence of infiltrators from Iran (overwhelmingly Iraq Arabs that had been driven out during the war and had found refuge with exile groups in the Islamic republic) unsettled the tribal leaders, who perceived a replay of the Iranian invasion, and who tended to view clerical leaders as local rivals more than sectarian partners. Whatever the specific motivations of individual tribal leaders, enough of them withheld support from the rebellion in the early stages to foreclose the possibility of a swift victory against the Ba'athists. Once the situation had clarified and initiative passed to the forces of the regime, tribal leaders in the south actively collaborated with government security forces, deploying their tribal militias along with regular units of the Republican Guard in actions against rebellious communities. The bloodshed was severe. Naked force was used to repress the uprising, with collective reprisals, mass executions and the razing of entire urban environments. The most spectacular act of pacification was the draining of the southern marshes, which successfully destroyed the ecological and economic base of the marsh Arabs' way of life, resulting in their forced resettlement far from their traditional homeland.

The willing participation of tribal groups in the south in the repression of their Shi'a coreligionists convinced the Ba'athist regime to re-establish its basis of legitimacy and the institutional structure of its rule along tribal lines. As the rebellion in the south progressed, the regime began to solicit and publicize tribal oaths of allegiance as a means of blunting the spread of dissent and presenting the impression of strength and national unity.

Shift from party-state to tribal power structure in Ba'athist Iraq

System	Symbolic Expression	Institutional Configuration	Economic Underpinnings
Leninist-inspired party-state			
	Soviet-style uniforms	Central Regional Command	Command Economy
	Marxist/nationalist rhetoric	Ba'ath Party	Oil Wealth
	Pan-socialist solidarity	Ministries, top-down governance	State-led development projects
	Modernization/Industrialization		Welfare state
	Propaganda		
	Literacy programs, mass mobilization		

Ba'athist neo-tribalism

Traditional Bedouin dress	Local tribal councils	Unregulated small business
Tribal/primordial rhetoric, including justifying Kuwait war	<i>Majlis</i> -style audiences	Entrepreneurial criminality by sheikhs
Tribal oaths, dancing, and banner surrender from sheikhs ³	Tribe-based decentralization	Oil wealth funneled to tribes
Honor killing of sons-in law		Tribal patronage replaces welfare benefits

Was this system effective? Tribal militias could be raised both to buttress regular security forces and to engage in inter-tribal rivalries. Shiekhhs could muster dozens or hundreds of armed men if necessary. Smuggling in al Anbar created fortunes that could be kept safely in Amman, as well as links with the outside world. Retribalization gradually edged out the Ba'athist party-state apparatus as the main locus of control, to the point that party organs and activists openly complained about the new tribal direction the country was embarking on, and laws needed to be publicly promulgated to forbid the execution of tribal revenge against individuals carrying out their state-appointed functions.

In addition to tribalization parallel to the security and control structures of the Ba'athist party state, tribalism also expanded inside of formal structures. The tribal linkages of key regime officials were made public, and many slipped into dual roles, keeping their positions inside of the security and political apparatus while also serving as tribal leaders. Further, entire units of the regular army were organized on a tribal basis. This had mixed results: while it did provide cohesion within the units, there were at least two major revolts as Saddam Hussein purged tribesmen affiliated with important tribes from key leadership posts. Those revolts were put down, and military prominence dispersed through to other, smaller tribes. Overall, in terms of a system of internal control, Iraqi neo-tribalism had a mixed history; there were those cases of tribal-inspired revolt, and by granting tribal leaders autonomy over justice among their tribesmen, the unity of control previously enjoyed by the central government was weakened. However, these concessions need to be placed into context: the Ba'athist security apparatus, despite draining resources away from virtually every other branch of the central government, had been severely degraded in its encounter with the West, and the wake of the Gulf War was a period of severe sanctions, economic privation, and serious security threats (US and British bombing campaigns, no-fly zones, and growing Kurdish resistance). Under these conditions, the neo-tribal governance form maintained the regime in power without dismantling its political monopoly. Of course, ultimately the system failed in 2003 under a renewed, committed assault by US and coalition forces. It is far from obvious that there existed any possible Iraqi configuration of power that could have resisted the onslaught. What is true is that, even up to the final moments before the launch of Operation Iraqi Freedom, and despite the best efforts of the most formidable political and diplomatic adversary in the world, the regime established by Saddam Hussein, which he fully intended to bequeath to his sons, remained intact.

Conclusion

Arab tribes have been major political and social forces in the Middle East even before the conquests of the early Islamic period. They can trace their origin as pre-modern “total” institutions, combining economic, political, cultural and security functions through the social cohesiveness of deeply believed, though often fluid, kinship ties. Their influence on the region, as attested to by both contemporary scholars and current historians, rested in large part on their ability to organize force, providing both the coercive punch and the logistical support to field effective, autonomous military units, either independently (usually on a smaller scale as raiders) or in tandem with other tribes or local polities. The effectiveness of tribal rulers in harnessing the coercive potential of their followers, however, was stymied by the egalitarian ethos of the tribe and the ample exit opportunities provided by a nomadic lifestyle based on camel husbandry – without a means to sanction and control tribesmen, sheikhs were forced to rely on suasion and bribery and could not discipline tribesmen into soldiers.

Beginning in the mid-19th century, changes in the economic and political life of the Middle East fundamentally altered the economic basis of Arab tribes while preserving them as cultural and social groups of profound cohesion. The shift, first from camel husbandry to agriculture and later to different economic relations with oil-rich rentier states, concentrated authority in the hands of sheikhs, creating hierarchical authority relations within the tribe. Sheikhs controlled access to land and to governmental largess, giving them a means to discipline wayward tribesmen. The lengthy timescale for this shift, and the preservation within the tribe of cultural practices crucial to tribesmen’s sense of identity and purpose, meant that the transformation of sheikhs from *primi-inter-pares* into *de facto* lords took place without an erosion of solidarity within the tribe. The resulting combination of hierarchical authority relations and traditional solidarity accounts in large part for the effectiveness of tribes in filling the security and political void left in the collapse of the Ba‘athist state.

Chapter 5: The Emergence of the al Anbar Tribal Quasi-State

The previous chapter demonstrated how the Arab tribes of al Anbar came to possess the characteristics of (a) internal hierarchy, with tribesmen answerable to the commands of their sheikhs, and (b) recent-term coercive and economic empowerment in collusion with the Baathist state, which familiarized tribal leaders and their key cadres with modern techniques of organized violence and administration.

In this chapter, I trace the evolving security situation of al Anbar from the American invasion of 2003 to the American drawdown, which was completed in December 2011. In this period, coercive pre-eminence in al Anbar was claimed by a variety of groups: (a) international militant Islamists, who would coalesce under the leadership of al Qaeda in Mesopotamia; (b) the nascent Iraqi central government, with security forces trained by the Americans; (c) US occupational forces; and (d) armed tribes under the leadership of their traditional sheikhs. In this multi-sided clash, the sheikhs were far from obvious winners. Militant Islamists enjoyed access to international networks for financial backing and could recruit across the entire region. The revived Iraqi state had at its disposal oil wealth and US assistance. And the American occupational force, made up of marines and elite army units, comprised some of the most formidable forces of the most formidable military on earth. And yet it was the tribal sheikhs who were capable, by dint of their deep reach into the local population, the loyalty of fighters and civilians alike, and their familiarity, thanks to late Ba'athist tribalism, with advanced tactics and management techniques were able to outmaneuver each of their rivals and solidify their hold on al Anbar province.

While the situation in al Anbar remains fluid, with renewed outbursts of violence and challenges from both militant Islam and the Maliki-led national government, the position of the tribes remains central, and sheikhs continue to determine the balance of power in their province.

Ba'athist State Collapse and Insurgency

Operation Iraqi Freedom, launched in 2003, finished the job that was begun during Operation Desert Storm. American doctrine and strategy, at least in terms of target identification, was the same, but married to improved aerial munitions and intelligence capacity. Command and control centers were the principal targets of the air strikes, and the objective was to eliminate the Ba'athist regime's ability to exercise authority over the country or mount organized resistance to US forces.²⁹⁶ This approach proved to be extremely effective for the invasion — much of the army, the state security apparatus and even the regular government officials melted away without confronting US forces. When the 2nd Brigade of the 3rd Infantry Division made its now famous “thunder run” into the center of Baghdad, it eliminated Ba'athist central control entirely and established US and Coalition forces as the paramount authorities in Iraq.²⁹⁷

After the initial invasion, early US occupational policy further eroded the foundations of Ba'athist control. The now famous “most wanted” deck singled out the senior Ba'athist leadership for capture and prosecution.²⁹⁸ This fact alone greatly complicated efforts to manage the handover of power in the country to American forces; by and large, those within the former regime who had the authority to deliver segments of the security apparatus into American hands were too frightened of accountability to cooperate with coalition forces. The situation remained salvageable; as late as April 2004, commanding officers in the regular Iraq army, at least, reassured by ground-level occupational staff, were willing to reconstitute their units and assist coalition forces in maintaining order, the desirability of which had been demonstrated by the widespread looting that followed the conquest of Baghdad.²⁹⁹ (Footage broadcast throughout the Arab world as well as in the United States of looters walking ancient artifacts out the front doors of the Iraqi National Museum as uniformed US troops stand by uncomfortably fatally undermined the image of Americans as in charge.³⁰⁰) However, two decisions made by L. Paul Bremer foreclosed the possibility of reestablishing order through the remnants of the old state apparatus. The first was CPA Order Number 2, which disbanded the Iraqi Armed Forces. The second was CPA Order Number 1, which launched de-Ba'athification, purging the civil service of Ba'ath party members. Given the nature of the party-state, this included virtually all staff with positions of any responsibility.³⁰¹

²⁹⁶ Boyer, “The New War Machine.”

²⁹⁷ Zucchino and Bowden, *Thunder Run*.

²⁹⁸ *Iraq's Most Wanted Playing Cards*.

²⁹⁹ Ferguson, *No End in Sight*. See especially the interviews with Col. Paul Hughes.

³⁰⁰ Writer, “Looters Shake Iraqi Cities.” For a detailed tally of the cultural losses related to the looting, see Polk and Schuster, *The Looting of the Iraq Museum, Baghdad*. This was the calamity that Donald Rumsfeld wrote off as just “[a] man walking out of [a] building with a vase.” Whitaker, “Free to Do Bad Things.”

³⁰¹ Pfiffner, “US Blunders in Iraq.”

Effectively, when Bremer took apart the Ba'athist party state, he eliminated the state itself as a national institution. No institutional framework for state authority had been developed to take the place of official Ba'athism.³⁰² Elections had not yet been held, and an interim administration took over without a clear constitutional mandate and no real coercive capacity of its own, instead relying on coalition forces for its own security purposes. According to the naive liberalism/libertarianism of some of the younger CPA staff, this development was perfectly salutary: freedom, though messy, would eventually bloom into the best possible government type for the society as individual Iraqis took to the new social and economic opportunities with aplomb.³⁰³

The reality was that, instead of empowering individual Iraqis, the removal of the Ba'athist party-state as the apex institution for organized violence in Iraq devolved authority to the next-largest organized coercive institutions. In the north of the country, this meant the Kurdish nationalist parties and the regional government they had established. In southern Iraq, it meant that many Shia congregations and Islamist movements that had organized in Iran became the strongest indigenous institutions.³⁰⁴ Throughout Iraq, sheikhs, free from oversight by state authorities, could claim as much autonomy as they could defend.³⁰⁵ So long as a group could avoid direct confrontation with US occupational forces, the only constraint on its freedom of action was the behavior of other groups. (Tribes as such were a matter of indifference to coalition forces and faced no formal obstacles to organizing man power or taking over local authority. Sheikhs accused of collaboration with the Ba'athists were targeted for arrest, but neutral sheikhs were left to their own devices, subject to curfews etc.)

In al Anbar province, the Sunni Islam of the population meant that Shi'a-style imam-leaders and congregational-based political mobilization were absent; sect and distance from Iran also militated against the influence of the well-organized Iraqi Shi'a Islamists parties (such as SCIRI and al Da'wa) that had incubated in the Islamic Republic. The party-state had been powerful locally, but it operated in tandem with the Sunni tribal leadership, and in the wake of the invasion, sheikhs were well placed to inherit the matériel, the organization, and the political connections left behind by the Ba'athists.³⁰⁶ In the West, more than in the South (where sheikhs had to compete with sectarian organizations), the North (where the Kurdish-Arab conflict undercut tribal power), or Baghdad (where the dense, mixed population and proximity to political struggle over control of the state apparatus inflamed violence), tribal authority emerged seamlessly from the ruins of the Ba'athist party-state/neo-tribal hybrid.³⁰⁷

³⁰² Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life in The Emerald City*.

³⁰³ Hassan, *Constructing America's Freedom Agenda for the Middle East*.

³⁰⁴ Wong, "Iraqi Militias Resisting U.S. Pressure to Disband."

³⁰⁵ Long, "The Anbar Awakening."

³⁰⁶ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

³⁰⁷ West, *No True Glory*.

In the aftermath of the 2003 invasion, sheikhs and tribes in the West were faced with an economic problem — how to maintain the flow of patronage to their tribesmen given the shutdown of subsidies from the center (both direct and in the form of employment for tribesmen in the security services, as well as contracts for services provided to the government).³⁰⁸ The abrupt change in the domestic ethno-sectarian balance of power in Iraq posed a political problem: following the logic of Ba‘athist neo-tribalism, where spoils and discipline were meted out on an identity basis calibrated to the expected loyalty of various groups, the shift in Sunni fortunes from an elite at the apex of power controlling staffing in the security apparatus and the distribution of oil revenues to a despised minority, possible the target of Kurdish and Shi’a vengeance, was cause for existential alarm.³⁰⁹ The rhetoric of democratic reconstruction in Iraq as the principle by which occupational forces would organize a successor government in Baghdad was based on an American language of political values which was erroneously thought to be universal. Iraqi constituencies interpreted it according to the political and ideological priorities of their group: the Kurds heard “democracy” and thought “independence,” or at least autonomy; the Shi’a heard it and thought “majority (Shi’a) rule”; the Islamists heard it and thought “*jahiliyya*”; and the Sunni heard it and thought “disenfranchisement.” The notion that US occupation forces might be sincere in their profession of democratic values and their expectation that the practices of Western-style democracy could be successfully introduced on a national level in Iraq struck most informed Iraqis as something close to ridiculous — US troops could count just as well as Shi’a organizers or Sunni sheikhs, and the implications of an electoral regime should have been just as obvious to them as well, i.e. Shi’a hegemony in one form or another.

The tribal leaders of al Anbar, even those who personally had nothing to do with the repression of the uprisings of 1991, had ample cause to view this prospect with high anxiety.³¹⁰ They were not ignorant of the tactics used against Shi’a and Kurds to put down the revolts, and through the transitive power of tribal vengeance (*tha’ir*) could be held accountable for atrocities committed by kinsmen or tribesmen. This is beside the simple chauvinism that many Sunni directed against Shi’a Iraqis, who were commonly described as dirty, uneducated, simple-minded, superstitious, and prone to manipulation by a cynical and sinister clerical elite (incidentally, this is the exact same complex of stereotypes deployed by elite Protestants against working-class Catholics in mixed English-speaking cities).³¹¹

The hostility and fear directed towards the prospect of majority rule by Shi’a political parties and political leaders notwithstanding, even without sectarian retribution, the Sunni sheikhs of al Anbar were likely to lose their favored position and access to public goods under any political arrangement that opened up political authority beyond the Sunni elite. Any diminution of their standing would be, beyond a practical threat to the ability of sheikhs to supply patronage to their

³⁰⁸ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

³⁰⁹ International Crisis Group, “In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency.”

³¹⁰ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

³¹¹ Ibid. Additionally, in personal conversation with the author as well as senior US military staff, Sunni sheikhs were near universal in forwarding similar opinions of their Shi’a countrymen.

tribesmen, a humiliation at the hands of outside rivals. The factors leading to the intransigence and resistance of the Sunni sheikhs to the package of reconstruction and democratic reform were overwhelming – the insurgency in al Anbar was, if anything, over-determined.

In the political environment of the early occupation period (2003–2006), the balance of forces internal to Iraq was unfavorable to the continuation of Sunni privilege, which was the principal agenda for the sheikhs of al Anbar. US military forces were the real coercive power in the country, but their leadership was fragmented. Ground commanders at various levels enjoyed tremendous autonomy on security questions, which were broadly enough defined to permit ad hoc cooperation with individual sheikhs. This led to the establishment of constructive relationships between individual tribal leaders and individual officers (including an early-career David Petraeus), including intelligence sharing, joint patrols with tribal militias, and the distribution of aid.³¹² However, the effectiveness of such diplomacy by military officers was fatally undermined by the strict specificity of the relationships (a sheikh may be the beloved partner of one area commander, cross the invisible line into another officer's bailiwick and find himself arrested as a wanted terrorist)³¹³; the short rotations for local commanders (the process of relationship building would often need to be reset back to nothing every six to twelve months as flag officers changed commands, taking key staff with them); and the US commanders' lack of influence over the political process in Baghdad.³¹⁴ In the early stages of the occupation, from 2003 to mid 2004, local US commanders made attempts to formalize their security cooperation with sheikhs, usually by organizing tribal militias into formally recognized auxiliary units that could be authorized to carry weapons, patrol territory, and enforce security within their tribal areas. These attempts anticipated the tactics which would eventually stabilize the province, but were overruled by the political staff in Baghdad overseeing the occupation.³¹⁵ Their criticism was the entirely justified complaint that brokering local deals with tribal sheikhs that resulted in arming irregular groups would undermine attempts to reconstruct national-level security institutions, alienate the Shi'a leadership which was tentatively engaging with Baghdad-centric reconstruction efforts, and risked creating an insurgent/sectarian force that would fight the officially recognized central government.³¹⁶ As a result, the attempts by US ground commanders to foster cooperation with the sheikhs of al Anbar were stymied by political staff and failed to produce regular cooperation. By mid 2004, the failure of US military officers to live up to the expectations of the sheikhs who sought an accommodation from them tipped the balance in favor of working with transnational insurgent groups, most notably al Qaeda in Mesopotamia. The Americans had proved themselves unable or unwilling to partner with the Sunni tribal leadership to secure their claims in post-war Iraq. Instead, US forces were perceived as allying

³¹² McWilliams and Wheeler, *Al-Anbar Awakening*. In private interviews with the author and US military personnel, several Sunni sheikhs of the Iraqi-Syrian borderlands singled Petraeus out by name as an extraordinarily effective and trustworthy partner, and rued the moment when he was rotated out of their region.

³¹³ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

³¹⁴ West, *The Strongest Tribe*.

³¹⁵ Eisenstadt, "Iraq: Tribal Engagement Lessons Learned."

³¹⁶ Youssef and Fadel, "Critics: Arming Sunni Militias Undercuts Iraqi Government."

with rival ethnic and sectarian groups. In such a political context, insurgency against the US occupation became more attractive, especially since that struggle opened the door to cooperation with transnational Islamist groups, who promised to bring more weapons, fighters and financial resources to the struggle. Al Qaeda represented a countervailing force to US reconstruction efforts, and very early on, tribal leaders and al Qaeda insurgents forged an alliance. Tribal leaders assisted in localizing the insurgency, while al Qaeda provided manpower, links with international backers, and money.³¹⁷

Ba'athist neo-tribalism had involved an alliance between traditional tribal leaders and a quasi-totalitarian party-state; the early stages of the anti-American insurgency in al Anbar province involved the attempt to forge a similar alliance between a transnational Islamist insurgency and the tribal leadership. The tribes were legacy institutions with deep roots in al Anbar and an established position in local society. Sheikhs offered an interface with the local population, intelligence, and strategic insights about how to fight in al Anbar. Working with the transnational Islamists also had the advantage of fitting into a readily available narrative regarding politics and righteousness in the region: Americans, especially since they were allied with Shi'a schismatics and Kurdish separatists, were natural enemies and occupiers, while the Sunni volunteers pouring in to fight them were pious young men motivated by valor and religion. The foreign fighters were quite skilled at playing into this narrative, and presenting themselves in a favorable light, as protectors of Islam and the local people.³¹⁸

As al Qaeda dug in to al Anbar, the divergence of interests between them and their tribal hosts became apparent. The preoccupation of the tribal sheikhs was the domestic balance of forces, strictly parochial to Iraq, with the confrontation of the Americans a necessary step in order to secure tribal leadership and Sunni prerogatives in the country, a fundamentally conservative set of goals, set in opposition to the disruptive influence of the American democracy agenda.³¹⁹ The transnational Islamists, however, saw the conflict as a localized front in a global revolution aimed at establishing Salafist government over Muslim populations, requiring a thorough-going restructuring of Iraqi society as well as the decisive defeat of the US occupation (such violent restorationist movements are not uncommon in Sunni Islam, and indeed often coincide with conquest movements and the rise of new regimes and dynasties).³²⁰

In 2005, as the number of Islamist fighters increased, both through the arrival of additional foreign fighters and successful recruiting from within al Anbar, their reliance on cooperation with tribal leaders decreased. They established their own hierarchies and chains of command which circumvented the sheikhs entirely and issued public declarations and enforced their authority independently. This made the sheikhs uneasy, for their tribes often included both elements

³¹⁷ Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*.

³¹⁸ International Crisis Group, "In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency."

³¹⁹ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

³²⁰ Gellner, "Tribalism and the State in the Middle East."

within the insurgency and individuals better reconciled to the US occupation and the central government.³²¹

Further, the prominence of Anbaris in the Ba'athist security apparatus created an affinity between the local population and employment as police or soldiers, including a number of officers considered apolitical enough to be held over from the prior regime. These police and security officers were nominally responsible to the US-backed central government in Baghdad (though, the police, especially, operated autonomously in al Anbar) and were thus targeted by al Qaeda as collaborators, informants, and traitors.³²² The goal of the al Qaeda insurgents was to replace the existing political and social structure of al Anbar province with their own network of cells and militias. The alliance with tribal leaders was tactical, not substantive. However, because of their shallow penetration into the social structures of al Anbar, the techniques of social control available for the al Qaeda leadership were limited (in some ways they ran into the same problems as the early Ba'athists in terms of attempting to rule over a society to which they were alien). On a mass level, they could attempt to control the narrative of the occupation, legitimizing their presence and their authority through the language of jihad and resistance to Christian occupation, as well as justifying their agenda through Salafist Islam. They could also deploy patronage to shore up the support of followers in al Anbar, but there were strict limits to how much they could disburse: funding was difficult to smuggle in, vulnerable to seizure by other groups (including the sheikhs), and the insurgents lacked the personnel or the organization to provide social services on a mass scale (among other things, such service provision would make them immediately visible to US forces, who could then pick them off). At the elite level, with the exception of Salafist clerics and other ideologues that could be assimilated into the leadership, al Qaeda have very little to offer in al Anbar. Their overall goal was to supplant existing elites. At best, they could shift the balance of power in inter-tribal disputes (such as those over smuggling routes), but otherwise they were only slightly better disposed to the sheikhs and local leaders than they were to occupation forces.³²³ US and coalition troops were the enemy, but the tribal leaders were rivals.

As a result, al Qaeda was limited in the means that it could deploy to assert dominance over al Anbar. With patronage limited, the appeal to Islamic values and Iraqi nationalism of limited use against the leadership claims of tribal leaders, they turned to naked coercion and exemplary terror. Typically opponents would receive both public and personal threats, demanding public oaths of subordination delivered at Al Qaeda-affiliated mosques. Those who refused would be subject to kidnapping, torture and execution, frequently accompanied by the desecration of bodies, with heads and corpses left at separate locations.³²⁴ Once tribal leaders became targets

³²¹ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*. This was further confirmed in private meetings with Anbari tribal leaders.

³²² Ibid. This was also the state position of al Qaeda itself: *Al-Furqan's Media – Spring Of Al Anbar #1*.

³²³ Schultz Jr., *The Marines Take Anbar*. Interestingly enough

³²⁴ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

for this particularly grisly form of power assertion, the breach between the tribal leadership and al Qaeda emerged into the open.³²⁵

Emergence of al Anbar Salvation Council: Institutionalizing Power

According to military sources, first clashes between al Qaeda and the tribes took the form of inter-tribal violence, as the al Qaeda-affiliated al Salmani tribe clashed with the better-established albu Mahal tribe in the summer of 2005 over revenues from smuggling into Syria.³²⁶ Revenue from smuggling was a considerable source of both income and social power in Iraq, especially during the sanction years when shortages of consumer goods and staples were endemic.³²⁷ Taking control over this practice represented a serious blow against the economic and social position of the Albu Mahal tribe, and they responded with force.

Accounts by the tribal leaders rarely refer to control of smuggling routes as a key consideration, emphasizing instead the terror employed by al Qaeda in attempting to establish control over the province. Rather than respecting the authority of sheikhs over their tribesmen and consulting with them on political issues and enforcement of laws and social customs, the al Qaeda officers – called emirs, and distributed geographically – ruled through decree from 2004 to 2007, cutting out the sheikhs entirely.³²⁸ These accounts describe a pattern of assassinations of tribal, civic, and clerical leaders, including the dismemberment and desecration of corpses; kidnapping and torture of suspected collaborators, defined broadly enough to include virtually anyone (and especially targeting police or other agents of law); and the imposition of “war shar’ia” – that is, summary corporal and capital punishment based on the personal judgment of emirs. Anbaris who lived through this period give accounts of constant terror, arbitrary violence, property seizure and large-scale flight.³²⁹

Further, while the foreign fighters insisted on presenting themselves as saviors of Islamic orthodoxy and the Sunni community in Iraq, they were not scoring the sort of decisive victories against coalition forces which might justify that image.³³⁰ After the second Battle of Fallujah, US forces reinforced their reputation as more or less unbeatable, and willing to take losses in order to assert control over even the most restive regions of Iraq. In this case, the Salafist belief that Western decadence had sapped the American will to fight to the point that inflicting moderate losses would provoke precipitous withdrawal was a crucial assumption behind the insurgent plan. It turned out that Americans could be induced to withdraw, but not haphazardly and certainly not if it meant abandoning the field to al Qaeda. Further, even as al Qaeda in Mesopotamia was increasing repression in the Sunni Triangle region where it enjoyed the greatest popularity and

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Todd et al., *Iraq Tribal Study - Al-Anbar Governorate*.

³²⁷ Canes, “Country Impacts of Multilateral Oil Sanctions.”

³²⁸ Fishman, “Using the Mistakes of Al Qaeda’s Franchises to Undermine Its Strategies.”

³²⁹ *Al-Furqan Media Présente “Avoir Une Forte Motivation D’une Grande Importance.”*

³³⁰ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*. Remarkably, al Qaeda itself offered similar conclusions through its propaganda arm *Al-Furqan’s Media – Spring Of Al Anbar #2*.

support, it was failing to take the fight to the Shi'a, who were the principle targets of Sunni anxiety in post-war Iraq (the bombing of the golden mosque in Samarra, which triggered sectarian violence all over central Iraq, was an attempt to redress this grievance. As with the Americans, the expectation of Sunni radicals was that the Shi'a did not have much fight in them, and could be easily cowed through preemptive force).

Even so, by 2005–2006 it was becoming clear that the al Qaeda-led insurgency did not have the traction to achieve its ambitious political and ideological goal of Sunni theocracy across Iraq (let alone the Middle East) and that it was instead concentrating on a “Caliphate in one country,” carving out the most sympathetic regions within Iraq for a shadow Islamist state, formally announced as the Islamic State of Iraq in October of 2006. Brutality alone is not a fatal mistake, but brutality combined with the impression of ineffectiveness is unforgivable.

The sheikhs were more pragmatic figures, seeking to strike the best possible bargain to entrench their position of power locally and maintain as much Saddam-era Sunni privilege as possible. Parallel to the al Qaeda led foreign fighters, tribal leaders had organized militia units of their tribesmen into nationalist insurgent groups. This segmentation had preserved a measure of coercive force in the hands of the sheikhs, as well as a means of bringing in less tribal elements. These organized groups peeled off of the general anti-US insurgency to fight their erstwhile allies in al Qaeda. The sheikhs had reached the conclusion that US forces would remain the most powerful single security actor in Iraq for the time being, and that cooperation with al Qaeda resulted in threats from both sides rather than any kind of security.³³¹ Consequently, the strategic calculation for them changed. Rather than resisting the Americans at all costs in order to avoid Shi'a domination, it was al Qaeda that needed to be fought off at all costs to prevent the replacement of tribalism with Salafist domination.

In 2005–2006, the balance of forces between those loyal to the al Qaeda mission and those working with tribal-led militias was far from settled. Al Qaeda was effective in gathering intelligence about its internal enemies and had sufficient cadres and weapons to launch lethal strikes against tribal leaders suspected of disloyalty.³³² Indeed, it is quite possible that their advantage in coercive capability at the start of the rupture ended up working to their detriment — they imagined a “terror-solution” to be readily available and thus failed to pursue reconciliation with the tribal leadership (in whole or in parts), which may have been possible and effective as late as 2005. Even partial reconciliation with select tribal rulers would have improved their position tremendously — they could have then disputed the narrative of tribes-vs.-terrorists that was increasingly persuasive with local (and not just US) audiences, and play divide-and-rule by pitting tribes against one another. But instead, they deployed general terror against tribal sheikhs in a gambit for uncontested domination.

In response, conservative tribal leaders — some in al Anbar, others in exile in Amman — recognized a general threat to the neo-traditional order which defined their power positions at the top of local society. Al Qaeda was threatening their economic base by challenging tribes for

³³¹ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*. Echoed as well in personal conversations with the author and ITN documents.

³³² Tyson and Wright, “Bomb Kills a Key Sunni Ally of U.S.”

smuggling revenues, their social base by proclaiming an emir-based theocratic political and legal order, and the physical security of sheikhs themselves. Certain tribal leaders were willing, because of amplified threats to their personal positions or by virtue of personal animosity towards al Qaeda, to be the first movers in challenging al Qaeda militants. The Abu Mahal had weathered its early challenge of al Qaeda reasonably well.³³³ The survival of such early movers, together with some initial victories against al Qaeda operatives, emboldened fence-sitting sheikhs into participating with the new resistance.³³⁴

A sheikh from a minor tribe, Abdul Sattar Buzaigh Abu Risha, emerged in the summer of 2006 as the initial leader of what came to be known as the Awakening Movement. He was selected partly for the courage of his willingness to be the first to fight, but also because, as a minor sheikh from a minor tribe, he could serve as a consensus candidate among a pool of sheikhs unwilling to give an already powerful leader an elevated position; furthermore, if Abu Risha were assassinated (as he was), it would not materially affect the fighting capability of the movement.

The tribal resistance crystalized into a single movement, though one with three branches following Abdul Sattar Abu Risha's assassination by an IED on September 13, 2007. His brother, Ahmed Abu Risha, took over as the head of the Anbar Awakening Council proper, while Sheikh Hamed al Heyes created an Anbar Salvation Council and Sheikh Ali Hatem al Suleiman founded the National Front for the Salvation of Iraq. These organizations all cooperated under the umbrella of the Salvation Movement and the Sons of Iraq, but were divided by electoral strategy and tribal rivalries. These bodies also gave the sheikhs the means to issue communications which spoke on behalf of the tribes in general, which provided a means to claim legitimacy through popular sovereignty without operating through formal electoral channels. The movement also allowed sheikhs to coordinate resistance, plan joint operations, pool manpower and resources, and to negotiate with outside forces (US occupation forces, the Iraqi central government) with a collective voice. At Council meetings, sheikhs debated strategy, reached consensus on political priorities and the selection of targets, distributed aid, listened to requests for assistance from more hard-pressed leaders, and supervised the operation of certain subsidiary institutions.³³⁵

By the end of 2007, the councils had quickly become the paramount institutions in al Anbar province. Although they did not personally provide administrative services or maintain regular security, they oversaw the institutions that did. The Provincial Council, which executed the administration of the province, was composed of members either hand-picked or vetted by the Salvation Council, and operated according to their guidance and priorities.³³⁶ Regular security (as opposed to specific missions targeting al Qaeda locally) was carried out by units of the Iraqi police. However, these units were recruited exclusively locally, on a tribal basis, composed of men selected by their sheikhs for their reliability. As a result, these police units, though

³³³ Cordesman and Davies, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*.

³³⁴ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Ibid.

uniformed formally, were accountable to sheikhs and to the Salvation Councils, not to the Ministry of Interior.³³⁷

This period, roughly from 2006 to 2010, represented the height of tribalism as a political form in al Anbar. Due to the weakness of the central government in Baghdad and local hostility to a central leadership which was perceived as a vehicle for Shi'a domination (especially under the leadership of Nouri al Maliki, for Iyad Allawi was acceptable for the Salvation Councils), the province enjoyed wide-ranging autonomy. An elected Provincial Council had considerable representation by representatives from the Awakening Movement, though the sheikhs' lack of experience in electoral politics prevented the blowout that many observers expected.

The advent of the al Anbar Salvation Council fundamentally changed the governability of the province. Previously, an appointed governor, Maamoon Sami Rasheed al Alwani, nominally ruled over al Anbar on behalf of the Baghdad government, but even the US advisors and occupation staff that were charged with helping him administer the province remarked on his fecklessness, administrative inadequacy, and lack of authority. Indeed, in this period, the province as a whole, but Ramadi especially, were so far beyond the reach of his authority that he was effectively ruling the government council building in Ramadi itself, which needed to be heavily fortified against insurgent incursions.³³⁸ Outside the armored perimeter, his writ carried no weight whatsoever.

Al Alwani's situation was so perilous, and his position so tenuous, that the occupational military staff on more than one occasion advised abandoning the government council building in Ramadi and administering the province from Baghdad. To his credit, the governor refused this advice, but this particular stand, while valorous, did not fundamentally alter the fact of his political impotence.³³⁹

When the Salvation Council emerged, however, that committee of sheikhs was able to deliver enough stability, and held enough authority over the civilian population of the province, so that the provincial governor could, at the urging of the Council, actually make some administrative decisions outside of his armored compound. In the 2009 elections, Al Alwani was replaced by an elected governor who worked closely with the Awakening Movement, Qasim Mohammad Abid Hammadi al Fahadawi.

The situation with other branches of government in al Anbar was similar. With the stability afforded by the Salvation Council, it was possible to hold elections for the Provincial Council in January 2009. Candidates were certainly vetted, and often hand-picked, by the sheikhs on the Salvation Council, creating a kind of administrative committee responsible to the Salvation Council, but which actually undertook day-to-day administration and service provision in the province.³⁴⁰

It was much the same for the apparatus of coercion. As part of their overall strategy for securing al Anbar province, Coalition authorities had established monthly quotas for the

³³⁷ Niel Smith and MacFarland, "Anbar Awakens: The Tipping Point."

³³⁸ McWilliams and Wheeler, *Al-Anbar Awakening*; West, *The Strongest Tribe*.

³³⁹ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

³⁴⁰ Sly, "In Iraq's Anbar Province, the Awakening Grapples with a New Role."

recruitment and training of Iraqi police. Prior to the emergence of the Salvation Council and its announcement of a pro-American, anti-Al Qaeda orientation, it was extremely difficult to get more than a couple of dozen recruits in any monthly period, with forty being an approximate average. Once sheikhs started delivering their own tribesmen into the recruiting system, the number increased by an order of magnitude — 400 to 700 young men would show up each month in order to be inducted.³⁴¹ These numbers were so high, and so out of proportion to previous figures, that they overwhelmed the administrative system, creating bottlenecks.

The Iraqi police units thus created had certain characteristics. They would only be deployed locally, and they were nominally responsible to provincial authorities, not to Baghdad. Effectively, this was a regularization and formalization of the militias and armed groups that had previously been sponsored by tribal leaders. Thus the new police officers remained loyal to the tribal leaders who had previously organized them as militia members, bodyguards, and informal security.

As the Salvation Council began to cooperate with the United States and emerged into the open, tribal sheikhs — through that institution — were the enabling force behind the executive, and essentially directed the Provincial Council and Iraqi police units. This facilitation of force operated in addition to armed groups and militias that they maintained outside of the structure of the Iraqi police.³⁴² Combined, these means represented enough organizational and coercive power effectively to challenge the Al Qaeda insurgency in al Anbar and to establish tribal dominance in the province in the form of organized rule by sheikhs.

Tribal-US Cooperation: Non-State-Centric Reconstruction

While the tribal-engagement strategy that emerged from 2006 to 2010 represented the first large-scale attempt to institute the practice of working closely with sheikhs and funneling resources through tribal bodies, on a much smaller scale, the practice has antecedents from the very beginning of the conflict. Ground commanders in Iraq enjoyed tremendous latitude in the approaches that they took in small-scale security operations. If it was expedient for the sake of a particular anti-insurgent operation or as an emergency stabilization measure, they could engage with local elites — tribal sheikhs included — for intelligence, logistics support, and even auxiliary manpower. Very early on, in 2003 or 2004, David Petraeus himself was employing this strategy in order to secure the border with Syria.³⁴³ He worked on an ad hoc basis with one of the desert sheikhs in that area on a number of effective individual operations.

However, while the individual operations could be quite fruitful, and to the ground commanders this seemed a promising approach to the overall security problem, attempts to formalize the cooperation through the establishment of units of Iraqi police or through deputizing

³⁴¹ Niel Smith and MacFarland, “Anbar Awakens: The Tipping Point.”

³⁴² Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

³⁴³ This was described to me in detail by a Sunni sheikh whose territory straddled the Syrian-Iraqi border between al Anbar and Ninevah governorate. See also Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends*.

tribal militias immediately foundered on opposition from Baghdad.³⁴⁴ This opposition came from both the US diplomatic and occupational apparatus on the one hand, and from the provisional Iraqi government on the other. In selecting a representative Iraqi government to work with, US occupational staff selected one with heavy Shia representation. Moreover, in pursuing a democracy agenda for the reconstruction of Iraq, US diplomatic and occupational personnel heavily favored formal state institutions over ad hoc bilateral arrangements with local provincial elites. As a result, deals that enshrined the authority of sheikhs – especially ones that provided them with legalized coercive capacity – were heavily disfavored by everyone in Baghdad.³⁴⁵ The Shia recognized in those units a potential armed force that could be used against them, and staff committed to the freedom agenda resisted the empowerment of unelected traditional leaders at the expense of the formal government. Precocious tribal engagement from the 2003–2004 period was never developed, as it ran counter to the priorities of shaping national-level reconstruction policy in Baghdad.

By 2006, the deterioration of the security situation in al Anbar was so severe that it foreclosed the possibility of an easy solution to the problem of reconstruction.³⁴⁶ As a result, those priorities were shelved for the sake of the much more immediate and pressing concern of defeating the Al Qaeda insurgency and stabilizing the province. In pursuit of that immediate goal, tribal-engagement policy was effective, and especially with the emergence of the al Anbar Salvation Council, the occupational forces had a single body with which to collaborate.

Once the breach between the tribal sheikhs and Al Qaeda emerged into the open in mid 2006, the strategic calculus pushing US occupation forces and tribal leaders together was irresistible. In their accounts of the battle against Al Qaeda militants, in the early phase of the Awakening, tribal sheikhs returned again and again to complaints about shortages of weapons, shortages of ammunition, and a general lack of economic resources. They had great clarity as to the identity of Al Qaeda operatives and fighters, their location inside the province and its major cities, the tactics that they had been using to great effect against forces of the government of Iraq and of the US occupation – indeed, in the early phase of the insurgency, while they were still partnered with Al Qaeda, the sheikhs and their forces used many of these tactics themselves.³⁴⁷

The US occupational staff, conversely, had near bottomless resources in terms of matériel, deep pockets for reconstruction funds, and the modern weapons platforms such as air support, etc., but an almost total lack of human intelligence as to the shape of the insurgency on the ground. As a result, the complementarity of tribe and US military should be obvious.

Further, the alliance served an important propaganda function for both sides. By dealing with US forces directly and cutting out the government of Iraq, the sheikhs could cast themselves as statesmen and representatives of their tribal followers and the province of al Anbar. The US

³⁴⁴ This was repeated to me in interviews with US military staff on the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), who felt undermined by policies coming out of the Green Zone. Youssef and Fadel, “Critics: Arming Sunni Militias Undercuts Iraqi Government.”

³⁴⁵ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

³⁴⁶ Jamail, “US Losing Control of Al-Anbar Province”; West, *The Strongest Tribe*.

³⁴⁷ McWilliams and Wheeler, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

forces, on the other hand, gained an Iraqi face for its operations in the province. While imperfect because of their traditional hierarchical authority, the “Iraqiness” of the sheikhs played into the liberation narrative that was at the center of American justification for occupation.³⁴⁸

Tribal engagement on the ground concretely took the form of direct relations between US military and occupation staff and tribal leaders, bypassing the formal structures of the government of Iraq. In addition to projects that run through the Salvation Council that were organized on a provincial or regional level, many US generals had favored sheikhs with whom they maintained especially close relationships. These sheikhs became de facto intermediaries between the local population and US military leadership. In exchange for intelligence and photo ops, these sheikhs were favored channels for patronage and support.³⁴⁹

By 2007-2008, as cooperation with tribal leaders began to pay dividends, and as the tribal leadership institutionalized its operation through the form of the Salvation Councils, the policy of tribal engagement seemed vindicated in the eyes of US military and political leadership. It shifted from being an ad hoc product of brute necessity in official doctrine for stabilizing a country. The tribal sheikhs, through a number of different projects – some military, some civilian – became the favored vehicles for delivering reconstruction and other types of aid. This had the effect of increasing the authority of tribal leaders over their tribesmen. Sheikhs now had considerable resources to disperse at their discretion, as well as the ability to select favored individuals for employment or to receive subsidies.³⁵⁰

Perhaps the most significant such program in terms of the number of tribesmen involved was the Sons of Iraq initiative. Young men, many otherwise unemployable, could register in this tribally-organized anti-Al Qaeda militia and receive a regular paycheck for undefined work obligations. Often, it amounted to a type of subsidy or payoff to prevent these young men from joining anti-government militias. By controlling who could and could not sign up for the program, sheikhs had tremendous influence over their followers. Other such programs existed in logistics and local commerce.³⁵¹

In exchange for all of this largesse, the US occupational staff imposed certain expectations on their tribal partners. Apart from the obvious prohibition against anti-American insurgency, the tribal leaders were organized in such a way as to minimize competition over reconstruction funds.

³⁴⁸ In personal conversation and one-on-one meetings I attended, sheikhs would repeatedly stress the “Iranian” orientation of the Maliki government, and cast the al Qaeda insurgency as foreign motivated and inspired. US occupational officials were happy to present an image of Americans partnering with “genuine” Iraqis against common security threats. For the tribal perspective on Shia governance, see “Iraq: Mutterings of Tribal Revolt.”

³⁴⁹ Patriquin, “How to Win the War in Al Anbar.”

³⁵⁰ The ITN program alone amounted to several hundred million dollars of DoD contracts, of which, conservatively, 50% would have been distributed to a network of approximately 200 tribal leaders.

³⁵¹ I worked for 18 months for a Department of Defense project based in the region charged with building relationships with sheikhs throughout Iraq to assist in US logistics operations. Sheikhs with whom we partnered were responsible for providing trucks and trusted tribesmen to serve as truck drivers to deliver non-sensitive freight to and from US bases in the area. In exchange for their participation and these services, sheikhs received lump payments to disburse as they saw fit, in addition to control over a development and aid fund to deliver humanitarian benefits in their regions.

In order to qualify, the Salvation Councils representing tribal leadership needed to include representation from all of the regional tribes. The goal was to dampen the possibility of intertribal rivalry undermining the viability of the project.³⁵²

However, this had an interesting side effect. While this measure was intended as a means of achieving US occupational goals regarding regional stabilization, it also strengthened the capacity and influence of the Salvation Councils themselves. Tribal leaders who refused to participate in them risked losing out on the bonanza of US security and developmental assistance. As such, sheikhs had an incentive to participate in these councils. As membership in them broadened, the councils themselves increased in legitimacy, stature, and assertive reach, increasing the number of Iraqi tribesmen that they could claim to speak for. In this phase, through the cooperation between US occupational staff and tribal leaders, tribal authority in the province has deepened, increased, and institutionalized.³⁵³ Cooperation with US forces increased the resources at the disposal of sheikhs, individually and collectively. Moreover, the performance expectations of their American partners helped increase the organizational capacity and reach of the councils themselves.

Uncertain Future in Al Maliki-Led Iraq

As tribal engagement proved to be successful in stabilizing the security situation in al Anbar, US commanders sought to export it to other regions of Iraq. At the explicit urging of US occupational forces, tribal leaders outside al Anbar were induced from 2008 to 2010 to form Awakening councils in their localities. This included the Kurdish Arab hinterland in northern Iraq, encompassing such volatile cities as Mosul and Kirkuk³⁵⁴; the Shia heartland of the south; and the city of Baghdad.³⁵⁵ In each area, one or more Salvation Councils were identified with a membership of local sheikhs broadly representative of the tribal makeup of the region. As in al Anbar, Sons of Iraq programs were established as a means of paying off tribesmen.³⁵⁶ In addition, other reconstruction programs funneled resources and employment opportunities through to tribal sheikhs.

However, these initiatives have experienced mixed success in helping to stabilize the security situation. They have also demonstrated the limitations of nationwide tribal-engagement policy. In al Anbar, the power of the central government was the weakest of anywhere in the country, with the provincial governor reduced to a literally besieged figurehead desperately fighting off retreat to Baghdad. The only indigenous institutions of authority that operated with any efficacy were the Iraqi tribes and the emir system of the Islamist-Al Qaeda insurgency. Once tribal leaders had

³⁵² Todd et al., *Iraq Tribal Study - Al-Anbar Governorate*. This was likewise a priority of the ITN, which insisted on the participation of all tribal leaders within the province — regardless of inter-tribal relations — before it would disburse contracts to anyone.

³⁵³ Cordesman and Davies, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*.

³⁵⁴ "Leader of the Salahuddin 'Awakening' Council Killed by ISI."

³⁵⁵ Rubin and Cave, "In a Force for Iraqi Calm, Seeds of Conflict"; Roggio, "Anbar Rising."

³⁵⁶ Wilbanks and Karsh, "How the 'Sons of Iraq' Stabilized Iraq."

defeated that insurgency, they essentially enjoyed a political monopoly in the province. There was no other region of Iraq with identical conditions. In the north, the Kurdish autonomous region operated as an effective state within a state, with a modern bureaucratic state apparatus for the region and political leadership contested by two large-scale mass nationalist parties. Tribalism exists in the region, but was subsumed within the Kurdish political party structure.³⁵⁷ In the Kurdish-Arab borderlands, the influence of sheikhs is contested by those of the very parties that offer an alternative node of authority and an alternative pattern of governance. In the Shia south, the situation is even more complicated. In addition to powerful tribal leaders (especially in the countryside), the Shia religious hierarchy enjoys great influence and authority over congregations, especially in the shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala.³⁵⁸ Further, with Al Maliki's success in wrangling for the prime ministership, both the bureaucratic apparatus of the central government and the influence of Shia political parties (such as Al Da'wah) have made a significant comeback. In the capital of Baghdad, the urban population is largely composed of detribalized elements, and the close presence of the central government allows it to maintain a firm grip over its capital (under Ba'athism, the population of Baghdad was frozen, and outsiders, especially tribesmen, could not move to the city without permission).³⁵⁹ As a result, beyond al Anbar, the pre-eminence of tribal leadership is far from settled.

For tribal leaders — not just in al Anbar, but across Iraq — the al Anbar model of tribal engagement represented a near-ideal political arrangement. It enshrined their traditional prerogatives as outright legitimate authority and granted them tremendous supervisory power over the Provincial Council and a local constabulary consisting of tribesmen hand-picked for their loyalty. In addition, the official occupational policy of tribal engagement meant a continued flow of resources from the American occupational force into the hands of Iraqi sheikhs. In this arrangement, the central government was a mere bystander, unable to impose authority or discipline on tribal leaders. Indeed, the central state ended up beholden to their goodwill, to ensure the governability of their territory. This amounted to an augmentation of tribal power beyond even late Ba'athist neo-tribalism. Under late Ba'athism, sheikhs were still expected to show ultimate deference and to recognize the paramount authority of Saddam Hussein and the Ba'athist leadership in exchange for staffing privileges for their tribesmen in the security apparatus, financial disgorgement from the central government, and the thoroughgoing tribalization of the system of symbolic political legitimacy.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁷ **Bārān** *Mustafa Barzani and the Kurdish Liberation Movement*; "Differences Deepen Between Iraqi Kurdish Parties — Al-Monitor."

³⁵⁸ Cockburn, *Muqtada*. See as well Niqash, "The New Security Plan and the Rejection of A'basra Awakening Council."

³⁵⁹ Makiya, *Republic of Fear*.

³⁶⁰ Baram, "Neo-Tribalism in Iraq."

In contrast, under the regime of *occupational* tribal engagement, tribal sheikhs answered only to US occupational forces.³⁶¹ That relationship was a diplomatic dance between roughly corresponding equals – rather than an explicitly hierarchical arrangement.

Just as this arrangement suited the tribal leadership, it was far from ideal for the central government. The authority of the sheikhs – and their wide-ranging discretionary power in their regions – made a mockery of official channels of political control. Further, the ability of sheikhs to staff local constabulary and maintain a payroll of Sons of Iraq fighters meant that coercive resources were available to them beyond the control of the central government.³⁶²

The system that was created by occupational tribal engagement represented a threat to re-establishing a modern-style state apparatus that exercised effective sovereignty within the country. It created centers of political authority outside of the electoral process and beyond accountability to the elected central government. These centers of authority were also extra-constitutional and extra-judicial, undermining the rule of law. Finally, the ability of sheikhs and Salvation Councils to maintain a military wing loyal to themselves outside the regular security apparatus represented a clear security threat to the integrity of the government, especially given the sectarian rift between the Shia Iran-dove al Maliki and the old-guard Sunni al Anbar sheikhs.³⁶³

Paradoxically, as tribal engagement bore fruit in terms of an improved security situation, that improvement undermined the rationale for supporting the system of tribal engagement. As the insurgency died down from 2009 to 2011, the priorities of US occupational staff shifted from pacification by any means necessary to the regularization of the Iraqi state in anticipation of US departure. As a result, support for the tribal system turned into support for the central state – specifically through the following means:

(a) The transfer from US occupational forces to the Iraqi central government of the responsibility to pay tribal irregulars enrolled in the Sons of Iraq. The result of that handover of responsibility was an immediate collapse in the number of Sons of Iraq fighters receiving their stipends. The Iraqi central government was unwilling to expend its resources funding fighters of questionable loyalty who were beholden to sheikhs of even more questionable loyalty.³⁶⁴

(b) To the greatest extent possible, the US pressured the al Maliki government into absorbing tribal militiamen and the Sons of Iraq into the regular security apparatus. The vast majority were rejected, with the greatest concentration of

³⁶¹ McWilliams and Wheeler, *Al-Anbar Awakening: Al-Furqan's Media – Spring Of Al Anbar #2*; Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*. Fascinatingly, on this point there is agreement not just between the Iraqi sheikhs and Americans, but also the al Qaeda led Islamist insurgents against which they fought.

³⁶² Harari, *Uncertain Future for the Sons of Iraq*.

³⁶³ “Iraqi Weekly Interviews Sheikh Ali Hatem Al-Suleiman Of the Anbar Awakening.”

³⁶⁴ Visser, “Shi’a Leaders Disagree on Integration of Sons of Iraq into Amry.” See also Zurutza, “‘Sons of Iraq’ Orphaned.”

those inducted belonging to Shia tribes in regions of the country that were considered to support the central-government.³⁶⁵

(c) US occupational forces thought to encourage tribal sheikhs and Salvation councils to remake themselves into political parties and political leaders, and to contest local and national elections. The aspiration here was clearly to harmonize the tribal-engagement system with the goal of a modern-style electoral state. The results, at least for the sheikhs, were far from encouraging. Without the institutional advantages of the tribal-engagement system, and suffering from an unfamiliarity with the ins and outs of electoral politics and aristocratic distaste for electioneering, the sheikhs moved from being a pre-eminent force to one power among many, forced to politically coalition-build despite still maintaining significant coercive arms at their disposal.³⁶⁶

In some areas outside of al Anbar, local Salvation Councils were targeted directly by the central government, in at least one case with the active cooperation of US forces. While the crackdown was never extended into an Anbar, the suppression of the Fadhil Awakening in Baghdad and the death sentence on its imprisoned leader had a chilling effect on other tribal leaders.³⁶⁷

The Problematic Endgame of Tribal Engagement

A basic paradox rests at the heart of US occupation policy in Iraq. On one hand, the strategic goals are clear: (a) introduce electoral democracy into the Iraqi political system, (b) stabilize the Iraqi state so that its government can maintain stability domestically and the integrity of its international borders, and (c) leave behind a successor government that, at the very least, is indifferent to US goals in the region and not beholden to any official enemies of the United States.³⁶⁸ All of these goals imply the creation of a modern-style, capable, effective state apparatus. On a tactical level, the security goals of the US occupation are also clear: (a) the suppression of insurgency against US occupational forces, (b) the elimination of Al Qaeda-inspired Islamist fighters, and (c) the achievement of domestic peace on an everyday level.³⁶⁹ The project of US-led reconstruction in Iraq has suffered as a result of the mismatch between the measures taken to achieve the tactical goals of US occupational forces and the overall strategic goals of the American-led operation.

It is difficult to be too critical of the dedicated efforts of the rank-and-file American staff in Iraq – both civilian and military – who doggedly pursued reconstruction policy under the most difficult and dangerous conditions. However, the already daunting problems posed by transition

³⁶⁵ Nordland and Rubin, “Sunni Fighters Say Iraq Didn’t Keep Job Promises.”

³⁶⁶ Arango, “Iraqi Sunnis Frustrated as Awakening Loses Clout.”

³⁶⁷ Leland, “Iraq Sentences Sunni Leader to Death”; Rubin and Nordland, “Troops Arrest an Awakening Council Leader in Iraq, Setting Off Fighting.”

³⁶⁸ “Freedom Agenda,” georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov. [Accessed May 21st 2012]

³⁶⁹ Odierno, “DOD News Briefing with Gen. Odierno from the Pentagon.”

from Baathist neo-tribalism into any sort of representative order — let alone a democratic electoral order — were no doubt exacerbated by high-level decisions made in the planning of the 2003 invasion, and in the immediate aftermath of the American military victory.

By all accounts, planning for the turbulence of post-Baathist transition was inadequate. Publicly, policy leaders invoked two diametrically opposed models for post-war Iraq. Depending on the context and the audience, post-communist Eastern Europe was sometimes held up as a comparison, with its rapid transition toward free markets and free elections, led by an energized and unified domestic civil society in countries such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary.³⁷⁰ On other occasions, the comparison presented was with postwar reconstruction in West Germany and Japan.³⁷¹ This scenario entailed a massive and protracted US presence, government by the decree of US military viceroys, and fundamental re-engineering of the subjects' societies from the ground up. It is immediately clear that any reconstruction policy cannot follow both models at once, and the lack of clarity as to how US policy leaders imagined Iraq to develop mirrors a lack of planning in post-war reconstruction.³⁷²

With a lack of direction from the political leadership and personnel thinly spread across a large, populous country, occupational staff in the initial post-war period were left to fend for themselves and forced to play a reactive role adjusting to conditions imposed on them by insurgents and disgruntled Iraqis.³⁷³ The first few decisions that were made by occupational leadership — specifically, the disbanding of the armed forces and de-Ba'athification in May 2003 — proved to be disastrous for the security situation.³⁷⁴ Those orders swept aside the remnants of the Ba'athist state without having any replacements, be they occupational military administrators or empowered political parties of the Shia majority, to take on governance roles in the country. Thus, the problem had shifted from the transformation of an existing political order, albeit an imperfect one, to the creation of an entirely new order. However, these decisions were not just a setback for the overall strategic goal of establishing a functional, democratic, friendly Iraqi state. They were also disastrous in terms of the tactical goals. Disbanding the army created a mass of disgruntled, well-trained, and armed young men ripe for uptake into the insurgency. It also created a sense of grievance among a significant segment of Iraqi society — a segment well placed to challenge US forces violently. De-Ba'athification degraded the ability of whatever remained of the Iraqi state to partner with US occupation forces in stabilizing the country, increased the sense of grievance among apolitical Sunnis, and created a class of cadres that could provide leadership and guidance to the insurgency. Thus, the decisions taken by Paul Bremer simultaneously complicated the strategic and tactical dilemma of the United States occupational forces.

³⁷⁰ Byman and Pollack, "Democracy in Iraq?"

³⁷¹ Porch, "Germany, Japan and the De-Baathification of Iraq."

³⁷² Loughlin, "Rumsfeld on Looting in Iraq: 'Stuff Happens.'"

³⁷³ Fallows, *Blind Into Baghdad*.

³⁷⁴ Ferguson, *No End in Sight*.

These dilemmas would be addressed by different personnel operating separately from one another, with a different set of urgent priorities. Within Baghdad, officials from the State Department and other US agencies were tasked with the problem of putting the Iraqi state back on its feet.³⁷⁵ In the hinterland and in the regions, ground commanders of the US military, together with provincial reconstruction teams of civilian and military specialists, were concentrating on the tactical problem of pacification.³⁷⁶ Both groups relied on partners within Iraqi society to help them achieve their goals. However, they worked with different partners who themselves were rivals for power and influence in the post-Ba'athist order.

From the perspective of Baghdad-based officials working with formal state structures, the legitimate authority in the country was the formally legitimate, democratically-elected government and the state agencies that were accountable to it. If Iraq were to be a success story, its political authority structure should mirror that of a Western electoral democracy, which would allow great leeway for private social and economic influence by powerful local elites, such as perhaps tribal sheikhs – but reserves for them no formal political role, and certainly no private coercive capacity. The attempts to empower sheikhs at the expense of formal state structures represented a step backward for this project.³⁷⁷ The partners on the Iraqi side were either career bureaucrats from the previous Baathists order, which tended to either be apolitical technocrats³⁷⁸ or sympathetic towards firm central control, often to the point of authoritarianism³⁷⁹; or, they were Shia elected officials who saw the sheikhs of al Anbar not just as insubordinate subjects, but as a serious and committed enemy of the new Shia-dominated order.

One possible solution to attempt to square the circle and accommodate both tribal sheikhs and the Shia majority would be some kind of federalism, where at the level of provinces, tribal sheikhs could translate their influence into political power while maintaining an overall Shia-directed national government. Such a solution was in fact de facto operative in Kurdistan, where the Kurdish regional authority effectively seized political control for itself and the control of the central government was extremely weak, to the point that Kurdish authorities had established checkpoints to control the flow of goods and people onto their territory.³⁸⁰

However, such a deal was possible with the Kurds because – and only because – they had been, and continued to be, political allies of the Maliki-led Shia coalition. The Iraqi Kurds enjoyed de facto federalism not so much a democratic right, but as a hard-won concession granted to irreplaceable allies. Formally, outside the Kurdish regional government, the constitution that had been promulgated for the post-Saddam order had no room for federalism, but tended to centralize control in Baghdad.³⁸¹ One American with extensive experience on

³⁷⁵ Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life in The Emerald City*.

³⁷⁶ West, *The Strongest Tribe*.

³⁷⁷ Youssef and Fadel, “Critics: Arming Sunni Militias Undercuts Iraqi Government.”

³⁷⁸ Anderson, “Out On the Street.”

³⁷⁹ Bakri, “The Rise and Fall of a Sunni in Baghdad.”

³⁸⁰ Hiltermann, Kane, and Alkadiri, “Iraq’s Federalism Quandry.”

³⁸¹ Ibid.

provincial reconstruction teams operating in Sunni-dominated regions complained that Iraq under al Maliki was even more centralized than under Saddam.³⁸²

As such, from the perspective of the Iraqi state, the demands of the al Anbar sheikhs were the counterproductive whining of a defeated elite unwilling to acknowledge the reality of democratic representativeness and willing to play spoiler for the country as a whole.

The view from the provinces, especially in al Anbar, Nineveh, Salahuddin, and other Sunni or mixed areas, was quite different. The much-vaunted Iraqi state was simply absent, limited to ineffectual Baghdad-appointed governors and the occasional unelected bureaucrat who would arrive and attempt to assert central prerogative in areas where he was unwelcome. Working with such figures from the perspective of ground officers was just as counterproductive to their goals as empowering the sheikhs was to the goal of state revival. The actual authorities – the wielders of *real* authority on the ground; that is, leaders who could make good on their promises of aid and support to the Americans, who could deliver actionable human intelligence, and who could command the loyalty of armed young men in order to make the deals they struck with US forces stick – such leaders were the sheikhs.³⁸³

While the government of Iraq was unhelpful in the counterinsurgency operations, the field officers recognized this immediately, and there were precocious efforts by both intelligence officers and military leader to co-opt tribal leadership into supporting the US occupational effort. These efforts began even before the invasion itself, with the recruitment of friendly sheikhs in Amman, Jordan, and elsewhere in the region to pave the way for an orderly invasion and occupation.³⁸⁴ Other efforts in 2003 included the establishment of tribal-led border-defense forces, which would be uniform and officially recognized and would help seal the porous desert frontier with Syria.

Such efforts were locally effective, extremely popular with field commanders, and immediately stymied by the central occupational staff in Baghdad. The sheikhs involved expressed bitterness, regret, and sadness regarding the failure of these efforts, but nonetheless were receptive to the revival of cooperation with US forces in 2005–2006.³⁸⁵

Once tribal engagement was officially embraced and forwarded as an effective counterinsurgency doctrine by, among others, a newly appointed joint chief of staff General David Petraeus, then regional commanders all began to search for tribal partners to empower.³⁸⁶ The period from 2007 to 2009 saw the emergence of “pet sheikhs,” or favored tribal leaders adopted by specific generals. These tribal leaders received the lion’s share of support and attention, while the generals could vaunt their enthusiastic implementation of the tribal-engagement strategy. This represented a shift of the pendulum away from efforts to establish a nationwide order along modern lines in Baghdad, and toward the acceptance of a fragmented,

³⁸² Personal interview with a DoD employee in an Anbari provincial reconstruction team.

³⁸³ Patriquin, “How to Win the War in Al Anbar.”

³⁸⁴ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

³⁸⁵ Ibid. This was also the attitude the sheikhs working with the ITN expressed in our meetings, even ones which had been imprisoned by US forces for suspicion of aiding the insurgency.

³⁸⁶ Army and Corps, *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*.

neo-traditional order based in the hinterlands. It was during this period that occupational forces recorded their greatest successes against Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia.

By 2009 – when victory could be declared in the fight against Al Qaeda, al Anbar could be forwarded as a success story, and the timeline for American withdrawal from Iraq had come into view – the pendulum swung back toward bolstering the Iraqi central government at the expense of tribal leaders. The Sons of Iraq program, through which sheikhs were able to reward loyal tribesmen and maintain a shadow militia, was transferred in the spring of 2009 from American funding to Iraqi funding – and then immediately gutted by the al Maliki government.³⁸⁷ Other tribal initiatives (such as the Iraqi Transportation Network (ITN)) that were focused on economic development were similarly rolled up in 2010–2011. The sheikhs, having risked their reputations, their legitimacy, and their lives in delivering their tribes in support of the US occupation forces, found their access to resources frozen and their American military partners concentrating on preparing for departure.

In one of the great ironies of the Iraq War, the sheikhs, who were the first to demand American withdrawal, also became the loudest voices to extend the US presence in their country once that withdrawal had begun.³⁸⁸ They described the US withdrawal as premature and implied that it – together with the behavior of the Iraqi central government – could re-ignite the insurgency along sectarian lines. But why might US withdrawal re-ignite the insurgency? The tacit implication was that the sheikhs themselves, jilted US allies, might unleash their militiamen on the central government if the tribes' influence continued to erode at the hands of the al Maliki government.³⁸⁹

This fundamental tension between the security imperatives and the political imperatives of the US occupation, and between the staff that carried out security initiatives versus those who carried out political initiatives (“uniforms vs. suits”), points to one of the great challenges of attempting to partner with traditional, neo-tribal authorities in conflict environments. While such authorities may deliver real local power as part of their bargain with US ground commanders, they are difficult to integrate into a formally modern state apparatus. If they are powerful enough to compete nationally, they will threaten other groups outside their region. On the other hand, if they are weak beyond their region, they risk marginalization and are thus difficult to induce into cooperating with central authorities.

A pragmatic solution would involve some kind of institutional heterogeneity in which some parts of the country have an effective formal modern political structure, whereas in other parts, tribal leaders rule *de facto* and *de jure*. However, even such a solution, which would seem to balance the competing claims of the two parties, runs into difficulty in implementation when both parties imagine the other to be irreconcilable.

In the end, in Iraq, the drawdown strategy involved siding with Baghdad against the sheikhs – while making it seem as much as possible as though that were not the case. The extent to which tribalism can survive in al Anbar is now no longer an issue for US policymakers, but rests

³⁸⁷ Nordland and Rubin, “Sunni Fighters Say Iraq Didn’t Keep Job Promises.”

³⁸⁸ Kramer, “The Sunni Awakening Braces for an Iraq Without U.S.”

³⁸⁹ Chulov, “Iraq’s Sectarian Divide Threatens to Split Country as Anger at Maliki Grows.”

squarely in the hands of the sheikhs themselves and their political rivals. The risks are not insignificant. In showing themselves to be effective partners for US security operations, the sheikhs also demonstrated their capacity to be effective *antagonists* to authorities they mistrusted who were attempting to assert power in their region. Without some steps toward reconciling with tribal leaders and recognizing at least part of their authority, the tribal leaders may indeed make good on their threat to challenge for authority by non-electoral means.

Conclusion

Of all the coercive actors contending to extend their authority over al Anbar province, those which were either actual states, such as the central government of Iraq and the occupational forces of the United States, or those claiming statehood in their own right, such as the Islamic state of Iraq, lost out to a coalition of traditional tribal leaders who have been content without declaring sovereignty or claiming independence for their particular political authority.

This outcome underlines the difficulty of operationalizing our definition of statehood under conditions of state collapse. In the ruins of Baathist Iraq, when the Baghdad-based government could no longer enforce its writ in al Anbar, the powers and prerogatives typically associated with the state passed to this non-state coalition of traditional tribal leaders operating through the various Salvation Councils and employing personal relationships instead of formal roles to the exercise of authority in the region. Their success rested in the advantages that their institutional form gave them in violent competition. The long-wave tradition of hierarchy among Iraqi Arab tribes, together with the coercive and administrative education provided in late Baathist Iraq, allowed the tribal leaders to convert their traditional authority into a powerful coercive capability. The tribes of al Anbar fended off the Islamist menace and negotiated for patronage and cooperation with US forces, effectively freezing out the central government until the very end of the US occupation.

While the situation in Iraq remains messy, transformed by the withdrawal of US forces and US patronage, the tribes remain the pre-eminent actors in western Iraq. They are courted both by the international Islamic militants and the central government, and are capable of asserting their own prerogatives against any outside claims.

Al Anbar anticipates and reflects circumstances in other regions where the coercive control of the central government has given way to competition for authority. Non-state actors enter the fray and can be perfectly viable competitors. They should be evaluated not on the basis of their programs or political projects, but on the effectiveness of their ability to command coercion on their territory.

Conclusion

How does order re-emerge when a state collapses? This theoretical question is the backdrop to this dissertation. Out of the violent contestation of post-collapse chaos, one group of non-state actors may succeed in re-establishing order and asserting control over a territory. But what allows that group — and not others — to succeed?

Although a general answer to that question is beyond the scope of this study (and perhaps any study), I have examined above how one group in one historical setting — a coalition of Sunni tribal sheikhs from Iraq's al Anbar province between 2003 and 2008 — achieved this goal. The tribal sheikhs of al Anbar successfully re-established order after the collapse of Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime. In 2006, they formed an alliance with United States military forces occupying Iraq. In short order, they defeated Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) in combat and forced them out of the province, reduced the province's death rate dramatically between 2006 (when they established control over the province) to 2008, and became the de facto political and administrative leaders of the province.

The political situation currently developing in Iraq is worth some comment. While the partnership brokered between US occupation forces and the sheikhs of al Anbar achieved its goals of stabilizing the governorate and eliminating al Qaeda from the territory, the alliance was based on a temporary confluence of interests rather than a shared vision for the future of the country. As enthusiastic as US military and political leaders became for the policy of tribal engagement, they never adjusted their strategic end goals, namely the creation of a modern-style, constitutional, democratic state for a unified Iraq led by an elected, Baghdad-based government, with the withdrawal of direct US security assistance in the very short term.³⁹⁰ The government in Baghdad was the Iranian-leading Shi'a administration of Nouri al Maliki, which had expressed hostility to tribal power in western Iraq and was mistrusted and despised by the Sunni tribal leaders of al Anbar.³⁹¹ US occupational forces had purchased tribal support by arming and

³⁹⁰ "Transcript." Summarizing — with pride — the condition of Iraq upon withdrawal, President Obama described it thus: "Now, Iraq is not a perfect place. It has many challenges ahead. But we're leaving behind a sovereign, stable and self-reliant Iraq, with a representative government that was elected by its people."

³⁹¹ Visser, "Shi'a Leaders Disagree on Integration of Sons of Iraq into Army."

paying tribal irregulars through the Sons of Iraq program, with the understanding that these fighters would be absorbed into the regular Iraqi Army. Further, the understanding of the sheikhs was that, now that they had abandoned their boycott of national elections, they would be supported in their efforts to parlay their regional authority into influence at the national level.³⁹² These two expectations — that their Sunni tribal fighters would be found a place in the regular security services and tribal leaders would have a voice in shaping national politics — were fundamental in gaining the acceptance of the sheikhs for an orderly transfer of power during the 2012 US withdrawal.

It became clear almost immediately that neither expectation would be fulfilled: the departure of the Americans spelled the end of the Sons of Iraq program. Out of over 100,000 Sons of Iraq fighters, perhaps as few as 10,000 found positions inside regular Iraqi forces, and those were drawn heavily from Shi'a tribal groups in the south and center of the country.³⁹³ For the others, the pay and sense of purpose that came with membership in the Sons of Iraq came to an end, with many turning back to their tribal leaders for support and direction.

While the abandonment of the Sons of Iraq program represented a severe blow to the rank-and-file tribesmen who benefitted from it, the al Maliki government also dashed the hopes of the Sunni elite — including tribal leaders — of finding a place in the country's electoral order. A key leader in the Baghdad tribal Awakening movement was arrested, sentenced to death and executed,³⁹⁴ while Sunni political leaders more broadly have been purged and persecuted, most notably Vice President Tariq al Hashemi, the highest-ranking Sunni in Iraq's government, who fled to Kurdistan after being charged with abetting terrorism in 2011.³⁹⁵ These developments came on the heels of the bitter electoral frustration of 2010, when al Maliki's coalition won fewer votes than that of Iyad Allawi (a secular Shi'a who enjoyed broad Sunni support, including that of Anbari sheikhs) but managed to stay in power due to deft parliamentary maneuvering, a tactic he seems set to repeat following his strong showing in the 2014 election. These setbacks, together with America's perceived indifference to them, soured the sheikhs on their former partnership as well as the plan for a unified Iraq.³⁹⁶

The result was an open breach as the central government attempted to reassert its coercive control in al Anbar, without granting concessions to tribal leaders. It began as a mass protest movement in Fallujah in December of 2012, with rallies attracting tens of thousands of participants disruptive enough to render the governorate unmanageable by the central

³⁹² Wilbanks and Karsh, "How the 'Sons of Iraq' Stabilized Iraq." These expectations were also brought up in meetings I attended between Anbari tribal leaders and American occupation staff. The disposition of the Sons of Iraq was a preoccupation, but the sheikhs felt reassured about the elections, believing that al Maliki would not survive 2010 as Prime Minister and that a Sunni or Sunni-backed candidate with tribal support would replace him. Perhaps predictably, sheikhs from Shi'a regions were much more comfortable with al Maliki, and simply did not see what all the fuss was about.

³⁹³ Zurutza, "'Sons of Iraq' Orphaned."

³⁹⁴ Rubin and Nordland, "Troops Arrest an Awakening Council Leader in Iraq, Setting Off Fighting."

³⁹⁵ "Arrest Warrant for Iraqi Vice-President on Terrorism Charges Fuels Fears of Civil War between Sunnis and Shiites."

³⁹⁶ Lake, "Iraqi Sheik to Obama."

government. The protests became a permanent condition, effectively cutting off central rule in al Anbar. The movement reached a crisis in April and May of 2013, when the protest camp in Hawija was stormed by Iraqi security forces, resulting in over 160 deaths.³⁹⁷

Tribal leaders, the most significant being Ahmed abu Risha (who took over as head of the Awakening Council) and Ali Hatem al Suleiman (Prince of the Dulaym, the largest tribal federation), had cultivated their own networks of power, maintaining armed loyalists and connections to local administration, media and other tribal leaders. Through the Sunni tribal protest movement, they reasserted tribal leadership as the highest authority in the region.

Unfortunately, the personal animosity between the two leaders prevented a repeat of the pan-tribal solidarity that proved effective against al Qaeda. Instead, they opted for different sides, with Ahmed abu Risha supporting the central government,³⁹⁸ and Ali Hatem al Suleiman opting to throw in with ISIS.³⁹⁹ The resulting civil war within the Anbari tribal state continues to rage, with control of Ramadi violently contested by both factions.

This conclusion extrapolates lessons from the case of al Anbar's tribal sheikhs remarkable success. First, it notes the different types of groups capable of competing for power in the wake of state collapse. This includes legacy military units, political parties with armed wings, locally-organized militias, international ideological movements, criminal networks, and tribal institutions.⁴⁰⁰ Next, it focuses on tribal leaders. Tribes are a unique but widespread social formation, and sometimes, as I argue, tribal institutions are particularly good at re-establishing order out of political chaos. Under what conditions is this true? *When do tribal leaders succeed in outcompeting their rivals and establishing order? And when do they fail?*

The central argument of this dissertation is that the Sunni tribal sheikhs of al Anbar succeeded in defeating their rivals and establishing order because they had two characteristics: (a) a high level of *hierarchy* in their internal tribal structure and (b) a historically high level of *empowerment* by the *ancien régime* of Saddam Hussein. My assertion is that for tribal leaders in particular, internal hierarchy and empowerment by the *ancien régime* are the two crucial independent variables determining success. In the next section of the conclusion, I define these two variables.

Next, I discuss the mechanisms that make the two independent variables important. Why do they matter? How exactly do internal tribal hierarchy and empowerment by the *ancien régime* allow tribal leaders to outcompete or outmaneuver their rivals in the quest to secure power and establish order? To answer this, I first examine how these two variables made the Anbari sheikhs more successful in establishing military and political order than the three other powerful armed actors in al Anbar province: Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), Iraqi central government forces, and the United States military. Then, I apply a comparative lens. Tribal sheikhs are present in other parts of Iraq, but nowhere did they succeed in establishing order and taking power the way they did

³⁹⁷ Abdel Sadah, "Iraqi Judiciary Opens Hawija Investigation."

³⁹⁸ "Iraqi Police."

³⁹⁹ Sabah and Alex, "Sunni Tribes to Fight Until Iraq's Maliki Goes, Chief Says."

⁴⁰⁰ In this, I draw heavily on the literature regarding insurgency and asymmetrical warfare, especially Mackinlay, *Globalisation and Insurgency*; Giustozzi, *The Art of Coercion*.

in al Anbar. To understand why, I discuss post-Ba'athist contestation for power in (a) Iraqi Kurdistan, (b) southern Iraq, (c) Baghdad and its environs, and (d) the northern borderlands of Kirkuk and Mosul between Iraqi Kurdistan and firm control by Baghdad. I stress how the range of competitors in each region forestalled tribal success of the sort that the Anbari sheikhs achieved.

To close the conclusion, I venture some speculations about political environments outside Iraq in which tribal institutions have contested, or are presently contesting, for political and military power. I examine briefly past and present cases of tribal groups around the world that have been involved in struggles for political power in areas of weak central-government control. In doing so, I consider how my two independent variables — level of internal hierarchy and level of past state empowerment — vary in relation to the tribal groups' competitive fates. Cases include Yemen, the Canadian Far North, the Russian-controlled Caucasus, Libya under Muammar al Gaddafi, the Pashtun borderlands of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Zaïre/the Democratic Republic of the Congo. While this final comparison is not the in-depth investigation that would be necessary to establish a generalizable theory, it does open avenues for future research and highlight the utility of the two-variable framework this dissertation introduces.

Who Competes for Power When States Fail?

When functioning properly, the modern state is a sophisticated system for maintaining the monopoly of coercive control. A political leadership enforces that monopoly through a specialized and purpose-built security apparatus. Depending on the nature of the regime and the complexity of the society, the security apparatus can be more or less highly resourced, more or less invasive, and more or less ruthless. However, in its normal operations, it will be unquestioned as the paramount power in the country.

State collapse involves the radical failure of this system. Centralized political leadership is swept away and lacks any clear replacements. The security apparatus fragments in terms of unity of chain of command and institutional cohesion, and degrades in terms of its coercive capacity. The territorially enforced monopoly of violence is then replaced by an open competition for political authority.⁴⁰¹ In such an environment, any institutions capable of mobilizing manpower and resources can make a play for control over part or all of the national territory. Without a security apparatus enforcing order, there is no restriction in terms of violent means, and as such, the competition tends to take on a brutal and ruthless character. Non-violent institutions are rapidly marginalized from contention, if not entirely eliminated.

The institutions that can effectively compete in a setting of state collapse therefore must be willing to resort to violence if necessary (and in this way, already take on one of the

⁴⁰¹ For a particularly concise description of how this process played out in Iraq, see Diamond, "Lessons from Iraq."

characteristics of state-ness: the willingness to enforce authority through violence). They must also have other characteristics⁴⁰²:

- Ability to mobilize manpower
- Ability to gather arms
- Capacity to inspire “stand-and-fight”
- Resilience to setbacks

In any national context, only a finite number of institutions have these features. Even fewer possess these features to a degree that would make them formidable contenders to reestablish some kind of territorial domination. In this category, we can place the traditionally recognized actors in civil wars and insurgencies: (a) legacy military units, (b) political parties with armed wings, and (c) locally-organized militias. Also worth considering are (d) international ideological movements and (e) especially ambitious criminal networks. In societies where (f) tribal institutions have persisted, these too can be – but will not always be – formidable contenders for authority.⁴⁰³

Definitions: Hierarchy and State Empowerment

As discussed above, the two characteristics that made the tribal sheikhs of al Anbar successful in competing for power and maintaining order are (a) the hierarchy resulting from the long-wave institutional evolution of tribal structures and (b) the shorter-term legacy of empowerment from the Ba‘athist state apparatus. Below, I turn these two characteristics into generalizable variables by defining them.

Hierarchy

I define hierarchy as the existence of relatively clear structures of authority, in which a single leader or small group of leaders is recognized as possessing the power of command over the tribe as a whole. Under conditions of high tribal hierarchy, individuals are more likely to sacrifice opportunities for short-term and personal gain for the sake of collective well-being, solidarity, and prestige. They are also more likely to approach superiors in the tribal hierarchy when faced with difficulties, rather than rely on outsiders. Finally, they are more willing to put aside personal

⁴⁰² This list is distilled from the relevant sections of Giustozzi, *The Art of Coercion*; Army and Corps, *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. For a more detailed treatment of the problem – and the crucial necessity – of motivating “stand and fight,” see Collins, *Violence*.

⁴⁰³ Conventional accounts of al Anbar’s stabilization credit American tribal outreach efforts with the defeat of al Qaeda – see Ricks, “Wait a Minute!”; “The Iraq Success Story That Propelled David Petraeus to the Top”; Al-ansary, Adeeb, and Von Zielbauer, “Iraqi Tribes to Join Forces to Fight Insurgents”; McWilliams and Wheeler, *Al-Anbar Awakening*. For dissenting perspectives, see Malevich, “It’s the Tribes? That’s Stupid” and the critical section on tribal insurgencies in Mackinlay, *Globalisation and Insurgency*.

convictions and vendettas at the behest of their leaders. Under conditions of low hierarchy, individuals or sub-units are more likely to defect from larger structures or agreements in order to advance their personal positions or interests. They are more sensitive to costs placed upon them when deciding whether or not to cooperate or coordinate with wider tribal structures. Finally, they are more willing to strike personal agreements with agents outside the channels of tribal hierarchy.

Unlike the structures of the state, which have a legal-rational justification and depend on the authority of the national government, this tribal hierarchy is understood by its members as being prior to modern politics or national institutions, deriving from kinship principles, and representing an authentic expression of personal identity.⁴⁰⁴ As a result, tribal authority – unlike state authority – is both public and private, and thus inescapable. Finally, in the specific case of Anbari Arab tribalism, with its attachment to notions of collective honor and a valorized, imagined martial history, the tribal authority can go as far as compelling tribesmen to risk their lives in battle and to stand and fight under extreme conditions.

It should be noted that hierarchy *within* tribes does not necessarily accompany coordination *among* tribes. In al Anbar, one major breakthrough was the creation of the Salvation Council, which allowed for coordination among tribal leaders – and thus dampened the prospect of destructive inter-tribal conflict. In the Caucasus, the distinctiveness of the different ethnic and cultural groups meant that despite the high level of hierarchy within them, coordination among them to oppose Russian encroachment was deeply problematic. Thus, the Russians were able to strike at each group separately rather than face a coordinated collective resistance.⁴⁰⁵

Empowerment by the State

There is a tendency among certain scholars to dichotomize state structure and tribal organization as though they were mutually exclusive. Indeed, in the large literature on stages of development, tribes and states tend to occupy different positions, suggesting that tribes are more primitive versions of states, to be supplanted with the advent of modernity.⁴⁰⁶

However, a more locally informed tradition of social-scientific thought, extending back to Ibn Khaldun, observes that tribes and states have typically coexisted – and indeed derive many of their most basic features from that interaction.⁴⁰⁷ Far from being atavistic vestiges, the political equivalent of the appendix, tribes are now and have been one of the cornerstones of political and social order in large parts of the world.

Not all states adopt the same orientation toward the tribes that exist on the territory they claim. Some state managers, partly inspired by theories of stages of development and political modernity, perceive tribal structures as rival claimants for the allegiance of their populations and

⁴⁰⁴ This is derived from Weberian categories of power. See Lassman and Speirs, *Political Writings*.

⁴⁰⁵ For a near-contemporary English language account, see Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus*.

⁴⁰⁶ A line of reasoning with a venerable lineage: see Smith, *Wealth of Nations*. Or the treatment of “barbarians” in Aristotle, *The Politics*.

⁴⁰⁷ ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*. For contemporary treatments of tribe-state relations in history, see Lapidus, “Tribes and State Formation in Islamic History.”

seek to disrupt and dismantle them.⁴⁰⁸ In other states, leaders see tribes as useful adjuncts to central power – institutions capable of ordering otherwise challenging or hostile territories – and are willing to grant them recognition, autonomy, and in some extreme cases side payments of various kinds (money, property rights, legal rights, access to borders, political appointments, etc.).⁴⁰⁹

We can thus talk about tribes as being empowered or disempowered by states. Empowered tribes receive official recognition of their identity and leadership, which essentially puts the resources of the state to the reinforcement of the identity myth that provides the tribes with cohesion and tribal leaders with legitimacy. They enjoy certain types of autonomy: local dispute resolution and judicial authority, local policing, freedom from certain types of central control.⁴¹⁰ They often also enjoy subsidies of some form, whether direct payments to tribal leaders or release from certain forms of taxation. Further, through these interactions with the apparatus of the modern state, tribal leaders become proficient in negotiation and management of modern bureaucracies, and familiar with the techniques and technologies of modern administration. Tribes thus empowered enjoy a much greater administrative capability and an advantage in dealing with external organizations organized along modern bureaucratic lines.

Tribes disempowered by central governments do not benefit from recognition or autonomy and do not receive payments or patronage. In addition to the lack of benefits, depending on the agenda and aggressiveness of the central government, they may also face active persecution. This can take the form of a relatively mild campaign of propaganda and indoctrination meant to weaken the perception of tribal identity and to devalorize belonging to the tribal group, while elevating citizenship and participation in the national state. Alternatively, it can take the form of aggressive, violent repression, up to and including the murder of leaders and activists.

Al Anbar Province: The Competitive Environment

The Evolution of Tribal Hierarchy and State Empowerment

The particular history of the tribes of al Anbar province resulted in the establishment of hierarchical authority within them and exposed the leadership to the resources and the operating procedures of a modern state security apparatus. This combination of factors gave them a decisive edge in the competition for power in the wake of the 2003 collapse of Ba'athist Iraq.

The high level of hierarchy among al Anbar's Sunni tribes is a function of both longstanding tradition and modern history. Among the Anbari tribes, the warrior-tribesman tradition described in ancient and medieval Arabic literature persisted to the present day through a local

⁴⁰⁸ This was particularly true in states committed to radical modernization projects, such as the Soviet Union. See Conquest, *Soviet Nationalities Policy in Practice* (1. Publ.).

⁴⁰⁹ This was the common practice in early colonial empires; see Newbury, *Patrons, Clients, and Empire*.

⁴¹⁰ This can take an official, strictly codified form, such as that emerging in federal-Aboriginal relations in Canada – see Asch, *Aboriginal and Treaty Rights in Canada* – or a hand's off approach, as in many colonial cases – see Naseemullah, “Foundations of the Frontier: Norms, Resources and Sovereignty in Pakistan's Tribal Areas.”

affinity to military institutions, a traditional respect for the warrior history of tribal kinsmen and near constant state of political and security crisis (see Chapter 4). However, during modern times, the independence of subordinate units that had been a hallmark of nomadic tribes was sharply curtailed through settlement and the establishment of colonial and postcolonial legal and administrative orders. Together, the persistence of the warrior-tribesman ethos and the modern curtailment of subordinate tribal units made decision-making and leadership within the Sunni tribes of al Anbar very hierarchical.

High Ba'athist state empowerment of the Anbari tribes is a more recent phenomenon that began in the 1980s and accelerated after Iraq's defeat in the 1991 Gulf War (see Chapter 5). Ba'athist neotribalism hyper-empowered the tribes by granting them access to the Iraqi border, access to military training, provision of matériel, financial resources and patronage that they could disburse downward to members of their own tribes, and finally official recognition through the monopoly media organs of the Ba'athist regime. All of these factors gave the tribal sheikhs great advantage over rival claimants for political supremacy in al Anbar. It enabled them to violently repress the Islamist threat within al Anbar and to exclude the reconstituted central government from the governorate. While the sheikhs could not directly out-fight US occupational forces, their local strength was sufficient to force a fundamental reorientation of US policy away from challenging tribal leaders in order to support a democratically elected central government to close collaboration with sheikhs, including the disbursement of weapons and subsidies.

Al Qaeda, the Iraqi Central Government, and the Americans

In the aftermath of the fall of the Ba'athist regime, four major armed entities sought control over the territory, population, and resources of al Anbar province: the Sunni tribal sheikhs, Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), the Iraqi central government based in Baghdad, and US occupation forces. Below, I discuss why the Sunni tribal sheikhs succeeded where the other three failed. The answer has much to do with the tribal institutions' advantages: hierarchical structure and prior Ba'athist empowerment. It also has to do with strategic mistakes by the other three actors in compensating for their relative local weakness.

Initially, at least, the aftermath of the US invasion of 2003 caused relatively little disruption in the order and stability of al Anbar. In the military campaign of Operation Iraqi Freedom, only a single significant battle took place in the governorate.⁴¹¹ On April 15, 2003, less than a month after the start of hostilities, the ranking officer of the Ba'athist ground forces in the province formally surrendered.⁴¹² Unlike the notorious looting and vandalism that took place in Baghdad and other cities in the center and south, the public buildings, government offices, and Ba'athist headquarters survived the initial occupation relatively intact.

If deft overtures to the traditional leadership of the province had been made, then it may have been possible to build on that initial stability and secure normalcy and good order in the

⁴¹¹ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

⁴¹² Agence France Press, "16,000-Troop Command Formally Surrenders."

governorate.⁴¹³ However, the decisions made by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to disband the military and initiate thoroughgoing de-Ba'athification squandered that opportunity, instead provoking broad-based and popularly supported anti-American mobilization.⁴¹⁴ As a Sunni-dominated province with substantial employment in the security apparatus and disproportionate representation in the upper echelons of the Ba'athist party, the Anbari leadership perceived CPA policy as a direct threat – not only to their sociopolitical position as a collectivity, but also an affront to the prestige and honor of Iraqi veterans and Ba'athist cadres.

The result was the unification of Anbaris. Across tribe, class, and locality, Anbaris joined together to oppose the American occupation and the indigenous Iraqi government it was trying to incubate. In those circumstances, Abu Musab al Zarqawi's Salafist militant organization (which would later be renamed as Al Qaeda in Iraq) was welcomed as a valued partner in the struggle against the Americans.⁴¹⁵

The Zarqawi Organization: The Salafist Challenge

Jama'at al Tawhid wa-l-Jihad, the military group that would later become Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), began as a vehicle for the ideological ambitions of Abu Musab al Zarqawi. Al Zarqawi was a dedicated Jordanian Salafist militant and a veteran of the Soviet-Afghan war. In accordance with Salafist ideology, the organization was purposely transnational. It disregarded national boundaries in favor of a pan-Islamic (or at least pan-Sunni) solidarity. Prior to 2003, the group focused on destabilizing the Jordanian government. Their most notable attack had been the 2002 assassination of Laurence Foley, an executive for USAID in Jordan. While Jama'at al Tawhid wa-l-Jihad extended into Iraq as early as 2001, it did not initially have any particular affinity with al Anbar prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom.⁴¹⁶

The miscalculations of the CPA created an opening for anti-American mobilization, which Zarqawi's group was well-situated to exploit. The decision to disband the military and impose de-Ba'athification shifted political opinion in the governorate to the attitude that Zarqawi was already espousing. For radicalized Iraqis seeking a means to challenge the US occupation militarily, Zarqawi's group could offer a great deal. His organization was already transnational, with a reach extending into Syria and Jordan and sympathizers among international Salafists. He could recruit throughout the region, fundraise in wealthy Sunni countries, and his organization already had an international propaganda and publicity reach.⁴¹⁷

The established traditional leadership in Iraq – including, notably, frustrated tribal sheikhs – recognized a genuine alignment of interest with Zarqawi's group, as well as a complementarity between their political and organizational capacity. For all the advantages of the Zarqawi

⁴¹³ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

⁴¹⁴ Both Iraqi sheikhs and US occupation personnel rue the missed opportunities of the early occupation. See Ferguson, *No End in Sight*; Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

⁴¹⁵ Kirdar, *Al Qaeda in Iraq*.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid. Also, for a treatment of the alliance between traditional groups and trans-national insurgents more generally, see Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*.

organization, it could not rival the local tribal leadership when it came to the ability to mobilize local support and gather ground-level intelligence as to the goings-on inside the governorate. Similarly, for all of their influence within al Anbar and authorities over their tribesmen, the sheikhs could not match the transnational network and the international religious legitimacy of Zarqawi's organization.

The match between sheikhs and Salafists was a potent one that the Americans learned to fear. Al Anbar was the site of thousands of attacks against the occupation. This was a level of violence that the Americans were unable to master despite overwhelming advantages in resources and technology. The partnership between tribesmen and jihadis took such a toll on US occupational efforts that by August 2006, classified US assessments claimed that

[US and coalition forces are] no longer capable of defeating the insurgency in al Anbar... [as] Al Qaeda in Iraq has become a part of the social fabric of western Iraq... [It has] eliminated, subsumed, marginalized, or co-opted all nationalist insurgent groups in al Anbar.⁴¹⁸ (emphasis in original)

However, as potent as the partnership proved to be against American and Coalition targets, it was not a durable one. While both groups were unified by their opposition to the US presence, their ideological projects were incompatible. The tribal sheikhs and other establishment figures in the governorate had a parochial, conservative orientation. They were the traditional leaders in the province, and through Sunni hegemony the leading class of Iraq. They sought to preserve this power and privilege against the disruption of American-sponsored political transformation. The goals of the Salafists, meanwhile, were nothing short of the radical and thoroughgoing transformation of society, beginning in al Anbar but ultimately extending globally.⁴¹⁹ For the sheikhs, success in the insurgency could be gauged by how much change they could prevent. But for the Salafists, success could only be measured in how much change they could provoke. As part of their agenda of revolutionary social transformation, the Salafists, once they had established themselves as a significant coercive force in the governorate, sought to impose their total control over the society in parallel with the continued struggle against US occupation forces and the Iraqi central government. While some tribal leaders felt that even the limited opportunities furnished by the US should not be scorned as an alternative to violent insurgency, if they could offer effective means of safeguarding the privilege of established elites. This different approach to achieving their political objectives created a rift the two partners.

Success went to the Zarqawi organization's head. Since 2005, it had been explicitly linked to the global Al Qaeda organization led by Osama bin Laden. Convinced that it no longer needed to rely on tribal support to dominate al Anbar, it launched a violent campaign to destroy any leadership figures that challenged its authority.⁴²⁰ In 2005, the Al Qaeda organization launched a full-scale terror campaign against recalcitrant tribal leaders and other community leadership figures, including those whose Iraqi-nationalist and anti-America bona fides were impeccable.

⁴¹⁸ Devlin, *State of the Insurgency in Al-Anbar*.

⁴¹⁹ Hashim, *Insurgency And Counter-Insurgency in Iraq. Al-Furqan's Media – Spring Of Al-Anbar #1*.

⁴²⁰ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

This included suicide bombing attacks, abductions, executions, the grisly torture of abductees, and the sacrilegious dismemberment of victims' corpses.⁴²¹

Far from striking a final blow against any lingering hesitancy over its domination, the campaign triggered the crystallization of tribal opposition to Al Qaeda's drive for dominance. Without the goodwill – or at least non-interference – of tribal leaders, AQI lost a significant component of its organizational strength inside Iraq. While it maintained a steady flow of foreign fighters and funding, it could no longer rely on uncoerced cooperation from Anbaris. Instead, residents of the governorate sympathized in greater and greater numbers with the nascent tribal opposition.

In 2006, the Anbari sheikhs' movement emerged publicly, declaring itself the al Anbar Awakening. A number of sheikhs – first individually, and then in coordination with other tribal leaders – defeated Al Qaeda fighters in pitched battles.⁴²² As a result, Al Qaeda lost one of its most powerful assets: the aura of charismatic terror that it had cultivated through its spectacular and ruthless violence. Stripped of that aura of dreadful invincibility, AQI bled supporters and was driven from al Anbar by 2008.⁴²³ It lost Zarqawi himself in June 2006 and shifted its base of operations to Ba'aqubah in Diyala province.

Al Qaeda in Iraq, as a coercive organization, had enjoyed a number of significant advantages. It had an international reach, and could mobilize manpower and funding from throughout the region. Its ideological Salafist bona fides were untouchable. To this, it added a sophisticated use of propaganda and the consciously cultivated reputation for spectacularly effective attacks.

However, without its tribal partners to lend their pre-existing, traditional, hierarchical authority over the population of al Anbar, its own ability to operate effectively as a ruling force was fatally undermined. It could not stand up to a challenge from those tribal leaders deploying their own sophisticated and capable coercive counter-mobilization against them.

Coalition Forces and the Government of Iraq: The State Revival Project

The other main challenge to tribal domination of al Anbar came from the US forces occupying Iraq. From early in the occupation, US forces pursued a strategy of reviving a territorially united Iraqi state purged of its Ba'athist ideological character. The CPA's dissolution of the Iraqi armed forces and its thoroughgoing de-Ba'athification of the Iraqi government were implemented to further that goal.⁴²⁴ This alienated the population of al Anbar. Without the legacy armed forces of the Saddam-era Iraqi military to draw upon, and with the civil administration hamstrung by de-Ba'athification and the systematic looting and vandalism of state property that had occurred in

⁴²¹ Ibid. This point was reiterated in every discussion we had with tribal leaders, who sometimes counted lost family members and described atrocities in detail. Al Qaeda itself belatedly recognized the damage it was doing to its base of support, and attempted belatedly to curb the use of spectacular violence against Sunni civilians, see Paley, "Shift in Tactics Aims to Revive Struggling Insurgency."

⁴²² Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

⁴²³ Hussein, "A Second Generation of Iraqi Politicians."

⁴²⁴ Schultz Jr., *The Marines Take Anbar*.

the immediate aftermath of the American invasion, the CPA was strained to find capable Iraqi counterparts to stand up as domestic government. Instead, the CPA was forced to rely on US military forces for security and domestic administration.

Results in the initial period were very discouraging. Law and order broke down and infrastructure was degraded. Even minimal service provision provided by the sanctions-era Saddam government was discontinued.⁴²⁵

From these dispiriting beginnings, and with the specter of a nascent insurgency built around both veterans of the Ba'athist-era Iraqi regime and anti-American Iranian-leaning Shi'a groups, the leadership of the US occupational forces sought to recreate a modern-style national republic with an administrative and security apparatus that could stabilize and govern Iraqi territory.

To this end, American forces helped establish successive Iraqi governments. First, the CPA formed the Iraqi governing council. The council's membership was hand-picked both for a representative composition of the religious and ethnic diversity of Iraq and for its acceptability to its US sponsors. Leadership of the governing council rotated on a monthly basis among the leaders of the anti-Ba'athist opposition groups. The council's main function was to prepare an electoral and constitutional process for transferring sovereignty from the American occupiers back to an Iraqi national government. The governing council was replaced in 2004 by the Iraqi interim government. Led by Iyad Allawi, the interim government governed the country until national elections could be held in 2005. The interim government was, in turn, replaced by the Iraqi transitional government, led by Ibrahim Ja'fari. This lasted a year until the next general elections, which finally established the current regular government of Iraq, led by Prime Minister Nuri al Maliki.⁴²⁶

From 2003 to 2007, the Americans fought in al Anbar alongside Iraqi government forces. The goal of the US security mission in al Anbar was to eliminate forces hostile to its presence, especially Al Qaeda and its affiliates, and to impose the authority of the Baghdad-based national governments over the territory of al Anbar. US forces worked closely with counterparts from the re-established, US-trained Iraqi military. These counterparts were deployed into al Anbar as representatives of the Iraqi domestic national government. In a pattern somewhat symmetrical to the alliance between Salafists and tribal leaders on the other side of the insurgency, Americans brought to their partnership with the reconstituted government of Iraq vast resources, international reach, and technological sophistication. The domestic security personnel that the government of Iraq provided were to deliver local expertise and knowledge of the population. Their sensitivity to local conditions was to permit for intelligence-gathering and smooth relations with the local population.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁵ Diamond, "Lessons from Iraq."

⁴²⁶ A detailed, insiders account of the cobbling together of successive post-war governments can be found in Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*. Apart from his professional role as a minister in two transitional governments (first for Trade and Defense simultaneously, later shuffled to Finance), he is personally enmeshed with two of the most significant Iraqi figures of that period: his cousin is the more famous Iyad Allawi, former prime minister and leader of the Sunni opposition, and his uncle is the notorious Ahmed Chalabi.

⁴²⁷ Ignatius, "A Better Strategy For Iraq."

Unfortunately, American forces and Iraqi central-government forces did not succeed in their joint mission. The culprit was a flawed understanding of the religious, political, and social fault lines within Iraq. American officials envisaged a partnership wherein US forces could conduct the intensive operations against massed insurgent forces while indigenous Iraqi units would follow in to secure territorial gains and smooth over relations with the local population.⁴²⁸

This scheme failed immediately and spectacularly in its very first test: the first battle of Fallujah. In 2004, Iraqi forces were ordered to support the American offensive against the insurgent city, but 30% of the Iraqi troops deserted or disobeyed orders. Meanwhile, the perception of civilian casualties and American heavy-handedness fostered by media accounts of the storming of Fallujah precipitated the desertion of 80% of police units and Iraqi National Guard units in the governorate.⁴²⁹ The attack concluded with a face-saving compromise. The Americans would cease operations in Fallujah and withdraw with security provided by a unit dubbed “the Fallujah brigade,” composed of fighters deemed acceptable by the local population. The brigade included a large number of insurgents who had been fighting US forces, and while formally the leadership of the unit pledged coöperation with US forces, the city actually became a refuge from US control and a staging ground for the insurgency for over a year.⁴³⁰

As a symbol of opposition to the occupation, the resistance of Fallujah helped undermine American efforts at establishing order under the Baghdad-based government of Iraq throughout the country. Even Muqtada al Sadr praised Sunni insurgents as holy warriors, and there were reports of Shi’a volunteers arriving in the city.⁴³¹

Whereas the first battle of Fallujah was a disaster for the Americans, the second battle of Fallujah was a victory. Over the rest of 2004, US occupational officials improved their coordination with the central government of Iraq while strengthening Iraqi security forces through training and recruitment. At the end of 2004, the Iraqi interim government approved a full-on assault against Fallujah. This included the participation of three Iraqi battalions. Unlike the first battle of Fallujah, there was no halt or pause in the American offensive, even as fighting reduced the city to rubble. The battle concluded with Americans firmly in control of Fallujah. Between 1,000 and 2,000 insurgents and an unknown number of civilians were killed. This was the single largest engagement of the Iraqi insurgency and the largest urban battle fought by American forces since Vietnam. The second battle of Fallujah also demonstrated to the Iraqi population and the Iraqi insurgency that US forces were willing to engage in large-scale battles and could not be defeated through conventional military means. From then on, the insurgency would primarily resort to guerrilla tactics, asymmetrical warfare, and the use of improvised explosive devices.⁴³²

⁴²⁸ The pithiest identification of the trouble with relying on Iraqi security forces in al Anbar comes from the internet-famous presentation by Patriquin, “How to Win the War in Al Anbar.” He introduces Mohammed, an Iraqi counterpart to US soldier Joe: “This is Mohammed. He’s in the Iraqi Army. He is from Baghdad, and he has a lot of the same problems that Joe has in Anbar... Except ALL the people here hate him!”

⁴²⁹ West, *No True Glory*.

⁴³⁰ Zoroya, “Fallujah Brigade Tries U.S. Patience.”

⁴³¹ Jamail, “Fallujah: US Will Lose More by ‘Victory.’”

⁴³² Keiler, “Who Won the Battle of Fallujah?”.

Paradoxically, as fighting ground on in 2004, the American alliance with the Iraqi national government took on an increasingly sectarian character. As the American occupational administration held elections and transferred resources to the Baghdad-based government, the government of Iraq enhanced its coercive capacity and enjoyed greater legitimacy from the Shi'a south and the Kurdish north, from which its leadership was drawn. As a result, the number of administrative cadres and security units that it could furnish to assist the US mission increased. However, their composition shifted to include almost exclusively Shi'a from the south and center of Iraq, with very little representation of the Sunni population of al Anbar. American leadership now had Iraqi partners, but they were Shi'a.

Because their new partners were predominantly Shi'a, the Americans faced difficulties in overwhelmingly Sunni regions such as al Anbar. As of late 2004, American military commanders found reliable partners within the government of Iraq who could provide troops and support of their mission in al Anbar. However, as they were drawn from a population that the Anbaris considered to be hostile sectarian rivals, they could not provide any of the functions that the American military needed to be domestic partners. Likewise, the Americans could not gather information or build relationships with the local population in al Anbar. This was true of their Shi'a partners from the central security apparatus *a fortissimo*.⁴³³

Without the advent of the al Anbar Awakening and partnership with Iraqi tribal leaders, therefore, the American occupational effort faced the very real risk of failure. The US occupational force in al Anbar enjoyed an overwhelming advantage over any rivals in terms of technology and firepower. It also had a near-bottomless commitment of resources from the US government. What it lacked, however, was the means of translating those advantages into authority over the restive, sullen, and frustrated population of al Anbar. In creating an indigenous, democratically-elected government of Iraq, it sought to cultivate an institution that could exercise authority and bridge the gap between US forces and the domestic population. The interim and transitional governments that it formed went some way toward doing this in the Shi'a regions of the south and center of Iraq. However, by failing to engage the institutions that already enjoyed hierarchical authority over the Anbaris — that traditional tribal structures that had been so recently reinforced under late Ba'athism, American success at standing up the central government under cut any ability to engage with the population of al Anbar. As late as 2006, US forces and their partners from the central security apparatus of the government of Iraq continued to be harassed and besieged throughout the governorate, limited to fortified enclaves where they could be segregated from a population that they could not communicate with, trust, or understand.⁴³⁴ Such is the context of the pessimistic report cited above concerning the total domination of Sunni civil, military, and religious institutions by Al Qaeda.

⁴³³ To complement the observation about Joe and Mohammed, see the visible antipathy Sunni sheikhs show towards Shia leadership and security personnel in Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*. This attitude was prevalent in all of my conversations with Sunni Iraqis, especially sheikhs from al Anbar.

⁴³⁴ West, *The Strongest Tribe*.

US-Tribal Rapprochement: The Alliance of Strong and Strong

In 2006, the Anbari tribal sheikhs forged an alliance with US forces. American anxiety over the course of the US operation in al Anbar was peaking just as the rupture between tribal leaders and AQI was coming out into the open. While the determination of sheikhs to oppose Salafist consolidation in their governorate emerged internally from their own priorities and imperatives, enterprising tribal leaders recognized the potential for a tactical alliance with the US forces in the region.⁴³⁵ After demonstrating that they could withstand Al Qaeda in military conflict, and indeed could expel anti-tribal forces from their core territories, a group of 50 tribal sheikhs made the formal announcement establishing the al Anbar Salvation Council as an umbrella organization linking the leadership of the major tribes of the governorate. These sheikhs entered into talks with US military leadership about the supply of weapons, financing, and coordination in combatting Al Qaeda-affiliated insurgents.⁴³⁶

The Americans eagerly accepted the Anbari sheikhs' offer. US military leaders recognized an opportunity to secure a partnership with an indigenous Anbari force that could provide the sort of support that the Iraqi-government forces could not: intelligence-gathering, visibility into the province, and improved relations with the local population. Indeed, to the Americans, this was the last, best hope for the stabilization of al Anbar.⁴³⁷

The alliance had great benefits to the Anbari sheikhs as well: they not only gained support in the fight against AQI, but also no longer had to fear US forces. As part of the new alliance, the Americans presented the sheikhs with weapons and money. On several occasions, they even allowed tribal militia units to call in air or artillery support during engagements with AQI fighters. However, an even greater boon was that the Americans lifted their own campaign against tribal leaders, many of whom they had suspected, rightly or wrongly, of collaborating with the insurgency. Beginning in late 2005 and extending into 2007, prisoners taken by US and Iraqi-government forces and identified as loyal tribesmen by the Anbari sheikhs were released. Tribal militia units were given freedom to operate without molestation by US and Iraqi-government forces.⁴³⁸ While US forces did not have the power to impose their political project on the governorate, they could and often did deploy significant force against perceived enemies (often misidentified), resulting in deaths or indefinite detention at facilities such as the notorious Abu Ghraib prison. Relief from the threat of this type of haphazard repression was a very real boon for the sheikhs and their loyalists. They were also allowed to carry weapons in public without being targeted and allowed to congregate in large groups even in sight of US and Iraqi-

⁴³⁵ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

⁴³⁶ Al-ansary, Adeeb, and Von Zielbauer, "Iraqi Tribes to Join Forces to Fight Insurgents."

⁴³⁷ McWilliams and Wheeler, *Al-Anbar Awakening*.

⁴³⁸ Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening*: In addition to accounts both from journalistic sources and made to me personally, I had the opportunity to witness as one particular Anbari sheikh arranged for the release of his tribesmen with his American partners, in this case a group of truck drivers detained over an issue with identification papers.

government positions.⁴³⁹ They were released from detainment or arrest on the intervention of a sheikh participating in the alliance.

The US-tribal alliance proved ruthlessly effective. Prior to it, pacification policy in al Anbar had been porous and haphazard. Under the new alliance, tribal militias used their knowledge of the local population, and their connections within that population, to identify AQI insurgents, discover their locations, and eliminate them in a campaign of arrests, abductions, and assassinations.

While the alliance with the tribes of al Anbar was celebrated as a major policy triumph in the United States, it should be pointed out that it amounted to a significant retreat from stated US political goals for Iraq. The empowerment of tribal units, the arming of militias, and the disbursement of development and security funds through the sheikhs all strengthened factional sectarian institutions of informal Anbari society against the regular state structures of the Iraqi government. This ran counter to the stated US goal of supporting Iraqi-government institutions as the sole legitimate political authorities on the territory of Iraq. While the greatest loser in this new power arrangement in al Anbar was AQI, which suffered a precipitous decline in its fortunes with the loss of hundreds of cadres and thousands of weapons and the denial of their major base of operations in Iraq, the government of Iraq also substantially lost out. The Iraqi government's regional rivals — the Iraqi sheikhs — were recognized by the Americans as legitimate local leaders, as partners in the struggle against Al Qaeda, and as worthy recipients of US aid and largesse.

The Anbari tribal sheikhs arguably enjoyed even greater benefits from the alliance their American partners. Tribal sheikhs were freed from US harassment and arrest (sometimes literally freed from confinement in detention centers), permitted openly to manage armed units of dozens to hundreds of men, and lavished with weaponry and development grants. In exchange, they agreed to fight an enemy they were already fighting. They made token concessions to the Iraqi electoral system, such as ending their boycott of Iraqi elections. This cost them none of their tribal authority. The sheikhs also had to recognize the leadership of a provincial council in al Anbar and the authority of Iraqi police. However, both the council and the police cadres were hand-picked by tribal leaders themselves.

American support for Anbar's tribal sheikhs did not last forever. In 2009–2010, in the run-up to final American withdrawal, US occupational policy pivoted once again away from the sheikhs and back toward supporting the central Baghdad-based government. American subsidies to the sheikhs of arms and money were curtailed. Instead, tribal leaders were told to regularize their militias into the Iraqi national armed forces (a move that the central government insisted on, but then refused to carry through) and to pursue their political objectives through the electoral system.⁴⁴⁰ However, American efforts to shore up the authority of the central government over al Anbar were limited to the withdrawal of aid from the sheikhs. With their eyes on the ultimate exit of US forces, US policymakers did not have the stomach to restart military operations on

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ Harari, *Uncertain Future for the Sons of Iraq*.

Iraqi territory, especially for the sake of a government led by Nuri al Maliki, who was widely considered to be closer to Tehran than to Washington.

As of 2013, the situation remains roughly the same. The official, internationally recognized government of Iraq is the Baghdad-based government led by Nuri al Maliki, who has control over the Iraqi armed forces and other elements of the Iraqi central state. Control of al Anbar, however, remains in the hands of tribal sheikhs who continue to employ large numbers of armed men as their private militias and have now added to their arsenal of political weapons large-scale protests and mobilizations inspired partly by the Arab Spring. These protests and mobilizations aim at removing al Maliki from power.⁴⁴¹

In the final analysis, American policy facilitated the ascension of a sub-national tribal power structure in al Anbar. AQI was expelled by tribal leaders. The American occupational forces partnered with the tribal leaders, and then withdrew. And now, the sheikhs of al Anbar are effectively challenging the authority of the official Iraqi government.

The Rest of Iraq: Why Did Tribal Sheikhs Not Succeed Elsewhere?

Tribal sheikhs are present in other parts of Iraq, but nowhere did they succeed in establishing order and taking power the way they did in al Anbar. Why not? Below, I discuss post-Ba'athist power contests in (1) Iraqi Kurdistan, (2) southern Iraq, (3) Baghdad and its environs, and (4) the northern borderlands of Kirkuk and Mosul. In some cases, tribal sheikhs lacked the hierarchical unity of purpose or fruits of Ba'athist empowerment that the Anbari sheikhs enjoyed. In other cases, their competitors were too powerful.

Iraqi Kurdistan: Tribal Power Through the KDP

Iraqi Kurdistan is a very particular case. In 1992, the establishment and enforcement of a no-fly zone over that territory, together with the coercive capacity of the Kurdish nationalist parties, permanently curtailed Ba'athist reach into Kurdistan. The two Kurdish nationalist parties have settled into a governing equilibrium, which has meant that the region never experienced state collapse when Ba'athist Iraq broke entirely after Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) has long been the most powerful political force in Iraqi Kurdistan. Although the region has long been a battlefield between rival military forces — the government of Iraq, British colonial administrations, Iranian secret services, US air power, and even the Turkish army — the coercive capacity of Kurdish nationalists has been monopolized by the KDP (with the more recent advent of uncertain future of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, itself a splinter movement made out of the liberal-modernist wing of the KDP). The KDP led the Iraqi-Kurdish struggle for self-determination since the mid-20th century. It has governed the region — alone or in condominium with the PUK — since meaningful autonomy was achieved from Baghdad following Operation Desert Storm. Through military successes,

⁴⁴¹ Tawfeeq, "Tribal Fighters Clash with Iraqi Army amid Rising Tensions."

survival following military defeat, and electoral victories, the KDP has proven that it is the peak power institution in the region. Despite its form as a political party, it is also primarily a tribal phenomenon.

Leadership of the KDP is fundamentally tribal. When founded in Iranian Kurdistan during the short-lived Republic of Mahabad (1946–1947), the KDP was envisaged as a modern-style political-national movement. However, it only took on significant coercive capability through the inclusion of Mustafa Barzani, the most powerful tribal warlord in Iraqi Kurdistan.⁴⁴² Barzani's family had been leading their tribal militia units against Ottoman and British governments for decades prior to the inauguration of the KDP. The party selected Barzani to be its president-in-exile after fleeing to the Soviet Union following World War II and the consolidation of anti-Kurdish governments, under Western protection, in Ankara, Baghdad, and Tehran. The Soviet Union hosted not only Barzani himself, but also hundreds of tribal loyalists, providing some of them with advanced political and military training.⁴⁴³

The KDP's tribal character has had critics, but none have been able to effect serious change in the organization. The tribal character of the Peshmerga circles around Barzani irritated the leftist intellectual elements of the KDP, who complained about it at every opportunity through journalistic and literary channels. However, they could not dislodge the entrenched tribal structures Barzani had infiltrated into the KDP party apparatus.⁴⁴⁴

Instead, tribalism within the KDP led to the formation of a splinter group, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). In the Qasim period (1958–1963), Barzani operated either through the KDP or independently under his authority as a tribal leader, depending on political expediency. At this time, too, he neutralized other powerful tribal groups, employing the tactic of first breaking their coercive power and then offering them reconciliation and co-optation within the KDP. This ultimately led to a schism in which Jalal Talabani led the leftist intellectual wing out of the party to establish the PUK as a second force, explicitly non-tribal, in Kurdish nationalist politics.

The results of the splintering-off of the PUK have been mixed. Without the influence of the leftist-intellectual wing, the KDP has become an unapologetic vehicle for the influence of tribal Kurdish leaders passing to Mustafa Barzani's son Massoud. Leadership is now composed of Barzani kinsmen or leading families from allied tribes. The PUK's challenge did succeed in creating a second political power structure strong enough to contest the KDP in the Kurdish civil war of the mid 1990s. However, the PUK's power may have peaked, as it has failed to deliver on its promise of a break from nepotism and an embrace of transparency. In the Iraqi Kurdistan legislative election of 2009, the PUK – which was now in alliance with the KDP, forming a monopolistic governing coalition – was eclipsed by the Movement for Change, a reformist movement led by a defector from the PUK's own ranks. This left the PUK as the third-strongest legislative force, behind the ever-dominant KDP and the PUK's own splinter group.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴² Bāzārī, *Mustafa Barzani and the Kurdish Liberation Movement*.

⁴⁴³ Primakov, *Russia and the Arabs*.

⁴⁴⁴ McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*.

⁴⁴⁵ "Differences Deepen Between Iraqi Kurdish Parties – Al-Monitor."

In Kurdistan, it may be that effective organizations need some tribal character to enforce cohesion among an otherwise fractious membership. Both the KDP and the PUK receive accusations of nepotism. Indeed, the accusation of nepotism leveled at the PUK establishment, in which kinsmen of Talabani enjoy leadership positions, is the same that the PUK levels at the neo-tribal KDP.⁴⁴⁶ The KDP, however, embraces its tribal character. It is therefore much less vulnerable to such accusations than the putatively even-handed PUK. It is also worth noting that Jalal Talabani felt compelled to violate his own professed standard political/ethical commitments in staffing the PUK organization.

The tribal character of the KDP and its success in establishing coercive control over its home territory is in keeping with the two key variables I have identified. While a close examination of hierarchy and empowerment among Kurdish tribal organizations would be the subject of another dissertation in its own right, I would observe that from a preliminary examination, Kurdish tribes seem to exhibit hierarchy and empowerment *a fortissimo*.

Hierarchy: Kurdish tribes have a different origin and historical trajectory than the Arab tribes of al Anbar. While classical chroniclers of Mideast history all noted the egalitarian and even democratic nature of Arab tribes, with hierarchy emerging in Iraq over the last 200 years, Kurdish tribes have been characterized by hierarchy from before even the modern period.⁴⁴⁷ This helps account for the Kurdish tribes' use as military auxiliaries to great effect throughout the Ottoman period.⁴⁴⁸ It also explains their ability to mobilize effectively against the British in the early 20th century.

Empowerment: While the attitude toward the Kurdish tribes of Baghdad-based Iraqi governments has been largely hostile (with the exception of opportunistic state support for rivals to the Barzanis), the Barzani-led tribalized KDP organization enjoyed sponsorship from whatever state or constellation of states found itself at odds with the government in Baghdad. This included extensive Soviet sponsorship through the 1940s and 1950s, followed by periods of extensive Iranian support and aid, and even extensive organizational, financial, and arms support from the United States and Israel. From these many sources, the KDP amassed the resources to be an effective fighting force. It also learned the optimum practices for the organization and management of armed power.

Taken together, these twin legacies mirror the emergence of hierarchy and empowerment that permitted the rise of the Anbari sheikhs after the end of the Ba'athist regime.

Southern Iraq: Weak State Empowerment and Strong Shi'a Rivals

In southern Iraq, there are several reasons why tribal leaders did not succeed in gaining power and establishing security the way they did in al Anbar. First, the tribes there were less favored by Saddam Hussein than in al Anbar. Fewer of their members were enrolled in the Ba'athist

⁴⁴⁶ "Pres. Talabani Heads Off Political Revolt Within the PUK."

⁴⁴⁷ Barfield, "Tribe and State Relations: The Inner Asian Perspective."

⁴⁴⁸ Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922*.

security apparatus, primarily because they were Shi'a and less trusted by the Baghdad regime.⁴⁴⁹ When southern Shi'a tribesmen did serve in the Ba'athist military or security services, they served in lower-ranking and less prestigious positions than Sunni tribesmen (such as regular army units, as opposed to the Republican Guard or the Special Republican Guard).

The most significant difference, however, was that unlike the Sunni sheikhs of al Anbar, the Shi'a leaders in the south were undercut by religiously based institutions that enjoyed many of the same advantages that tribes did in al Anbar.⁴⁵⁰ These institutions included mosque-based militias, such as the Mahdi Army, as well as returnee groups coming in from Iran such as al Dawa and SCIRI. They enjoyed powerful connections with the local population, using religious solidarity and the prestige of clerical scholarship to claim a leadership role in the community, with that communitarian cohesion providing enough inspiration for their followers to take on tremendous personal risk for the sake of collective goals. Similarly, Shia clerics could rely on their congregations for support and intelligence in the same way that Sunni sheikhs in al Anbar relied on their tribes. These groups presented a formidable challenge to the pre-eminence of tribal leaders in the Shia south, with different sheikhs selecting different strategies of alliance, accommodation, or confrontation.

Baghdad and Central Iraq: Too Many Strong Competitors

In the central area around Baghdad, tribal leaders faced so many powerful competitors that they could not hope to rise to supremacy. In this part of Iraq, the strength of both American occupational forces and the nascent Iraqi central government were at their most concentrated. Even so, the principal security actors became sectarian militias organized on an almost neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis. These militias were committed to ethnically cleansing their particular urban patch and protecting their kinsmen and neighbors. The conflict in Baghdad is by no means entirely settled, but it has subsided considerably due to the progress of ethnic cleansing in creating segregated living environments and in the central government's effort at strengthening its policing capability through means both fair and foul.

Kirkuk and Mosul: Relatively Strong Arab Tribes Face Stronger Kurdish Militias and Parties

Finally, in the northern borderlands such as Kirkuk and Mosul, an unresolved conflict over Kurdish claims to administration of those cities has been stalled by national-level politics and the strengthening capabilities available to both the regional government in Kurdistan and the central government in Baghdad. The conflict in these cities has taken on an ethnic dimension — a legacy of Saddam Hussein's policy of "Arabizing" this borderland region by encouraging Arab

⁴⁴⁹ Saddam's mistrusted the Shi'a tribes in the south even though they had proven themselves loyal to the Iraqi central government on multiple occasions. During the Iran-Iraq War, some Shi'a tribes mobilized spontaneously against Iranian forces. Later, during Operation Desert Storm, many (though not all) Shi'a tribes also remained loyal to Saddam. Baram, "Neo-Tribalism in Iraq."

⁴⁵⁰ Cockburn, *Muqtada*.

migration there and suppressing Kurdish nationalism and identity in the region.⁴⁵¹ Arab tribes are in fact important actors in both cities, representing the Sunni population with significant militias under their command. However, they face Kurdish militias and Kurdish nationalist parties even stronger than they. The Arab tribes are only one actor among many, too distant from al Anbar to coordinate effectively with their fellow Sunni sheikhs.

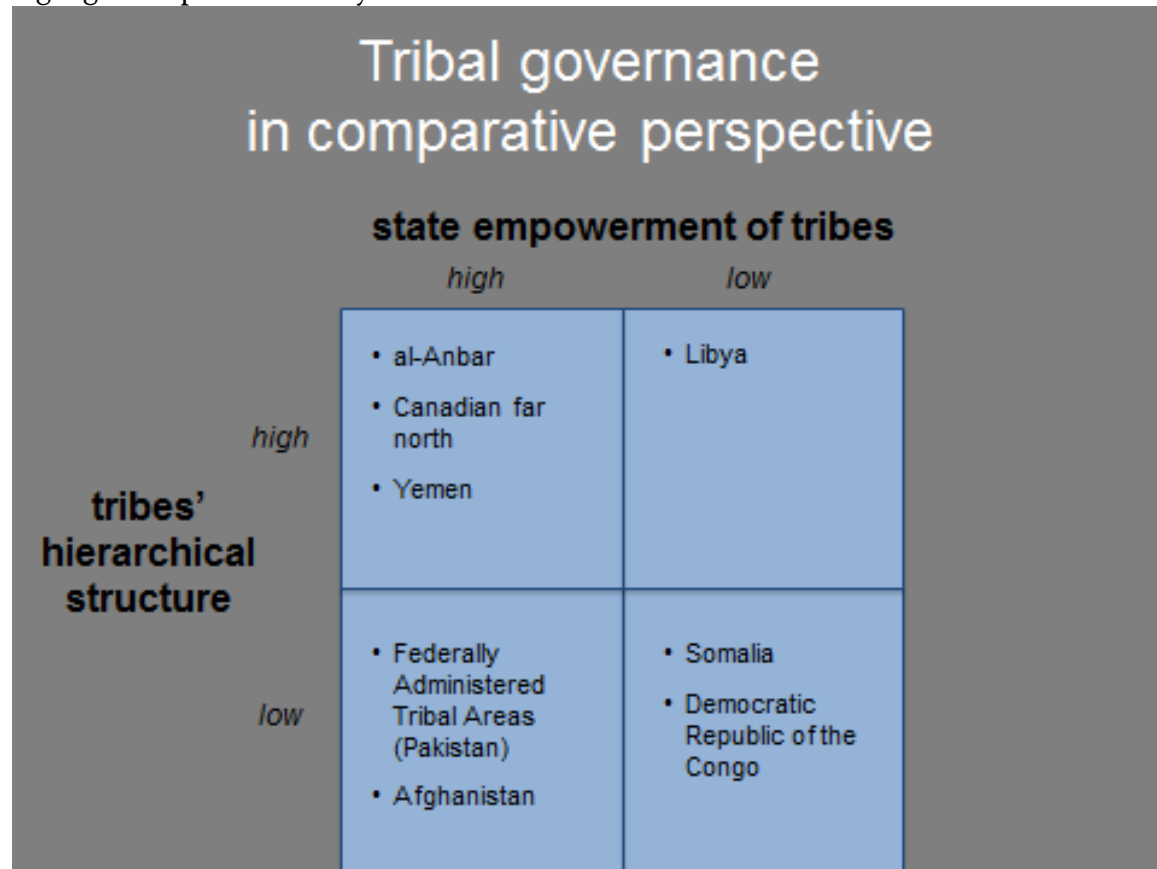
Stepping back from al-Anbar: The rest of Iraq		
Region	Competing groups	Outcome
al-Anbar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> tribes US forces Iraqi central government Al Qaeda 	tribal autonomy
Kurdistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PUK PDK 	Kurdish government-in-waiting
southern Iraq	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> tribes Shi'a parties Mahdi Army (Sadrists) Iraqi central government 	Shi'a domination through central government
Baghdad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> neighborhood-by-neighborhood sectarian militias Al Qaeda Iraqi central government 	ethnic cleansing, government control
Kirkuk, Mosul	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kurds Iraqi central government Sunni groups Al Qaeda 	???

Tribal Governance Around the World: Speculations on the Generalizability of the Hierarchy/Empowerment Model

Broadening our frame of reference, we can venture to speculate about political environments outside Iraq with significant tribal populations that have contested, or are presently contesting, for political and military power. How do the two independent variables — level of internal hierarchy and level of past state empowerment — vary in relation to the fates of tribal groups around the world? Cases include Yemen, the Canadian Far North, the Russian-controlled Caucasus, Libya under Muammar al Gaddafi, the Pashtun borderlands of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Zaïre/the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This final comparison is merely an intellectual exercise. Establishing a truly generalizable theory would require in-depth historical

⁴⁵¹ Makiya, *Republic of Fear*.

analysis of each case. Instead, the goal here is to explore avenues for future research and highlight the potential utility of this dissertation's two-variable framework.



High Level of Hierarchy / Low Level of Empowerment by the State

In some regions, a history of tribal organization with strong centralized decision-making and high enforcement of decisions agreed upon, together with a history of coordination with modern state structures, creates conditions that allow for tribal leaders to play crucial roles in the governance of their territory. Examples include not only al Anbar, but also Yemen and the Canadian Far North.

In the case of Yemen, the northern areas, which never underwent British colonial occupation, preserved powerful tribal structures that constituted the foundations of the old monarchical and even modern Yemeni political orders. As the formal structures of the Yemeni state have weakened and broken down, order is preserved in the north through the vigorous activity of tribal leaders coordinating with one another. The most serious attempts at nationwide stabilization involve the participation of tribal leaders delivering militias or military units to aid the efforts of the aspiring central government.

Although this study has stressed the importance of non-state actors under conditions of state failure, conflict is not the only factor that can make tribal leadership attractive. In conditions of geographical remoteness and hostile climate, with a sparse population ethnically distinct from

that of the national center, even an advanced, highly capable modern state may find it attractive to work through traditional leadership structures. In the Canadian Far North, the empowerment and negotiation with recognized aboriginal leaders represents a cost-effective alternative to internal colonization and the creation of an elaborate infrastructure of governance in far-flung and inhospitable territories.

High Level of Hierarchy / Low Level of Empowerment by the State

In the process of the construction of central governments, the tribal structures are not always perceived as welcome legacies. Indeed, in cases where modern state apparatuses perceive tribal structures as threats to their own unity of authority, they may seek to undermine or extirpate them. This can be done in core national territories, or as a colonial policy to deal with restive minority populations.

When Russian imperial power was pressing into the Caucasus, it absorbed a region that included a highly diverse tribalized population – one culturally, religiously, and linguistically distinct from that of the Russian heartland, with a martial and fiercely independent local identity. The various groups put up spirited resistance to their incorporation into first the Russian Empire and then the RSFSR. The policy adopted toward these ethnic groups, partly because of the very effectiveness of their hierarchical structures and collective solidarities in organizing resistance to central control, was to suppress them and seek to undermine the cohesiveness of the group and the authority of traditional leaders. As a result, despite flare-ups and rebellions, whenever central control appears shaky, the typical position of the tribal leadership is weak.

High Level of Hierarchy / Medium Level of Empowerment by the State

An intermediate case of hierarchical tribal structures with a mixed state policy of empowerment is Libya under Gaddafi. There, the central government cultivated relationships with tribal leaders, but only as a policy of divide and rule, with each engagement designed to undercut other leaders and thus prevent coordination among them or the consolidation of decisive authority in the hands of any one tribal leader.

Low Level of Hierarchy / High Level of Empowerment by the State

The Pashtun population that straddles the Pakistan-Afghanistan border is one in which traditional kinship bonds represent the bedrock of social relationships, with complicated bonds of reciprocal obligation connecting patriarchs with their sons and different levels of tribal leaders with one another. However, while tribal identity remains central to the Pashtun way of life, the level of hierarchy within tribes is relatively low. There is a pronounced tendency toward fragmentation, and rivalry at every level. Among other difficulties, this characteristic of the Pashtun population has been a perennial obstacle toward the central consolidation of power by their leadership. It has also been a serious impediment to stabilization and governance efforts over their territory by external actors, whether Pakistan, the Soviet Union, NATO, or the central government in Kabul.

In the case of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan, this local characteristic of the tribal population coexisted with an official policy of extreme local autonomy,

with occasional patronage and side payments in exchange for local compliance with the priorities of the central government. Under these conditions, the FATA remained fragmented between various tribes, clans, and families, without even a local monopoly of force. Instead, structure was preserved through occasional outbreaks of clan-on-clan violence or family feuds.

Low Level of Hierarchy / Low Level of Empowerment by the State

The territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) was one of the last to be absorbed into the international state system. This happened via a colonial regime that, though brutally extractive, treated indigenous political structures with indifference. Those structures had very low levels of centralization and a very low degree of hierarchy. The very land-richness and relative population scarcity complicated attempts at creating local hierarchical centers of power.⁴⁵²

Following independence, the policy of the Mobutu regime toward any subordinate power structure was one of neglect and occasional hostility. Any structures or traditional authorities that might have served to mobilize political opposition were disfavored and, the greatest extent possible, dismantled. This was taken to such an extreme that even fixed physical infrastructure linking together communities was destroyed to complicate opposition organizing. The result of this combination of low levels of traditional hierarchy and policies of state disempowerment were such that during the eastern Congolese wars of the 1990s and 2000s, local communities and ethnic groups were among the weakest actors, often reduced to voiceless victims and spectators as other forces — especially those of Rwandan origin — dominated the territory in the pursuit of their own security and economic ambition.

Conclusion

The goal of this study has been to examine the aftermath of state collapse and to try and understand the violence that ensues.

Without the stabilizing influence of state structures monopolizing and regularizing coercion, political competition takes on an unlimited and violent character. In such an environment, the key political actors are no longer institutions specialized in mobilizing mass support (such as electoral parties). Instead, they are those adept at deploying and organizing violence. As a result, political initiative passes to different actors. These include security services, militias, warlords, insurgent groups, and criminal syndicates.

In the case of al Anbar, the most successful institution in the violent struggle for authority over the governorate proved to be an old-fashioned, perhaps even archaic one: the Arab tribe. My study has sought to account for the success of Arab tribes in al Anbar over their rivals — Al Qaeda, the US military, and the government of Iraq.

⁴⁵² Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*.

My main argument is that two historically determined institutional characteristics of the tribes of the region — their hierarchical authority structure and their recent state-sponsored empowerment under late Ba‘athism — resulted in their extraordinary affinity for deploying and organizing violence in their territory, and thus in their success against formidable rivals.

Hierarchy and the associated warrior ethos, preserved from an imagined Bedouin origin, resulted in cohesive tribes in which hundreds to thousands of tribesmen recognized the decisions made by sheikhs and respected their claim to obedience. This pool of followers included both fighters and civilians, giving the tribes a depth of support capabilities in the local population unavailable to any other group.

The recent histories of empowerment under late Ba‘athism introduced the Anbari tribes to the most advanced techniques of modern leadership and organization as well as training tribal fighters to the highest standards of the Iraqi military. Unlike tribal leaders elsewhere, who clove to traditional forms of fighting and were limited in the organizational and political innovation, the Anbari sheikhs employed sophisticated fighting techniques, ruthless tactics, and an almost Machiavellian willingness to abandon past rhetoric and ideological commitments for the sake of *realpolitik*.

The combination of hierarchy and empowerment proved decisive in the Anbari sheikhs’ bid for provincial domination.

In this section, I have sought to place my findings in the broader context of state failure in order to speculate on the potential of this framework for understanding the results of state failure and the fate of the tribes more generally. I include an account of the regions in Iraq beyond al Anbar, and some thoughts about tribal systems in other countries. Though the limitations of this study preclude any definitive statements, the framework leads to persuasive results within Iraq and suggests that further study on international cases would bear fruit.

Fifty years ago, tribes were considered a quaint, even embarrassing vestige in a world of inevitably ascending nation-states. Now that many of those states are under stress and even approaching collapse, it is time to treat tribes seriously. They can be determined, capable political and social institutions that will be with us for a while yet.

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