GRAND AYATOLLAH AL SISTANI'S ROLE IN IRAQ AFTER 2003: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF HISTORICAL TEXTS AND THE PERCEPTIONS OF IRAQI DIASPORA

A Thesis submitted by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the role of the Iranian cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali Al Hussaini Al Sistani in politics in Iraq, from the time of the invasion/occupation of Iraq by the United States in 2003 until the present day. The purpose of this study is to investigate the complex issues surrounding the political interventions of Al Sistani and to explore a range of perspectives held by Iraqi people about his role as a cleric with political influence. The study contributes significantly to the shedding of new light on the impact of clerics on Iraqi society and an initial hypothesis for the study was to discover whether Al Sistani might be the first of a new mould of Islamic clerics who believe in pursuing peaceful and democratic solutions to political problems.

An interpretivist, epistemological approach has been adopted as the theoretical basis for achievement of the qualitative aims of the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with volunteer Iraqi diaspora participants in order to discover their views regarding Al Sistani's interventions. It was initially considered that interviewing Al Sistani himself would provide the most direct qualitative data. However, as access to Al Sistani proved logistically impossible, it was decided that textual analysis of authentic documents representing him would be fruitful.

Thematic analysis of interview and textual data was used in the development of new understanding and meanings. The analysis involved immersion in the data - a process undertaken by reading and re-reading transcripts and texts in order to become more and more familiar with them.

The findings of the study reveal detail about three significant political interventions that Al Sistani had taken. The first is in countering the plan by the United States to choose a US controlled committee to write a new constitution. Al Sistani intervened by insisting that the US organise the election and the Iraqis then elected to office would be responsible for the constitution. Respecting Al Sistani's influence, the US complied. Secondly, detail is explored in Al Sistani's part in forming the Iraqi government in 2014. His contribution was in breaking an eight-month deadlock where politicians could not agree on the formation of the government. The third intervention occurred just a month later when Al Sistani issued a Fatwa to encourage Iraqis to take up arms against Islamic State (ISIS) in both Iraq and Syria.

Significantly, the study also illuminates detail about essential differences between the views of Shia and Sunni Iraqis. However, while differences occur the results indicate a general respect and approval of Al Sistani's political interventions, influence and decisions. There is a broad, positive sentiment that Al Sistani's promotion of democracy holds special hope for the nation's problems and to how Iraq is viewed by the rest of the world.

Certification of Thesis

This Thesis is entirely the work of Atef Jabar Kadom except where otherwise acknowledged. The work is original and has not previously been submitted for any other award, except where acknowledged.

Dr David Cleaver
Principal Supervisor

Student and supervisors signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

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List of Abbreviations

CPA	Coalition Provision Authority
ICP	Iraqi Communist Party
IECI	Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq
IGC	Iraqi Governing Council
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and Sham or Levant
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
ME	Middle East
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PMF	Popular Mobilization Forces
TC	Transitional Council
TNA	Transitional National Assembly
UIA	United Iraqi Alliance
USA	United States of America

Keywords and their definitions

AH: This refers to 'after the Hijra' (622 AD in the Western calendar). The Hijra is the name given to the event where Muhammad and his followers migrated from Mecca to Yathrib (now Medina) to found the first Muslim community.

Ayatollah: An ayatollah is a high-ranking title given to Usuli Twelver Shia clerics. These clerics are experts in Islamic studies including jurisprudence and the Quran. Usulis number the majority in the Twelver Shia Muslim group. They favour the use of ijtihad (reason and independent interpretation) in matters of law. The much smaller group, the Akhbari, reject the use of reasoning in deriving verdicts, believing that the Quran and hadith are the only source of law. An ayatollah is a religious leader among Shia Muslims, with the title being used especially for one who is not an imam. An ayatollah can be translated literally to mean 'sign of God'.

Election: Elections are the decision-making processes through which people choose their officials. The usual method of modern democracy is to hold an election for people to vote to fill the seats in a legislative council. Importantly, for the Iraqis the 2005 election signalled the end of a dictatorship and the beginning of a new democratic system of government.

Fatwa: A fatwa is any religious decision made by a mufti (Islamic scholar who is an interpreter or expounder of Islamic law) and this decision must be followed by the Muslims it is given to. The most infamous fatwas in Iraqi history are the jihad fatwa by Sayyid Kadhim Al-Yazdi to resist the British invasion of Iraq in 1914, and Al Sistani's fatwa in 2014 against ISIS.

Hadith: A hadith is one of many reports describing the words, actions, or habits of the Islamic prophet Muhammad.

Hawza: The term 'Hawza' refers to the seminary in which Shia jurisprudence is taught. Along with this function, it represents the spiritual and religious leadership of Shia communities. The Najaf Hawza is considered to be the oldest Hawza in the history of Shia Islam, having been established in about 448 A. H (1056 A.D.).

Ijtihad: Ijtihad is a technical term of Islamic law that describes the process of making a legal decision by independent interpretation of the legal sources, the Quran and the Sunnah. It basically describes the use of reason.

Imam: An imam is an Islamic leadership position, or a person in that position. It is most commonly used as the title of a worship leader of a mosque and Muslim community among Sunni Muslims. In this context, imams may lead Islamic worship services, serve as community leaders, and provide religious guidance. An imam is also the term given to the highest religious authority in Shia Islam – usually Grand Ayatollahs.

Jihad: A Jihad is the process of "exerting best efforts," in resisting or struggling to achieve a particular goal.

Marja: Marja is the title given to the highest level of Shia authority, a group of Grand Ayatollahs with the authority to make legal decisions within the confines of Islamic law for followers and less-credentialed clerics. After the Quran and the prophets, the marja (a collective term for the group) are the highest authority on religious laws in Usuli Shia Islam. Al Sistani is one of a group of 4 to 5 Grand Ayatollahs in Najaf, the centre of clerics. This is the only location for ayatollahs in Iraq, and therefore the only location for a Marja in Iraq. Other ayatollahs live in other places such as Iran and Bahrain, for example.

Najaf: The city of Najaf lies about 160 kilometres to the south of Baghdad. Its existence dates back to the era of Harun al-Rashid, the famous Abbasid Caliph, who ordered a dome to be built over Imam Ali's grave in about 170 A.H (786-87 AD). This encouraged Shi'is to come and settle in the area to study the 'Islamic sciences'.

Qom: is located in a desert about 130 km south of Iran's capital Tehran. Qom is considered one of the most important Shia centres in Iran a city in which more than 70,000 Shia students from around the world study and research about Islam at hundreds of madrasas, libraries and research institutions spread over it. Qom has a historical relationship with Najaf Hawza and sometimes there is competition for the leadership of the Shia in the world.

Shia: The word Shia in Arabic means "followers". The followers of Imam Ali, the Prophet Muhammed's son-in-law and cousin, who the prophet declared as his successor, are known as the Shia. The Shia are the second largest Islamic group in the Muslim world and the largest Islamic group in Iraq. They live primarily in central and southern Iraq.

Sunni: The Sunni are the largest branch of Islam. A Sunni is a Muslim who believes that the caliph Abu Bakr was the rightful successor to Muhammad after his death as opposed to Imam Ali. There are several different traditions within the Sunni branch of Islam. They are second largest group in Iraq .They live in the middle and west of the country.

Taqleed: The conformity of one person to the teachings of another.

Wilayat al-faqih: Wilayat al-Faqih is the mandate of the Islamic jurist or guardianship of the jurist. Wilayat means government or legal authority. Combined with faqih, which is the standard Islamic term for someone who interprets the law, "the doctrine of Wilayat al-Faqih currently forms the central axis of contemporary Shia political thought in Iran now. It advocates a guardianship-based political system, which relies upon a just and capable jurist (faqih) – who is like both a cleric and a politician – to actively assume the leadership of the government in the absence of an infallible Imam" (Amanat, 2003). However, the guardianship of a high-ranking religious scholar is not universally accepted amongst all Shia theories of governance. Some Iraqis connect this theory with Al Sistani's role in Iraq. Most of the Sunnis consider Al Sistani's intervention in politics as a part of Wilayat al-Faqih (Rahimi, 2007).

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. BACKGROUND

Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani (full name: Al-Sayyid Ali al-Husseini Al Sistani) has been an influential Shia Muslim cleric in Iraq since 2003. His authority and stature are widely felt even though Iraq is a multi-sectarian country with a diversity of perspectives and views regarding religion and politics. Al Sistani suffered from house arrest under Saddam's regime and was subjected to more than one assassination attempt, but he did not leave Iraq and preferred to stay there in order to provide leadership (Kadhim, 2012a).

Al Sistani is a religious figure, a high cleric without a formal position, yet widely accepted as an authority. While an Iranian by birth, he has resided in Iraq for 50 years and prior to 2003, he did not intervene politically in any way (Nasr, 2007). Yet now he has also gradually become a political figure with influence. While assembling historical details from a variety of sources, the purpose of this study is to investigate a range of perspectives about his political role and the extent to which Iraqi people have accepted or regarded his role as a cleric with political influence. As preliminary background and for an understanding of who Al Sistani is, the following questions are discussed:

What is his background?

What is the influence he has had on the world around him?

What motivates him? What are his beliefs, his thoughts, his aims, his motivations?

These questions are dealt with in this introduction and they are discussed further also in the Literature Review as well as in later chapters.

The thesis examines Al Sistani's role in Iraq since 2003, the year Iraq was invaded by the United States of America. This invasion caused the collapse of the existing Iraqi government and the dissolution of the army, which in turn led to the emergence of many new leaders, both religious and political from all Iraqi sects, and Al Sistani was one of them (Noorbaksh, 2008).

It has since become evident that the government of the United States of America –while having specific aims and missions to achieve – did not have a clear plan for Iraq and its people beyond 2003 (Allawi, 2007). An interim government was installed, but much

negotiation was needed – mediation, discussion, diplomacy – within an environment where there was much resistance from many Iraqis.

The occupiers faced their first objection from Al Sistani when they wanted to impose a new constitution on the Iraqi people. Through mediators, Al Sistani sent a letter to Paul Bremer, the US Ambassador in Iraq, asking him to hold elections and then choose a committee to write a constitution for the Iraqis (Allawi, 2008). Not all Iraqis supported this objective because Iraq was unstable and delicate, and security was lacking. Any election could potentially have led to the domination of a particular sect in running the country, and therefore deprive other Iraqis of a democratic voice.

1.1.1 The Sunni and the Shia and *Wilayat al-Faqih*

Estimates of the population ratio between the Shia, the Sunni and other sects vary and a lack of census data from Thirty years ago is not helpful. However, it would be reasonable to estimate Shia to comprise about 55% of the population and Sunni 15-20%, with the remainder being comprised of other minority sects. Shia are mostly located in the middle and south of Iraq, and the Kurds in the north. Of the 18 Iraqi provinces, 3 are Kurd, 3 are Sunni, and the remaining 12 are Shia (Wimmer, 2003).

The Shia believe that before Muhammad died it was to his brother-in-law Imam Ali that he entrusted his authority for the responsibility of governing the Islamic world. Therefore they look to the legacy of Ali for teaching and guidance (Nasr, 2007). The Sunni, on the other hand, say that they defer to Abobaker as the elected leader after Mohammad died. All this took place the year 623.

There are many other differences of course, with one of the most significant being that there are more fundamental beliefs and perceptions among the Sunni who assume a more literal interpretation of the Quran.

Wilayat al-Faqih is an important Shia political doctrine that is followed in Iran, but also supported by some Iraqi clerics. It refers to a political system based on a guardian (a jurist or Faqih) assuming the leadership of the government in the absence of an 'infallible Imam'. 'Imam' is a title (Kadivar, 2011) that is assigned to a respected leader in the Muslim community, usually a religious leader. The concepts of Faqih and Imam are accepted among all Shia and Sunni, although the details (such as the role of the jurist and the scope of his authority) are contested.

Islamic theories regarding leadership and intervention in politics are ambiguous because there are different groups and individuals who have a range of ideas and Al Sistani's

theories offer a further set of interpretations. The Shia position assumes that clerics should have a role in politics (Abd al-Jabbar, 2003). A second theory states that clerics should not have any influence in politics but should be confined to teaching, religious education, and related matters (al-Kifaee, 2010). A third theory states that in the absence of an 'infallible Imam', a guardian or a faqih can assume political leadership. This is the Wilayat al-Faqih doctrine that considers itself progressive and dynamic (Amanat, 2003).

As none of these theories fit Al Sistani's current role and ideas, it could be assumed that he promotes a new theory of leadership and political intervention by clerics. This theory suggests that clerics intervene in difficult situations but they do not automatically take on roles of political leadership (Al Sistani gives his advice and intervenes only if he believes he should, or if it is necessary) (Maynard, 2005).

1.1.2   After the 2005 elections

Important elections took place on January 30th, 2005. There was much debate at this time, and debate continued after the elections. People (as reflected in the world media) wondered if Iraq had become a democratic experiment. Iraq remained the focus of regional and global attention (Ono, 2005). What was happening in Iraq with its new government, and the continuing resistance of many Iraqi people, would have far-reaching consequences for the spread of democracy in the Middle East. Not all Iraqis expected democracy to succeed in the country due to the varied perspectives of the many different sects. Moreover, there were doubts by the Americans as to whether Al Sistani believed in democratic values, or if his request for an election was a singular and isolated intervention. They also wondered if his motivation was part of an agenda that sought power for the Shia (Feldman, 2005).

Throughout the many years he had spent in Iraq up until 2003, Al Sistani had never intervened in politics, but this changed after the occupation. Although Al Sistani is an Iranian citizen, this thesis will investigate perceptions about his encouragement of the system of Wilayat al-Faqih (the current political system in Iran).

The 2014 elections

Ten years later on April 30th, 2014, elections were held after a time when Iraq had been without a government for eight months. Even combining their efforts, the parties did not have a solution for the question of how to form a new government. But then a message was sent to Al Sistani, requesting his help. Al Sistani agreed and his advice was taken, and the elections took place (Hadad, 2016).

Soon after this, on June 13, 2014, Al Sistani issued a *Jihad Kefaya* Fatwa against ISIS. This was soon after the Iraqi army lost three provinces and some parts of the north of Iraq to ISIS (Pelham, 2015). The announcement was made during a Friday prayer. All Iraqi citizens were called to defend the country, its people, their honour, and the country's sacred sites. In response, tens of thousands of volunteers were mobilised to join the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), and other groups (al-Khafaf, 2015).

The Kefaya element of this fatwa means that if you do not have significant responsibilities – if you are not working or you are not a student for example – then you are compelled to stop what you are doing and carry out the fatwa (al-Libi, 2010). This fatwa was controversial because it had been criticised by Sunnis who considered it as an invitation to kill them, while on the other hand many Shia believed it would save Iraq from the danger of ISIS, which had announced that they came to apply Islamic law and kill anyone who opposed their ideas.

In light of these details, this thesis will explore perspectives about Al Sistani's interventions and discuss whether they fall in line with the system of Wilayat al-Faqih. The thesis will also explore how Iraqis regarded Al Sistani and his interventions through the fatwas and via other means. It will discuss matters such as why a number of the Iraqi parliamentarians followed this message and chose a new prime minister in accordance with further recommendations of Al Sistani's. The response of others, such as these parliamentarians, sheds insight on how the Iraqi population viewed Al Sistani and his ways.

1.1.3   Biographical details on Al-Sayyid Ali al-Husseini Al Sistani

In understanding Al Sistani and his views and actions, it is important to understand something about his background. The following is historical detail from the website of Sistani.

His early years

Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Husaini Al Sistani was born on 4th of August 1930 in the holy city of Mashhad in Iran. He was raised in a religious family. At the age of five Al Sistani commenced learning the Quran, and soon after entered the Madresa 'school' of the late Mohammad Baqir Sabsavari where he continued religious studies (from various notable religious scholars) until he migrated to the holy city of Najaf for higher studies. From the beginning of 1941, he began basic Hawza lessons, which is the beginning of training to be a Muslim Cleric (Al Sistani's website: https://www.Al Sistani .org/english/data/2/).

In late 1948, he migrated to Qum city in Iran to continue his studies in Fiqh and Usul – the 'Divine Law as revealed through the Prophet Muhammad'. He was helped in his studies by several well-known scholars (Al Sistani's website: https://www.Al Sistani .org/english/data/2/).

After three years in Qum, Al Sistani migrated back to Najaf in 1951 where he attended the lectures of Ayatollah Abol-Qasim el-Khoi (1899-1992), who was considered "a prominent religious scholar and mujtahid, [and] one of the highest-ranking religious authorities in the world of Shiite Islam" (Noorbaksh, 2008). A decade later, he was certified as mujtahid by Ayatollah Khoi and Ayatollah Hussein Al-Hilli, another leading Marja (Al Sistani's website: https://www.Al Sistani .org/english/data/2/).

In the same year 1960 he left Najaf and returned to his hometown of Mashhad in Iran, and upon return was awarded certain permits, with the expectation he would stay in Iran. These permits certified that he had attained the level of *ijtihad* and was therefore able to pass legal judgments in matters of religion. He also received a diploma in *rijal* the study of the words of Muhammad. However, he returned to Najaf in Iraq in 1961 for unknown reasons after only one year in Mashhad (Iran). Some argue that this return was in response to an order from Al Sistani's mentor, Ayatollah el-Khoi (Noorbaksh, 2008; Khalaji, 2006; www.Al Sistani .org).

Upon returning to Najaf he taught jurisprudence and started lectures (externals) in jurisprudence in 1964 (Al Sistani's website: https://www.Al Sistani .org/english/data/2/).

At this point reading further may be difficult for non-Muslim readers without a brief reminder of the meaning of some terminology. This can be found at the beginning of the thesis.

Upon his return to Najaf, Ayatollah Al Sistani began researching and teaching Islamic jurisprudence, and has taught jurisprudence for more than five decades. Throughout recent years many commentators have suggested he was being groomed to succeed Khoi as the spiritual leader of much of the Shia Islamic world (Noorbaksh, 2008, p. 59).

Post war Iraq

After the toppling of the regime in 2003, Ayatollah Al Sistani emerged as a central figure in the new Iraq. His religious legitimacy in Shi'ite communities, along with his sophisticated network, has given him an exceptional capability to mobilize Shiite communities. His transnational religious website represents an independent and integrated governance system that not only administers the clergy-related affairs but extends to provide services that the state usually performs.

Since the fall of Saddam Hussein, the Al Sistani network has emerged as the most organized transnational civic institution in Iraq, with offices not only throughout Iraq, but also in Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Britain, Georgia, India, Iran, Kuwait, Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, and the United States, with the seminary students [in Iran] supported by Al Sistani's centre being 'well paid and even offered a health insurance plan that covers their families during the period of their studies' (Rahimi, 2007, p. 7).

In 2008, the notable author on Iraqi politics, Dr Mehdi Noorbaksh made the striking statement that it was Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani who was capable of uniting all Iraqis. He could deliver for a community [of Shia] that had been under-represented, isolated and discriminated against in the government and politics of Iraq from the time of the British occupation of the country (Noorbaksh, 2008, p. 58)

When the US-led coalition overthrew the Saddam regime, most Iraqi Shia were "facing a historical opportunity, and challenge, to transform Iraqi history in their own favour." (Noorbaksh, 2008, p. 60). They saw in Al Sistani their wise leader who would guide them through this critical stage.

While this is a brief background of Al Sistani, what happened in his life after the fall of Saddam's regime will be detailed in the coming pages where it is explained how he has intervened on several occasions in the politics of Iraq, and done so with influence and success.

Throughout the following years Al Sistani has risen to the position of Grand Ayatollah, which places him in higher authority than others. He is also called an imam and is part of the marja, but also as a grand Ayatollah he is above it, and he is one of only a few who have the degree of Ijtihad. However he has also studied widely in numerous areas, including scientific studies for which he has a particular interest.

1.1.4   My interest in this topic

The following biographical material is presented in order to reveal my background and the social and cultural context in which I have been placed. This may allow the reader to make judgment about the lens with which I view this topic. Importantly, it offers insight into revealing my interest in conducting such a project and how decisions evolved.

I was born in 1976 in Nasiriyah, a major city in southern Iraq situated on the Euphrates River. With a population of more than two million (mostly Shia), and being the site of many Shi'ite shrines, the city is well protected by security forces. But bad things do happen there. Militant groups do sometimes get in past the blockades at the entry points to the town. For

example, in September 2017 eighty people were killed by ISIS and more than 90 injured during joint attacks at a restaurant and a security checkpoint.

Although it is one of the safest places, Nasiriyah is still a part of the Iraqi conflict, and so it has its issues. Born into a family with three brothers and three sisters, life was easy enough, but there was always conflict and wars. When I was five Iraq went to war in Iran (1980.) That war continued for 8 years. In 1991 we had the Kuwaiti war. In 2003 I was doing my Bachelor's Degree in Baghdad when the Americans and their allies occupied the country. Yet I was fortunate. Life was good and easy, despite the wars. I was never detained by security forces and receiving a bachelor of Education meant I could find work.

The ancient city of Ur is only 5 kilometres from my home. Some say this is the place where civilization began. It has holy significance for Christians, as there are claims that Abraham's house still lies there. It has become a popular tourist attraction for both Christians and Muslims.

My family worried about Saddam's regime, especially knowing that other parts of Iraq were not doing as well as us and my tribe – Hajam – was one of the tribes that led the revolution against the Saddam regime in 1991.

When I returned from Baghdad to Nasiriyah to teach, I also married, and soon we had children (We had two children before leaving for Australia, and then a third in Australia.)

During the occupation after 2003, everything changed in Iraq. It was questionable whether we were becoming a democratic nation and this was a time of great insecurity. But there were many opinions. The Americans, the Australians and others needed good communications with the locals, both in the workplace and in the area of political discussions at all levels. There was a great need for translators, and with my background in education and teaching I managed to secure employment as one.

As events unfolded I found myself in a position where I could move with my family to Australia to live or to study, and this is what we did in 2008. In Australia, we found everything was different – different in the sense of moving to a culture alien to us and vastly different from what we were led to expect. Although experiencing some racial prejudice, we found the country of Australia to be warm and welcoming and very much a mix of many different cultures and backgrounds, all generally living together with respect, tolerance, and in friendship.

After the move to Australia, while making many new friends, but still keeping my beliefs and cultural habits, there was one particular visit that I remember. My visitor was a

Sunni man. We chatted about politics and through the events of our conversation he started to criticize Al Sistani.

'Why?' I said. 'He is a good man. Isn't he?'

'No, no,' the man replied. 'The elections! He wanted the elections when our city was not secured, and now it is all Shia!'

This comment tested my current understanding and assumption that Ayatollah Al Sistani was unquestionably righteous and with a holy nature and I had believed that he was working positively on behalf of all Iraqis.

From this point my curiosity was roused and I was not sure what to believe or what I thought about Al Sistani. Everything new I learned about him raised more questions and I needed evidence. It was not satisfactory to just read the written words and comments of others.

As the years passed and I continued to live in Australia, I became more and more interested in Al Sistani and his role and how he adapted from being an Imam from Iran, to an Imam in Iraq and how he cared for the people of Iraq – not just Shia but all Iraqis. I watched how he changed from being an Imam to being a man of political influence. And then the greatest change in my thinking occurred, and I wondered if it might be Al Sistani who would become a great leader who would save Iraq from inner breakdown and raise the country to a respectful place in the world's eyes. However, with the range of different opinions both in Australia where I was living as well as back home (and around the world) I knew I had to do research if my opinion and hypothesis could become more informed and evaluated.

I found, at first, that almost no one had written about Al Sistani, or placed him at the centre of their research. Life was comfortable for my family and myself in Australia but we were still Muslims, still Shia, and we cared for our cultural and religious background as well as the image of Islam in the eyes of others. So during the time of my master's degree I started to try to learn more about Al Sistani.

I recognised that most Iraqis, when writing about Al Sistani, retain levels of personal bias. I understood the inevitability of bias therefore believed it important to take an academic approach to the subject where effort could be made to ensure that personal bias could be brought to the fore and not remain unexamined. Seeking to present openness about my background and perspectives, it is intended that readers of this project are able to make their own personal judgments about my position in relation to the points of dialogue and discussion raised by this research.

In light of these matters, I decided to conduct an investigation that would include the perceptions of a variety of Iraqis about Al Sistani and include critical analyses and interpretations to develop further understandings. I formulated hypotheses and developed research questions, then I explored how the research might be conducted. In exploring the perceptions of others I could shed more light on the hypothesis that Al Sistani may be a significant hope in Iraq coming together again as a nation that can change and grow – and overcome opposing forces – in a non-violent way. I felt that there might not be a definite conclusion to a question like, "Is Al Sistani a good spokesperson for Iraq, and is his political intervention appropriate?" However, the research could be useful in illuminating a range of perceptions and understandings and generating new knowledge about the topic.

1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Since the invasion of Iraq by the US-led "Coalition of the Willing" in 2003, and his first fatwa requesting the Iraqi election, Al Sistani's role in Iraq has become controversial, both among Iraqis and within the international community. Iraq is a country of different religions, sects, and nationalities. For this reason not all those who are Muslims or of Iraqi origin have supported Al Sistani's role in initiating new Iraqi political processes. Most Iraqi people realise he belongs to the Shia sect and that he is of Iranian origin. However, many are unsure of his motivation behind his interventions in politics.

The first interventions were when Al Sistani issued a fatwa to encourage the Iraqi people to take part in the first Iraqi elections which were conducted in 2005 after the fall of Saddam. Many Shia's participated, while Sunnis boycotted the election. They did this for many reasons (to be detailed later), but primarily the Sunnis considered the election (and Al Sistani's Fatwa) to be a means by which the Shia would acquire power. Braam mentions that 'the Sunnis Arab felt marginalized and had refrained en masse from voting in 2005' (Braam, 2010, p. 9). The Sunni criticised the timing of the Fatwa, while they suffered due to a number of fundamental decisions by the US, such as the de-Ba'athification (removal of the Sunni sympathetic Ba'ath Party's influence) of all government agencies and the disbanding of the Iraqi army – both perceived as anti-Sunni measures (Ono, 2005).

The possibility of Iraq becoming a democratic country, especially after the election and the Fatwa of "Shia cleric" Al Sistani, was in doubt because most Islamic clerics tended to favour countries that adopted Islamic law and limited the exercise of democratic values. Some sects of the Iraqi people assumed that Al Sistani believed in the holding of democratic

elections, but not in all democratic values. Hawazi mentioned that, 'Democracy in Iraq is more context-based and affected by Iraqi realities. One major reality about the Iraqi environment is the supremacy of religion in Iraqi society. Therefore it should be noted that Al Sistani's support for democracy in Iraq does not mean he accepts total separation of religion and state'(Al Hawazi, 2008, p. 57).

As stated earlier in Section 1.1.2, there was no agreement on the intervention of Shia clerics in politics. Some suggested the clerics should have a role in politics and that they might obtain a high rank, others believed it more appropriate for clerics to stay far away from any political action and simply provide advice and guidance.

However, Al Sistani believed that his role and ideas were extremely necessary because the tenets of Islam were at risk. The situation in Iraq is different from most other cultures due to the diversity of the society and it has rejected the concept of clerics being leaders or having roles in politics. Braam mentioned that 'despite his insistence that he is not a political leader, Al Sistani continues to demonstrate clear political involvement when he considers it critical to do so' (Braam, 2010, p. 9).

The Iraqi elections conducted in 2014 were more controversial because the politicians stalled for eight months without forming a government. This led to Al Sistani answering questions from politicians and advising them in matters relating to choosing a new prime minister. Some of the Shia and Sunni sect considered that the Wilayat al-Faqih would be a clear interference in Iraqi political affairs. They did not support political influence or intervention by clerics. Leaving politics to the politicians was their choice. However, in the meantime there was a political stalemate. Al-Qarawee (2016) mentions that:

> The most powerful Shia cleric in Iraq, Ali Al Sistani, also favoured removing Maliki. (Al Maliki was the Iraqi Prime Minister from 2006 to 2014 – a period of many significant events for Iraq.) Additionally, several senior Da'wa members, including Abadi, thought that Maliki's insistence on staying in office for a third term would jeopardize the party's chances of maintaining the prime ministership (p.3).

On a different political front, Al Sistani's fatwa against ISIS, issued in 2014, encouraged people to take up arms in defence. However, this created controversy because the area in which the insurgency took place was predominantly Sunni and it was therefore assumed to also be a fatwa of revenge against the Sunni. Political comment in the media has mentioned that, 'Some Sunni Arab countries have unjustly attacked the fatwa as an

irresponsible move that may exacerbate sectarian violence and other Sunni scholars went as far as calling it a war declaration against the Sunnis' (al-Khatteeb & Kadhim, 2014).

All these events have motivated the researcher to conduct an investigation into whether the Iraqi people agreed with the Al Sistani interventions in politics and to what extent they believe he understood the nature of the Iraqi people and the regional conflicts. As long as Iraq has many religious groups and sects, as well as nationalities, I feel it is worth considering the role of any person – whether Muslim cleric or not – who may be able to ensure the rights of both the Shia and the Sunni's, as well as the rights of other minorities.

1.3.   THE PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH

The purpose of this study is to investigate the political role of Al Sistani in sectarian Iraq and to investigate the extent to which Iraqi people accept his role as a cleric with political influence. This research will identify and analyse the distinction between Al Sistani's approach and Wilayat al-Faqih regarding clerical interventions in Iraqi politics, and try to determine if Al Sistani applies Wilayat al-Faqih in Iraq or to what extent.

This thesis also explores perspectives about the role of Al Sistani from the Iraqi community in Australia – the country where I now live. What do they think of Al Sistani and his political influence? Do they see Al Sistani as an influential figure who will help change the widely held perception that links Muslims to violence and terrorism? Thus, this thesis explores the opinions of Iraqi residents in Australia (the Iraqi diaspora and international students) regarding clerical interventions in politics, and investigates the how they have responded to Al Sistani's ideas.

Furthermore, this research will evaluate the role of the clerics generally in politics from the point of view of members of the Iraqi community in Australia. Although much has been written about Iraq as it was before 2003 and then since the US-led invasion, the importance of this project is to present and analyse the points of view of many different stakeholders from Al Sistani himself, via three books issued by representatives of Al Sistani on the Iraq issue after 2003, to those who felt compelled to leave Iraq. Taking into consideration the sectarian composition of the Iraqi people and the existence of occupying forces, further political conflicts are beginning to emerge. An exploration of the aims of this research may help in shedding insight on these matters in relation to whether Al Sistani may be able to improve this situation.

1.4. RESEARCH AIMS AND QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study is to investigate the political role of Al Sistani and to investigate the extent to which Iraqi people accept his role as a cleric with political influence. The three research questions explored in this study are:

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. To what extent do Iraqi people accept Al Sistani's role as a cleric with political influence? Do they approve of his approach to his own political influence?
2. Do Iraqis see Al Sistani as holding special hope for Iraq in regard to the nation's problems, and to how Iraq is viewed by the rest of the world?
3. How does Al Sistani see his role?

To gather information on the three research questions the following 'sub-questions' will be considered:

1. Why did Al Sistani issue an election Fatwa in 2004 while most of the Sunni areas were suffering from terrorism and therefore could not participate in elections?

2. Why did Al Sistani issue a Jihad Fatwa against ISIS but not against American occupation forces when they invaded Iraq?

3. Does Al Sistani support democracy?

4. What is the attitude of the Iraqi diaspora in Australia to Al Sistani, and to what extent do they follow his leadership?

HYPOTHESES

1. Iraqi people generally accept Al Sistani's role as a cleric with political influence and approve of his approach.

2. Iraqis do see Al Sistani as holding special hope for Iraq in regard to the nation's problems, and also see him as someone who can improve the light in which the rest of the world view Iraqis. Iraqis typically see Al Sistani as the leader they need, even though he does not always take on that role.

These questions will be explored among Iraqi participants residing in Australia at the time of this research. It will also be explored among participants living in England. Thus the data gathered may not reflect the attitudes of Iraqis still living in Iraq.

1.5. METHODOLOGY

The present study uses an interpretivist, epistemological methodology. Qualitative research is used because of its appropriateness within this research paradigm.

The research participants are fourteen people, 10 men and 4 women (Iraqi international students who came recently to Australia, and Iraqi politicians and clerics from Britain). The main data collection method employed was in-depth interviews with participants, alongside other sources of information such as books and texts issued by Al Sistani, and press interviews. Other sources included websites of the Najaf school and Al Sistani's official website run from his offices in London and Najaf.

While the individual interviews provided insight about Al Sistani from the perspectives of others (all Iraqi's) the textual analysis of books and texts issued by Al Sistani provided important data. As described elsewhere, matters of bias were considered as a vital academic responsibility during the process of analysis.

1.6. THESIS OUTLINE

This thesis consists of nine chapters. Chapter one begins with a general introduction to the research, background material, and then statements in regard to the purpose of this research, research aims and methodology. The chapter concludes with this thesis outline.

Chapter Two – the Literature Review – details historical background material regarding the relationship of clerics to successive Iraqi governments, from the 1914 occupation of Iraq by British forces, to Al Sistani's time. Furthermore, it presents a literature review on topics related to Al Sistani's role in Iraq under headings such as: Al Sistani and the 2005 Elections, Al Sistani and Politics, Al Sistani and Democracy, through to Al Sistani's message to the Politicians.

Chapter Three explains the research methodology, methods and design of the present study. The present study uses qualitative research. And Chapter Four details the findings, typically in tabulated form, with samples of texts analysed and profiles of all participants.

Chapters Five to Nine are the analysis chapters. These chapters each look at one aspect of Al Sistani's involvement in politics, detailing the relevant findings, and discussing all in relation to the research questions.

Finally, Chapter Ten provides a conclusion to the thesis. In this chapter all data is discussed as a whole and the overall findings are summarised. The significance of the research is discussed and recommendations for further research are outlined.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1   INTRODUCTION: THE PURPOSE OF THIS REVIEW

This literature review provides a background for the research and a justification for the methodology used for the data collection and analysis. The review also provides a theoretical framework for this study, as well as identifying gaps in the current literature.

The chapter surveys various topics, and it should be noted that one of its specific purposes is to show how Al Sistani's role in Iraq differs from that of other clerics, both currently and in the past.

The review covers a number of areas but begins with a historical overview of the background of clerics' involvement in Iraqi politics.

2.2   BACKGROUND

2.2.1   A brief history of modern Iraqi

In 1914 British forces invaded Iraq. This prompted the first intervention of Shia clerics in politics at that time and, 'the Shia clerics of Najaf and Karbala (Shia holy cities) declared a jihad against the British invasion'(Berridge & al-Aboody, 2017, p. 632) . Thereafter, for many years the relationship between the clergy and successive governments has been marked by the determination of these governments to limit the political roles of Shia clerics. The Shia clerics did not have a clear plan how to participate in politics; therefore, some governments marginalised them, even to the extent of executing some (Amanat, 2003). But in 2005 Al Sistani was able to present an alternative to the Shia clerics, as he did not openly promote a political stance.

Some scholars agree that the Shia clerics have played an important role in Iraq since 1914 when the British forces invaded the country and overthrew the Ottoman rule in 1917 (Litvak, 2002). This era brought division among the Shia, Sunni and Kurdish sectors of Iraqi society as each took a different stand on this invasion (Ismael & Ismael, 2005). The Shia clerics aimed to establish an Islamic government, free of any foreign control and subsequently called for a revolt against the British forces in 1920. However, this revolt was unsuccessful (Nakash, 2003). Following this, in 1922 a section of the Sunni community assisted the British forces in conducting elections when the first government was established.

These elections were boycotted by the Shia, and it was the Sunnis and British who subsequently wrote the new constitution (Noorbaksh, 2008). The resulting disagreement, division, infraction and military crackdowns have resulted in the loss of Shia lives over subsequent generations. Kadhim (2012b) suggests that some of the Shia clerics who advised people not to participate in the elections have contributed in part to the sectarian isolation of members of the community. This isolation could have been mitigated if they had not adopted a tough opposition to the British and to King Faisal I. Berridge and al-Aboody (2017) comment that 'since establishing the Iraq state the Shi`a educational opportunities were restricted [and] such institutions of public education that existed at the time were inevitably perceived as channels of Sunni propaganda unpalatable to the majority of Shi`a'.

2.2.2   The 1920 revolution

Following the 1920 revolution against the British occupation, the Cairo Conference was held in 1920 in the presence of Winston Churchill (the British Colonial Secretary) to consider the situation in Iraq (Vinogradov, 1972b). Stemming from this 'Churchill announced the change of the British government's policy of converting from direct colonization to the government of the National Administration under the mandate' (Vinogradov, 1972b, p. 139). Because of the violent resistance and the outbreak of a number of revolts against British forces, these forces accepted the inauguration of King Faisal I of Iraq (1921-1935) (Abd al-Jabbar, 2010). Armed revolt broke out in late June 1920.

Simon and Tejirian (2004) mention that one of the reasons the Revolution broke out was because of the exposure of the Iraqi people under the Ottoman rule to pressure, tyranny, ignorance, disease and poverty. Ayatollah al-Shirazi, the leading cleric at the time, issued another fatwa that seemed to encourage armed revolt (Vinogradov, 1972a). Moreover, the ' Shia mujtahid, Ayatollah Muhammad Taqi al-Shirazi, issued a fatwa declaring that service in the British administration was unlawful. Subsequently, meetings between Shia clerics and tribal leaders discussed strategies for peaceful protests but they did consider violent action if the peaceful demonstrations failed to get results' (Tripp, 2007, p. 41). Kadhim (2012b) added that for the first time in the history of Iraq, the role of clerics in jihadist activity has been prominent as in the battles of Basra, and the mobilization of revolutionaries. The importance of the clerics lay with their ability to influence the elders and members of the tribes, and to enable them to unite their words and reunite them on certain demands.

After the revolution of 1920, Iraq officially came under British occupation. At that time British troops wanted to install a new king for Iraq. There were two main candidates Sayyid

Talib al-Naqib and Faisal bin Ali Al Hussein (Tripp, 2002). The Shia clerics refused both of them because they demanded the immediate independence of Iraq first. Then a parliamentary council of Iraqis could be elected where council discussion would decide who would hold the throne of Iraq and who would form a government (Aimami, 2011). After the failure of the revolution, Shia clerics began to encourage all people to become politically aware and 'practice politics'. In response to this, new parties and movements were formed such as the National Independence Movement (Farouk-Sluglett & Sluglett, 2001).

In 1921 a referendum was held and King Faisal won with a 97% majority and from 1921-1933 became the first King of Iraq. His rule was distinguished among the Iraqi people by disagreements regarding matters of ethnicity and sectarianism. Tarbush (2015) mentions that the election of King Faisal I introduced issues of proportional representation. The sectarian distinction was notable by the awarding of vital positions within the defence forces and police to Sunnis despite being a minority. The new Iraqi Army leaders were also almost exclusively made up of former officers of the Ottoman Army, the majority of whom were Sunni. Sunni dominance in the Iraqi government was a fact established from the earliest days of its existence (Porter, 2010, pp. 527-529). Roberts (2004) mentioned that:

> In Faisal I's ruling time, Shia, who made up more than half of Iraq's population, and the Kurds, who made up approximately twenty percent of the population, were almost completely excluded from roles of authority under the Mandate. Despite the fact that Sunni Arabs made up less than twenty percent of the population, their ranks dominated the various government ministries as well as the officer corps of the armed forces (p.374).

Faisal I's government tried to cause sedition between clerics and tribal sheikhs when the British empowered the tribal sheikhs to collect taxes, 'thereby establishing a form of indirect, but powerful, rule over Iraq's tribal communities' (Roberts, 2004). This led the Shia clerics to issue a number of fatwas against the British occupation and the government of King Faisal I because of the arbitrary measures taken by the authority of the mandate against clerics and Iraqi people (Aimami, 2011).

In 1933 Ghazi succeeded his father, King Faisal I as King of Iraq (Tripp, 2007). Yasin al-Hashimi then become Iraqi prime minister from 1935-1936 (Bellini, 2012) . This government conducted elections in 1935 that again were not accepted by the Shia, who deemed them fraudulent, as they were not given enough seats in the parliament. Roberts provides comment by describing King Ghazi as 'the product of a system which exacerbated Shia resentment of the Sunni-dominated state during the next few years. He goes on to add

how King Ghazai was to play a very small role in how the country was to develop. It was under his rule that regime changes originating from schisms within the government and the military were to become the norm' (Roberts, 2004, p. 379). Al-Marashi mentioned that 'the military and government during Ghazi's reign were divided between pan-Arab nationalists (qawmiyyun) and the "Iraq-firsters" (wataniyyun), who realized that Iraq was part of the Arab world but were more concerned with domestic affairs rather than entangling Iraq with events in other Arab states. A large number of tribal chiefs and Shia clerics, religious scholars and intellectuals, met in Najaf, agreeing on a public reform program to confront the problem of tyranny and sectarian discrimination against Shia by the Hashimi government' (Al-Marashi, 2009, p. 541). Kashif al-Ghita, a prominent Shia cleric at the time, issued a fatwa calling on the government to begin negotiations with the Shia and to listen to their demands. The government, however, ignored his demands, forcing him to call on the tribes in the south and middle of Iraq to revolt against the government, which in turn led to the government's collapse (Nakash, 2003; Tripp, 2007).

2.2.3 The second British occupation (1941)

After the second British occupation of Iraq in 1941, the Shia from the south of Iraq and Baghdad expressed their desire to increase their representation in the government as the Sunni minority held the majority of government positions. These demands were brought forward to the British adviser to the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior, C.J. Edmonds, by Sayyid Muhammad Al-Sadr in a meeting where he expressed Shia dissatisfaction (Abd al-Jabbar, 2003; Nakash, 2003). The Shia continued to protest against government policies. During World War II in particular they protested against government discriminated in employment, mainly in the police and military forces (Aimami, 2011).

There was a subsequent turnaround when Salih Jabir, a Shia from the southern city of Nassiriya, became Prime Minister. He took office in 1947 but he faced opposition, this time from the Sunnis who accused him of pandering to British directives by hiring too many foreign experts and by handing most government positions to the Shia(Nakash, 2003). At this time the Shia clerics did not interfere as they felt well-represented by Jabir's government (Abd al-Jabbar, 2003; Tripp, 2007). A conflict then arose between Jabir and Nuri Sa'id, a prime ministerial candidate, who demanded further open elections that would be free of government interference and held in a way that would improve the political democratic life of Iraq. These demands were not accepted and subsequently Sa'id met the Regent, and they decided to call the army and impose martial law and dissolve all political parties. This

resulted in elections in 1953 and Sa'id won, causing disagreement among Shia politicians (Abd al-Jabbar, 2003; Nakash, 2003). Throughout these events, Shia clerics decided to remain in the role of observers without interference as earlier revolutions in 1920 and 1934 had been politically ineffective and with the result of the loss of many lives (Abd al-Jabbar, 2003; Nakash, 2003).

2.2.4 The 1958 military coup and a new era of co-operation.

On the 14th of July 1958, Abd al-karim Qasim, an officer in the army, took power through a military coup, abolished the monarchy, and transformed Iraq into a Republic (Tripp, 2007). Qasim, who supported the rise of the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), faced strong opposition from the clerics who were led by Grand Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim, the most eminent cleric at that time. Opposition also came from the Iraqi Ba'ath party which was socialist. Opposition also came from the Ba'ath party in Syria, and from Gamal Abdel Nasser who was president of Egypt at the time (al-Kifaee, 2010).

In December of 1959, Qasim's government introduced equal rights laws for women. These included inheritance equity and other personal freedoms. These changes caused tensions as they were not in accord with Islamic Sharia law (Aimami, 2011). Muhsin Al-Hakim issued a fatwa attacking both the new laws and communism. Terrill (2004) argues that:

> Grand Ayatollah Muhsin Al Hakim, committed only two major political actions in his lifetime. These were to issue a Fatwa in 1960 forbidding Shias to join the Communist Party due to its official atheism and to support the Da'wa Islamiya Islamic political party openly before this group was outlawed (p.7).

This point reveals the influence held by the cleric at that time (It is notable that, throughout his life in Iraq, Al Sistani did not issue such a fatwa but left the people free with regard to political party choice). Kadhim (2012b) argues that when a cleric issues a fatwa in a political case, it is not issued solely after careful study, but also on the basis of recommendations and advice from those around him. Thus this fatwa might be eventuate as being a mistake – not the best choice – and if it is then it would be as a consequence of cleric, the people and advisers – who might all be justly criticised.

This time heralded the beginning of a new era where the Shia sought a political framework that would enable them to face communism and also the socioeconomic gap that was growing in Iraqi society (Abd al-Jabbar, 2003). This led to the establishment of a new political party: Jama' at al-Ulama' fi al- Najaf al Ashraf, in 1960. The purpose of this group

whose members were Shia theologians was to warn people against communist beliefs. Many of them went on to join the Al-Da'wa Islamiyya party for the same purpose (Abd al-Jabbar, 2003; Nakash, 2003; Schmidt, 2009a; Tripp, 2007).

At this time in the 1960s people took to the streets, demonstrating against the state's support for communism, and demonstrations were supported by some clerics and sanctioned by others. One of them was Mohammed Baqir Al-Sadr, a young Shia cleric who became the face of the anti-communist movement in the Hawza of Najaf. He argued that Islam brings forward a third alternative to capitalism and communism, when he published two prominent books: Falsafatuna (Our Philosophy) and Iqtisadona (Our economic system). These addressed 'the philosophical, economic, and political dilemmas of human societies' (al-Kifaee, 2010). Additionally, Muhsin al-Hakim forbade communism when he issued a Fatwa to prevent anyone from joining the Communist party and he embarrassed Qasim's government by refusing to meet him until the civil rights law was cancelled (Abd al-Jabbar, 2003).

The 1960s eventually brought what is known for both Sunni and Shia, as the 'golden era', because it was a time when the Shia supported and were in accord with Sunni rule (Abd al-Jabbar, 2003). Initially, the Shia clerics were content to be supportive as the communist focus of Qasim's government intellectually and religiously contradicted their views (Abd al-Jabbar, 2003; al-Kifaee, 2010; Nakash, 2003). And Aziz (1993a) that:

> The period of 1964-1968 was considered as the "golden era" for the Shi'ite politics for several reasons: First because the Ba'thist-Arif regime felt indebted to the Shi'i religious establishment for its help in discrediting and ousting Qasim's regime, and second, because the new regime gained legitimacy from the Shi'i leaders who supported their crackdown on Communist forces in the country (p.211).

However, this accord did not last long as Abed al-Salam Arif (the Ba'ath party leader and president of Iraq) died in a plane crash in 1966 in the south of Iraq. His brother, Abed al Rahman became president but the Ba'ath party were waiting for the opportunity to replace him as he was considered a weak leader. The situation resulted in a military coup led by the Ba'ath party and Abdul Rahman was subsequently banished to Turkey (Abd al-Jabbar, 2003; Tripp, 2007). In 1968 a dark, tumultuous era commenced in Iraq as the new government began assassinating opponents and repressive security forces sought to eliminate all political opponents, particularly from the Communist and the Islamic Dawa'a parties (Abd al-Jabbar, 2003). The Shia religious leaders were not consulted regarding policy decision-making and Ba'ath party era actions influenced Al Sistani to stay away from politics. They prevented any

political action by clerics to the extent of imposing house arrest on many, including Al Sistani (Anderson & Stansfield, 2005a).

2.2.5 1968: the beginning of a dark era

Once the new regime established its dominance, it began to undermine the authority of the Najaf Hawaza. The authoritarian practices and persecution of the Ba'ath party included the closing of Al-Jawadayn elementary school and other high schools including the Usul Al-Din Islamic College in Baghdad (Abd al-Jabbar, 2010). These actions were considered by some as the beginning of a dark era for Shia (Maynard, 2005). The Ba'ath party confiscated property and funds set aside for building Al-Kufa university and shut down Risalat Al-Islam, the only religious journal allowed by the government at the time (al-Kifaee, 2010). These events led to increased tensions between the Shia clerics and the Ba'ath regime. This led Muhsin al-Hakim to call on the people to take to the streets in demonstration and the result was a direct clash with the army where many civilians were arrested and later executed (Abd al-Jabbar, 2003). Al-Hakim then encouraged the young Shia to participate in the political process where possible. This call brought the socio-political discourse of the marji'iya (the highest level of the Shia religious authority, organisation and hierarchy) to a new level which was to be highly politically active and engaged (Allawi, 2008).

The Ba'ath regime began personal attacks on Al-Hakim's family by accusing his son, Mahdi, of conspiring against the government, and arrested him along with many Al-Da'awa party members (Uloom, 2009). With the death of Muhsin Al-Hakim in 1970, the hopes of many that someone would stand against the regime and prevent their control died (Allawi, 2008). Nevertheless, opposition from the Mujtahids continued as Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr, the prominent young cleric previously mentioned, became more active in educating and sensitising the people against the government (Aziz, 1993b). It was also notable that he embraced the system of Wilayat-al-faqih, like Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran. 'Ayatollah Sadr was much more politically active than most Iraqi clerics, and Iranian radio broadcasts in Arabic referred to him warmly as the Khomeini of Iraq' (Terrill, 2004, pp. 8-9). The success of the Iranian revolution of 1979 that overthrew the Shah gave him hope for a similar event in Iraq (Aziz, 1993a). The foundation of the new system in Iran marked important events such as the approval of the highest Shia religious authority for the validity of a political system and political actions taken by dedicated and religious Shia individuals through an organised political party: and the direct participation of young religious figures in the political process (Abd al-Jabbar, 2003; Allawi, 2008; Schmidt, 2009b; Tripp, 2007).

2.2.6 1979: Saddam Hussein's regime

In 1979 Saddam Hussein became Iraq's president after the stepping down of Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr for health reasons (Bengio, 2000). Early in 1980 the Ba'ath party executed Mohammed Baqir Al-Sadr, along with his sister, because he supported the new Iranian regime lead by Ayatollah Khomeini (Aziz, 1993a). Baqir Al-Sadr was active in politics and he had openly supported the Ayatollah Khomeini's regime and Wilayat al-faqih principle in Iran. Aziz mentions that 'Sadr's support of the Khomeini crusade against the Ba'athists was considered a threat to the Iraqi regime and dealt with swiftly. Thousands were arrested, and hundreds were executed without trial. As the head of a movement that had gained popular support from the success of the Iranian revolution, Sadr emerged as an anti-government leader and a catalyst for anti-Ba'athist activity, and was regarded by his followers as the 'future Khomeini' of Iraq'(Aziz, 1993b, p. 207). Visser (2006) argues that the danger of cleric interference in politics is that when the cleric issues an opinion or a fatwa, it becomes religiously enforceable by the imitators (his followers). Whoever refrains from carrying out the fatwa is considered an infidel, and an apostate, and the punishment for apostasy is execution. Then Saddam initiated the war against Iran, which continued for eight years causing a lot of economic and social damage to Iraq, and leading to broken relations between the Iraq and Iran Shia societies (Bellini, 2012; Noorbaksh, 2008; Schmidt, 2009a).

After his war with Iran, Saddam Hussein and his regime invaded Kuwait in 1991, leading to the first Gulf War, and Iraq being placed under international sanctions, which worsened the social and economic situation (Bellini, 2012; Tripp, 2007). Then the revolution broke out in southern Iraq. Bellini (2012) mentions that,

> In March 1991, the Iraqi population in Basra and all the cities in the south of Iraq which [had a] Shia majority, then later in Mosul, rose up against Hussein's forces, shouting anti-regime slogans and attacking members of the Ba'ath Party in protest. Within days, the revolts had spread to nearly every major city in Iraq, including Karbala, Najaf, Hilla and Kut (p.63).

While Terrill (2004) says:

> Some of rebels claimed that [there was] a fatwa from al-Khoei calling them to fight against Saddam's government, therefore Saddam's government viewed the clergy as at least partially responsible for instigating the uprising and, thousands of clerics were arrested, and hundreds were executed (p.10).

Then Hussein's regime attacked protestors in the cities of Najaf, Karbala and south of Iraq and eliminated them (Abdullah, 2006).

Al-Khoei had died in 1992 but Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq Al-Sadr, another preeminent cleric, took the lead and played an important role in Iraq's history and its politics as he advised people to attend Friday prayers which he used as a means to take a stand against the government through criticising it (Cockburn, 2008). Raphaeli (2004) points out that:

> Under Saddam Hussein's rule, no religious leader could operate free from the dictator. Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr's relations with the Iraqi president were complex. Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr incorporated the slogan, 'No, No, to America; No, No, to Israel, No, No to devil' into his Friday sermons.

However, Saddam assumed the slogan of "No, No to devil" was a reference to himself (Raphaeli, 2004, p. 33). At that time the other clerics such as Al Sistani did not intervene in politics, therefore Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq Al-Sadr distinguishes between the vocal hawza (an-natiqa) and the silent hawza (as-samita). The vocal hawza represents clerics like himself, who seek an active political role and advocate an Islamic republic in Iraq.

However the silent Hawza has historically rejected the involvement of the Shi'ite clerics in the political life of the country (Raphaeli, 2004). Consequently, Saddam's regime saw Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq Al-Sadr as a threat and assassinated him as well as two of his sons in 1998 in Najaf (Kadhim, 2012a).

From 1998 the Shia political field remained without a clear religious clerical leader as the Ba'ath regime insisted on preventing their political involvements in every way possible until their overthrow in 2003 (Aimami, 2011). That year was an important year in Iraq's history, not only because of the fall of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, but also because the clerics had a chance to take on a political role and to make their ideas on building the new state known. With those emerging clerics came Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Al Sistani (Abd al-Jabbar, 2003; al-Kifaee, 2010; Allawi, 2008).

2.2.7 2003 and the emergence of Al Sistani

Having been present and living through a great range of events, and being a cleric, Al Sistani understood Iraq's history. After the fall of the Saddam regime in 2003 Al Sistani kept an equal distance from both the Iraqis and the western occupiers. Even though he did not meet anyone from the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), he was the first to request that the CPA would organise the elections and let the Iraqis choose their own government (Braam et

al., 2010). Al Sistani insisted that Iraqis themselves, without any external interference, should write the Iraqi constitution. It is notable that Al Sistani did not issue a Fatwa ordering reprisal or action against the Ba'ath party (Allawi, 2008; Bremer, 2006).

After 2003 when the American forces invaded Iraq, Al Sistani was a prominent cleric in Iraq, and his emergence from isolation in spring 2003 was a striking introduction to the political world (Arato, 2004; Fuller, 2009; Terrill, 2004).

Some clerics in Najaf relate that, after the demise of Ayatullah Sayyid Nasrullah Mustanbit (one of the clerics in Najaf), many clerics had suggested to Ayatullah Al-Khoei that he should prepare an appropriate successor by choosing a cleric from the Hawzah of Najaf so that the religious authority would remain alive and effective. al-Kifaee (2010) indicates that:

> The process of becoming a Grand Ayatollah, depends on many academic and non-academic factors. Academically, Al Sistani has to prove his excellence in essential religious topics, which can be demonstrated via three indicators: the number of Ijtihad certificates he has earned and the rank of those who licensed him; the number of students he teaches and the academic value of his writings (pp. 23-24).

Kadhim (2012a) states that:

> Al Sistani is the supreme figure among his peers, the three other major clerics in the country, each of whom also carried the title Grand Ayatollah. Al Sistani came to the fore of the religious scene in Najaf after the death of his mentor and predecessor, Grand Ayatollah Abu al Qasim al Khoei, in 1992, being the most prominent scholar among al Khoei's students (p.10).

There is another sign that Al-Khoei left in his will as a sign of who follow him to lead the Hawza. He wrote: "Ayatullah Al Sistani is performing the prayers on my body" (Abd al-Jabbar, 2003; al-Kifaee, 2010). Kadhim (2012a) indicates that:

> Grand Ayatullah al-Khoei decided in his late years to prepare a successor for the position of the supreme religious authority and the leadership of the Najaf Seminary. The choice fell on Ayatollah Al Sistani for his merits, eligibility, knowledge, and character (p.4).

After that, Al Sistani became marjia and he began to send duties and salaries to the believers, salaries to students of religious sciences, and he taught in the same classroom as Ayatollah Al-Khoei. Owing to his reputation his followers increased rapidly, especially in Iraq, the Persian Gulf region, and India (Uloom, 2009). Then, Ayatollah Al Sistani become

the highest ranking among the mujtahids and scholars throughout the Islamic World, especially in the hawzas of Najaf and Qom (Allawi, 2008).

With this choice Al Sistani became the highest clerics for Shia in the entire world according to the al taqleed principle, especially in Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Afghanistan, and Pakistan (Maynard, 2005). Therefore Saddam attempted to assassinate Al Sistani and his bodyguard was killed in one of the attempts in 1996 (Allawi, 2008).

Al Sistani represented the "quietest school" as he was cautious in dealing with Saddam, did not call others to violence or to rebel against authority and did not argue with other clergy (Diamond, 2006; El Horr, 2012). Instead his focus at that time was just on science, religious teaching and his students. al-Kifaee (2010) mentioned that when Mohammed Reda, Al Sistani's son, had been asked how Al Sistani had practised his work during Saddam's regime, he answered that:

> It was a very scary situation and Al Sistani remained under house arrest for a long time and did not give any excuse to Saddam's government to suppress the Hawza, and he was succeeded in preserving the hawza in a very serious and complicated situation (p.51).

After the coalition forces' invasion of Iraq in 2003, the country was without a prominent leader. This led to the rise of many religious and political figures attempting to seize control (Abdullah, 2006; El Horr, 2012; Noorbaksh, 2008). However, it quickly became clear to Iraqis that a prominent religious leader would occupy the role. Grand Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani began his role in the post-Saddam Iraq by insisting that elections had to be held as soon as possible (Braam et al., 2010).

Initially, the Coalition forces, led by the United States of America, were not fond of Al Sistani as they expected him to be an advocate of religious extremism (Uloom, 2009). He did not deal directly with the coalition forces but rather met, on many occasions, with representatives from the United Nations (Cole, 2006; Ono, 2005; Rahimi, 2007).

Al Sistani tended to be one of the moderate figures in the region. Many of the clerics in Saudi Arabia were calling for a jihad against the USA in Iraq (Abdullah, 2006) while he as a cleric indicated that he intended to use peaceful means to protect the rights of Iraqi people. This was clear when he dealt with occupation forces, thus promoting a different image of Islam (Al-Rahim, 2005; Braam et al., 2010). This was clear from the recommendations he gave to politicians, implying that democracy and freedom is a top priority. And even though he is Iranian, he explicitly rejected the doctrine of Wilayat-al-faqih (al-Kifaee, 2010).

When the United States invaded Iraq in 2003 it formed an Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) with the sectarian composition of Iraq consisting of Sunni, Shia and Kurds in addition to some other minorities (McGarry & O'Leary, 2007). This approach was intended to promote sectarian unity, and it led to all sectors demanding their sectarian rights (Allawi, 2008). Franzén (2012) argues that the religious landscape of Iraq has changed markedly post 2003 and the fact that the society was divided according to sectarian identity was clear in Iraq, particularly when some clerics demanded sectarian rights.

Years have passed now, and much violent sectarian conflict and widespread sectarian hate has filled Iraq, and continues to do so. This is the major reason why some Sunni politicians have criticized Al Sistani's interventions in politics (Cordesman, Davies, & Detwiler, 2007).

The following sections will provide a more detailed examination and synthesis of the literature in seven specific areas, all relevant to the research aims of this thesis.

2.3   SISTANI AND THE 2005 ELECTIONS

This section will shed light on the 2005 Iraqi elections and how they were significant in the Iraqi modern era. It focuses on Al Sistani's call for an election and how the Iraqi people interacted with the idea after decades of dictatorship. It will reveal how Al Sistani's suggestions about the Iraqi constitution were welcomed by some sectors of Iraqi society and reference will be given to the fact that he is Iranian by birth but residing in Iraq.

Elections are a decision-making process, in which the people choose representatives for office. This is the usual method of a modern democracy to fill the seats in the legislative council (Katz, 1997). However, for Iraqis 2005 was not just a time for elections but the end of the dictatorship and the beginning of a new provision to end the factional fighting and start rebuilding Iraq (Feldman, 2005).

There were three elections after the collapse of Saddam's regime. The first election held on the 30th January 2005 was a turning point in Iraqis modern history as it was the first democratic election in 50 years, and showed Iraq desire and self-determination for democracy (Ono, 2005). The second poll was on October 15th 2005. This was a referendum on the Iraqi constitution (Allawi, 2008). The third election was held on the 15th December 2005 to establish a permanent governing body to last for four years.

These elections were a crossroads for Iraqis, Arabs and Americans (Katzman, 2009a). The Iraqi people would prove they believe in the new democratic process. Grand Ayatollah

Al Sistani was the first one who requested the elections, while Sunnis boycotted it (Diamond, 2005; Rahimi, 2004). The participation in these elections has led to a lower level of violence in the past few years, and significant evidence of the faith of the participants in the democratic process in the new Iraq (Gause III, 2005). These elections have also had an impact on the US administration in that their success was considered a major victory for America throughout the world (Visser, 2006). The Arab world viewed the elections with concern, wondering if the hopes and aspirations of the Iraqi people could possibly be reflected throughout the Middle East (Raphaeli, 2005) so that other countries may even move toward democracy.

2.3.1   A history of Iraqi elections

The monarchy formed the first parliament after the completion of the constitutional monarchy in Iraq when it held its first parliamentary election on the 17th of January, 1953 (Abd al-Jabbar, 2010). Nuri al-Said dissolved this parliament as a result of the chaos and controversy resulting from the controversial decision of Iraq to join the Baghdad Pact (Elliot, 1996) which was seen as ' a defensive organization for promoting shared political, military and economic goals founded in 1955 by Turkey, Iraq, Great Britain, Pakistan and Iran' (Sanjian, 1997). Parliamentary elections were held again in 1954, but they were false in the eyes of political observers in terms of preventing Prime Minister Nuri al-Said's political opponents from participating (Simon, 1974). Dissolution of this parliament came with a coup by Abd al-Karim Qasim in 1958, which overthrew the monarchy in Iraq (Grassmuck, 1960).

Elections were held in Iraq after the establishment of the modern Iraqi state early last century, but were not administered correctly, but used to gain factional private power, and were suspended in some periods, as happened during the reign of the Ba'ath and the system of the former dictator (Walker & Clark, 2005).

Then there was Saddam Hussein. He used the elections as a means of perpetuating his place at the helm of government. When voters went to the polls, there was no other candidate and the voter had to vote for Saddam, because if the voter selected "No" then the security authorities would have become involved (Isakhan, 2016).

Grand Ayatollah Al Sistani was the first to demand elections after 2003 (Al-Rahim, 2005; Ono, 2005). Diamond (2006) states that Al Sistani indicated his support for the democratic process in Iraq when he announced that everyone should participate in the elections and considered doing so to be a "religious duty". Shukla (2005) mentioned that:

> Al Sistani's call to the Shia community that voting was more important than even prayers and fasting, inspired a huge Shia turnout. The Shia community was also galvanised by the prospect of capturing power for the first time in modern Iraq (p.150).

Al Sistani declared that the interim assembly delegates, who would shape the nation and form a constitution, ought to be chosen by means of direct election (Diamond (2005) The United States of America initially ignored his requests, stating that the Iraqi people were not ready for any elections after living 24 years under a dictatorship and that there was no true census of the population. Al Sistani suggested using "food cards" for the census to eliminate that problem. Al-Khairalla (2005), Bremer (2006), Cole (2006), Diamond (2006) and Braam et al. (2010) mentioned that after months of ignoring the advice there was a strong opinion from Najaf, voiced by Grand Ayatollah Al Sistani . There was a fatwa in a form of a question to Al Sistani about elections and constitutions. Ono (2005) mentions that this question – addressed to Grand Ayatollah Ali-Al Sistani by a group of his followers on 20th June 2003 – read as follows:

> The Occupation Authorities in Iraq have stated that they have decided to form a council that would write the new Iraqi constitutions; and that they will appoint members to this council in consultations with political and social groups in the country, after which the constitution that will be drafted by the council will be presented for approval by a referendum. Could you inform us of the religious ruling on this project and what believers ought to do regarding the manner in which the new Iraqi constitution is to be drawn (p.20).

Allawi (2007) mention the official answer provided by Al Sistani on 26 June 2003 was:

> Those forces have no jurisdiction whatsoever to appoint members of the constitution preparation assembly. Also there is no guarantee either that this assembly will prepare a constitution that serves the best interests of the Iraqi people or that it expresses their national identity whose backbone is sound Islamic religious and noble social values. The said plan is unacceptable from the outset. First of all there must be a general election so that every Iraqi citizen who is eligible to vote can choose someone to represent [them] in a foundational constitution preparation assembly. Then the drafted constitution can be put to a referendum. All believers must insist on the accomplishment of this crucial matter and contribute to achieving it in the best way possible (p.204).

Al Sistani insisted that any constitution-making body for Iraq should be elected rather than appointed. Moreover, the fatwa signalled a new era of Shi'i religious influence in Iraqi traditional political processes (al-Kifaee, 2010; Feldman & Martinez, 2006; Hawazi, 2008). The United States later agreed and called for direct elections to a constitutional assembly by 15 March 2005, and promised that a national election would be held for a new government by the end of that year (Braam et al., 2010). Al Sistani's fatwa regarding the election had been criticized, because in the west of Iraq – particularly – in the provinces of Anbar, Nineveh, and Salahuddin prior to election day, insurgents repeatedly targeted polling stations and, in leaflets and graffiti, threatened to kill anyone who voted (Ono, 2005). In an effort to try to secure restive Sunni cities in time for the vote, US forces conducted numerous counter insurgency operations in the four months prior to the vote (Conetta, 2005). The US considered Al Sistani's fatwa to vote to be a means of exploitation of these events in order to obtain a new Shia government after Saddam's regime fall (Allawi, 2008). Predominant Shia influence over the new government could further upset Sunni militias who have already vowed to disrupt the election (Duss & Juul, 2009). Before the election four car bombs exploded in Baghdad killing at least 26 people, and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of the Al Qaeda branch in Iraq, claimed responsibility (Fishman, 2006; Katzman, 2009a; Murphy, 2005).

This fatwa was considered by Arab Gulf countries and some western governments as an attempt to make the Iraq regime similar to Iran's. Diamond (2005) mentioned that:

> While it is hard to forecast much about Iraq's election and the country that will arise, the leading Shia cleric and the ayatollahs who follow him may be … planning to remake Iraq in Iran's image, with direct clerical rule that … the USA fears (p. 36).

Lynch (2006) supports the idea that Al Sistani demanded early elections and a more democratic mechanism for choosing Iraqi leaders. Bew (2006) agrees that it was important to get support and the declaration of an advisory opinion (a fatwa) from Al Sistani urging people to broad participation in the elections. Al Sistani's name is linked to the stability of Iraq because he tried continuously to end America's occupation role, through the emphasis on participation in the elections (Jalal, 2014). Abdollahian et al. (2006) support this when they mention that Al Sistani played a big role in the stabilizing of Iraq, and that his absence could cause chaos in Iraq. In addition, an electoral process was announced by Al Sistani stating

explicitly that he had clearly declared his support for the US-led elections to rid Iraq of the occupation and urged Iraqis towards the democratic practice (Katzman, 2009b).

McGarry and O'Leary (2007) argue that writing the Iraqi constitution by Iraqi people and their voting in the elections were the biggest evidence of the features of the democratic transition in Iraq and the Middle East. Katzman (2007) also argues that the increase in the proportion of participants in the democratic process has proved the Iraqi people's desire to move to become a democratic country. From this time, the percentage of people attending elections increased; in January 2005 it was 58%, in December 2005 it was 75%, and for the referendum on the constitution it was 80%, which indicated that Iraqi people supported the democratic process (Katzman, 2007, p. 3).

Al Sistani played a major role in the writing of the constitution. He has insisted that Iraq's new constitution must be in line with Islamic principles, and it should recognize Islam as the nation's religion (Allawi, 2008). This involved much discussion and many questions needed to be addressed, as explained by many authors including McGarry and O'Leary (2007) Walker and Clark (2005) who all stated that the drafting of the constitution was a huge task for the Iraqis who had to face many questions that had concerned Iraq for years. One of these questions which faced the committee writing the constitution is to the question of how to make Islam the single source of law (Brown & Brown, 2005; Rahimi, 2007). The US Government made public its strong concerns about this, implying that making Islam the single source of law might have led to a more strictly Islamic state that precluded secularism (Allawi, 2008; Deeks & Burton, 2007). Iraq has many religions so it is difficult to make Islam the single source. Bremer (2006) argues that whenever the complexity of the negotiation among the committee of the writing of the constitution went to Al Sistani , he had a satisfactory solution for all issues. And Al Sistani suggested that Islam should be only one of the sources of legislation in the new Iraqi state.

Al Sistani is considered to have the largest following among the world's more than 100 million Shia (or Shi'ites). One may wonder why, and in partial answer to this Braam (2010, p. 2) states that Al Sistani is known not only for his immense religious knowledge, 'but also for his influence in the political realm on a number of critical occasions in Iraq's contemporary history'. When the US refused Al Sistani's suggestions, he sometimes invited the people to peaceful demonstrations in order to bolster the significance of his point and to indicate its popularity among the Iraqi Shia majority. The cleric called for the Iraqi people to protest in mid-January 2004. More than 100,000 Shia marched through Baghdad while a further 30,000 took to the streets of Basra (Isakhan, 2013).

2.4   AL SISTANI AND POLITICS

After 2003, Al Sistani's role in the new Iraqi political process became controversial because of Shia theory towards participation in politics. The Shia believed that the "only legitimate states were those ruled by the Prophet Muhammad or one of the twelve infallible Imams. Therefore, all states that did not meet this requirement were considered, in theory, illegitimate" (al-Qarawee, 2017). Moreover, Sachedina (1981) claims that:

> The moderate Shia, who's imams had refrained from active participation in politics, continue to uphold the imamate of the descendants of al Hussain until the line reached to twelfth … (p. 8).

During this time the Iraqi Shia awaited the twelve imam and they continued to hold this position to the present, so that clergy did not participate in any direct political action or hold any political positions of power. Some Iraqis, however adopted Khomeini's model in Iran and worked directly in politics and took responsibility for the results, whether positive or negative (Sachedina, 1981).

Ambassador Paul Bremer, the presidential envoy to Iraq and the senior coalition official overseeing the Coalition's reconstruction efforts and the creation of new institutions and governing structures in Iraq, worked in Iraq for more than a year and faced many challenges during his time, including the struggle between the US's ideas and plans and those of the religious establishment represented by Al Sistani. Bremer (2006) mentioned that transferring sovereignty to the Iraqis should not take place until candidate members wrote the constitution, and he said that Iraqis may not deal well with the democratic process as it is a new feature in their lives. In response to this Lynch (2006) argues that Al Sistani's demands for an early election and the introduction of a more democratic mechanism for Iraqis to choose their leader encouraged them to become democratic. Rubin (2006) also agreed that it was important to use the support and declaration of an advisory fatwa from Al Sistani , which urged the people to participate in the elections.

Ambassador Paul Bremer wrote a book entitled *My Years in Iraq*, in 2006, in which he discussed the problems he faced with the chaos, the emerging militant groups, the spread of terrorism and the disagreements among the different sects. Throughout the book, Bremer wrote about Al Sistani's role and how he faced his objections (Bremer, 2006). Bremer thought that Al Sistani would take on a role in Iraq like that of Ali Khamenei in Iran, and was reluctant to deal with him. However, Al Sistani suggest that Bremer was wrong when he invited the United Nations to come to Iraq to witness and manage the elections, which

Bremer and the United Kingdom Prime Minister Tony Blair welcomed because they wanted to get international legitimacy which they could not get otherwise (Allawi, 2008). Moreover Schmidt argues that a stable assessment of Al Sistani's philosophy is that it was "quietest" but also stated that it was a "serious error of judgment" of the part of the US administration in Iraq to regard Al Sistani as being entirely apolitical (Braam et al., 2010). In fact, 'Al Sistani had managed to formulate some of the more important parameters of the Iraqi democracy, built on an Islamic legitimacy (Schmidt, 2009b, p. 132). Visser argues the Shi'i clergy are not quietist, but rather, they simply do not prefer to take part in the institutions of the state and, as such, tend to remain outside the realm of politics except for the events in which they believe it is critical to interfere. And Al Sistani cannot be identified simply as either "quietist" or "activist" (Visser, 2006).

Many Sunni politicians considered Al Sistani's intervention in politics would make Shia stronger than them, because the new Iraq was a civil state, rather than an Islamic state (Nasr, 2007). This view is supported by some researchers such as Diamond who states that Al Sistani made the Shia majority run the government through his intervention in politics and the Iraqi Sunni Arabs have good reason to fear democracy (Diamond, 2006). And Noorbaksh (2008) mentioned that it was a realistic view that the Sunnis would not only lose much of their political power but they will also become targets for the Shia majority government that will exact official or sanctioned vengeance for the decades of violence done to the Iraqi Shia.

2.5   AL SISTANI'S INFLUENCE IN IRAQ AFTER 2003

This section explores the emergence of Al Sistani's influence in Iraq after 2003 during the occupation. The review outlines how his influence may have altered western perceptions of the role of Muslim clerics, especially regarding the Shia.

No one expected that the United States of America as a Western country would deal with a Muslim cleric and interact with him regarding the new Iraq after 2003. Therefore, expectations have varied since the first intervention of Al Sistani in the Iraqi case. The Westerners considered that the role of Al Sistani in the new Iraq was an enigma for them. Initially they were worried to deal with him as a "Muslim cleric" then they changed attitudes based on his political positions.

Al Sistani's political philosophy was an enigma to westerners for various reasons. Firstly, he refused to meet anyone from CPA, and in fact anyone else remotely connected with the occupation authority while he met many times with the UN representative in Iraq

(Allawi, 2008). Secondly, Al Sistani did not issue a jihad fatwa against the occupying forces, therefore when he was asked to comment on the coalition forces in Iraq, he answered that they were there according to a UN agreement, and he did not encourage Iraqis to use arms against them (Hawazi, 2008). Al Sistani proved to the USA that he could influence the course of the new Iraq, with Buruma (2004) being just one author supporting this:

> Al Sistani has proved in the past that he can muster tens of thousands of protesters to influence the course of the new Iraq. His impact on U.S. efforts to remake Iraq has been enormous. And yet he remains in many ways an enigma, an unseen hand and a powerful force guiding the country who knows where (p.1).

In line with this, Dodge (2005) pointed out if the United States did not take Al Sistani's objections seriously they would be faced with a dilemma. Yes, he was "quietist" but his has ability to influence events is significant.

Al Sistani has forced the U.S. to abandon many of its plans for Iraq's future (Braam et al., 2010). When Washington laid out a lengthy timetable for returning Iraq to self-rule, Al Sistani's objections forced the Bush Administration to deliver a more swift handover instead (Bremer, 2006).

Al Sistani has been heavily criticized by some Sunni and Shia parties for not associating with resistance movements against the Americans when they were in Iraq and for not inflowing the sectarian war in favour of one side against another. But these criticisms were usually directed at him by Islamist parties or groups from outside the religious establishment (Mamouri, 2014).

When US forces occupied Iraq, the Iraqis had just come from the experience of a harsh dictatorship which fought wars until Iraq was in heavy debt. Aimami (2011) mentioned that in many ways Iraqis did not care much about who would rule them next because they believed that any new ruler would be better than Saddam, and when America invaded Iraq they said that they came as liberators. The USA army was a superpower armed with the latest weapons and equipment while the Iraqi people were tired of the siege and injustice and wars, therefore Al Sistani wanted to avoid further bloodshed, murder and fatigue, and get rid of the American and allied occupying forces with negotiations instead of war (Aimami, 2011). The US was thinking that Al Sistani belonged to "quietist school" which does not play a formidable role in politics, but the period after 2003 forced the United States to rethink some of its policies (Braam et al., 2010). Allawi (2008) mentioned that:

Al Sistani muted acquiescence to the presence of foreign troops was not support for the occupation but a pragmatic choice , based on his assessment that this was the Shia historic moment to redress the balance of power inside the country (p.206).

Another aspect of Al Sistani's approach to political issues was the inclusiveness of his actions and words, and this very much increased his credibility in the eyes of the world. An ambassador on behalf of the Catholic Pope mentioned that during his visit to Al Sistani, he thanked him for his protection of Christians in Iraq and for his role in unifying Iraq and its people. Al Sistani had always tried to help the displaced Christians and said throughout the visit that Christians were a part of the people of Iraq and 'we feel pained by what is happening to them and you are in our hearts and not all politicians listen to our words so we urge everyone towards brotherhood and love' (Mamouri, 2014b).

Feldman (2005) agrees that Al Sistani did not order the Shia to retaliate against Sunni Ba'athists or Jihadis who attempted to drag them into a civil war by attacking Shia mosques and massacring civilians. Mamouri (2014a) notes that it was not surprising to see Al Sistani's name as a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize, given his prominent role in deterring religious extremism, promoting forgiveness and peace, and acting wisely during Iraq's occupation and sectarian strife, making him Iraq's ambassador for a safe haven. His absence in such times of distress would have led to far worse humanitarian catastrophes in Iraq.

2.6   AL SISTANI AND DEMOCRACY

While I have previously discussed the role of Al Sistani in broad political terms, in this section I specifically look at Al Sistani's relationship to democracy and investigate the capacity of Iraqis to endorse democracy after Al Sistani had persuaded them that it was their religious duty to take part in the elections. Al Sistani's 'invitation' to vote was an explicit call by him to urge people to exercise democratic values.

Islam and democracy have an unclear relationship as the concept is viewed differently among different Islamic schools of thought, and democracy is thought of differently even between different clerics within each school. Conflicting views also arise from extremist groups, such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS who operate under an Islamic cover, but whose actions in reality oppose the core fundamentals of Islam (Alissa J. Rubin, 2014; Nasr, 2005; Tessler, 2002). In terms of the relationship between Islam and democracy, Islam might be thought of as one barrier to the spread of democracy in the Muslim world, particularly in the Middle

East. Although cases of a de facto separation between Islam and the state took place several times throughout history, Islam could not be ignored in Middle Eastern political decision-making. Islam's undetermined relation with the state is a main reason behind lack of democracy in the region, particularly as a lack of coherent theories regarding the relationship between Islam and democracy enables authoritarian Middle East leaders to manipulate their people (Hawazi, 2008).

Post 2003 when Al Sistani issued a fatwa to convince people to take part in elections was when Al Sistani was first seen by the masses as believing in democracy, but the question was – which type of democracy did Al Sistani believe would be suitable for Iraq (Chaulia, 2007; Rahimi, 2007).

In spite of being inexperienced in the world of politics, Al Sistani proved that with intelligence and good judgement, one can get small things right that can count for a lot and have a major effect (Feldman, 2005).

The democracy that Al Sistani called for has led to two problems arising in the new democratic system in Iraq. First, Iraq was under occupation and Shia were not inclined towards a secularised political system for historical reasons. The Iraqi people who had just lived under a dictator for decades would not accept American democracy and they would not be ready for it (Wimmer, 2003). Second, the political conflict between Sunni, Shia, and Kurdish leaders needed to be resolved to some extent (Wimmer, 2003).

Feldman (2005) discusses the challenges that faced Al Sistani, in the form of people such as Muqtada Al-Sadr and Muhammad Baqir Al-Hakeem, who believe in Wilayat al-faqih and have their own perspective and vision for the new Iraq. Isakhan (2013) states that the strongest cries for democratic elections came from Al Sistani, while other hard-line Islamists like Sadr have utilized the power of mass demonstrations and petitions to frequently challenge the central government. The tension, caused by the different ideologies, escalated in 2004 when unknown forces surrounded Al Sistani's home and demanded he leave Iraq. However, they were unsuccessful because of the speedy mobilisation of Al Sistani's devotees saving the cleric (Chaulia, 2007; Isakhan, 2013).

Feldman (2005) states how by inviting the United Nations to Iraq to witness the elections and the creation of the new government, Al Sistani added legitimacy to the democratic process that Tony Blair and George W Bush could not (Feldman, 2005). Feldman did not however indicate that some of the Iraqis did not participate in the elections because of the militants' presence in their areas, which made Sunni Iraqis unable to participate to their full capacity making the election fatwa not a truly successful push to real democracy after all.

This brings back the question of the extent to which Al Sistani believes in democratic values, including a democracy where one is free to be without a religion and free to participate in activities prohibited by Islam such as drinking alcohol, and whether he would support elections even if they brought in a secular government.

Rahimi wrote a report in 2004 about democracy in Iraq after the war and how Al Sistani collected the people around him and promoted democratic values in the new Iraq. The report described Al Sistani's role as a stabilising pillar for democracy in Iraq and that his role contributed to the building of a new civil society and government (Rahimi, 2004). Friedman also mentioned that if a democracy would develop in the country it would be largely due to the directive of Al Sistani (Friedman, 2005).

Rahimi (2007) indicates that Al Sistani's role advanced the idea of Islam as a source of legal authority and a religion that supports a modern democratic government. He also posed the question of when Al Sistani's political role would cease; whether it was a temporary interaction or whether it would continue and where it would lead the country in the future.

Dawisha (2005) shows concerns when discussing the subject, as since the collapse of Saddam's dictatorship, leading writers on democratic transformation, as well as observers of Arab and Middle East politics, have tended to belittle the chances for a democratic transformation in Iraq, dismissing these as wishful thinking. One main reason for the pessimism is the lack of liberal and democratic traditions in Iraq's political culture and historical experiences. On the other hand, Gerecht (2004) argues that Shia clerics are more likely to spread an acceptable Islamic form of democracy than Muslim moderates or reformists from other sectors and therefore the United States exploited this in carrying out their mission in making Iraq an example in the region.

2.7   AN EVALUATION OF AL SISTANI'S FATWAS

This section outlines Al Sistani's fatwa, which consensus of opinion seems to indicate was intended as a means to rescue Iraq from ISIS groups. This will be discussed from the point of view of various writers and analysts. After ISIS had invaded three Sunni provinces Al Sistani called for a jihad and thousands of people complied. However, this fatwa was criticized by some Sunni politicians who considered it as action that would contribute to or make complex, a sectarian war.

Al Sistani's jihad fatwa, which was issued in 13 June 2014, has been considered as the most important event in the new Iraqi era. The fatwa was heeded by millions of Iraqis, who

considered Grand Ayatollah Al Sistani a spiritual leader. This fatwa called on all Iraqi citizens to defend the country, its people, the honour of its citizens, and its sacred sites. This part of this chapter will shed light on the meaning of 'fatwa' for the Sunnis and Shia and when the Sunni and Shia clerics have a right to issue it. It will also discuss if this fatwa was meant to stir up sectarian strife or to eliminate the Sunnis influence.

The Shia are generally very cautious when speaking about a jihad. The fundamental difference between them and the Sunnis on this subject is that the Shia considers that the call for an offensive jihad is the prerogative of the infallible Imam of the time (Bengio & Litvak, 2014). In current times, the Imam is the Mahdi and the Shia believes that he disappeared in 874 AD and will return at the end of time. In his absence, the religious scholars can only call for a defensive jihad when an aggressive enemy attacks their community or sacred places (Litvak, 2010). In contrast the Sunnis give the power to call for offensive or defensive jihads to the political ruler and the scholars of religion (Khatteeb, 2014). Being consistent with this doctrine, Shia religious scholars have rarely called for a jihad. The few previous calls for jihads were all calls for defence, as it was with the case with the call for a jihad to resist the British invasion of Iraq in 1914. The fatwa by Grand Ayatollah Al Sistani was no different. It was clearly indicating that the call was to 'Citizens to defend the country, its people, the honour of its citizens, and its sacred places' (al-Kadhimi, 2015).

Al Sistani had believed his role had to be minimised, but then suddenly ISIS occupied three cities – Anbar, Mosul and Takirit – and placed the government and people of Iraq in real danger. Dodge (2014) mentions that the Iraqi people had become divided regionally, ideologically and politically. Many groups began to raise their voice to criticise Al Sistani, who remained silent regarding the events unfolding in the country. Then Al Sistani issued one of the most important fatwas in the last 100 years, where he declared a jihad, which required anyone with any military training and who could hold a weapon to join the Iraqi army in their war against the terrorist groups (al-Khafaf, 2015).

Isakhan (2015, p. 224) states that thousands of Iraqi Shia responded to Al Sistani's call that was read by his representative during the Friday Prayer who said it was "the legal and national responsibility of whoever can hold a weapon to hold it to defend the country, the citizens and the holy sites". On the other hand, Schiavenza (2014) argues that although Al Sistani called on all able-bodied Iraqi men, regardless of their religious affiliation, to join the fight against ISIS, his fatwa might actually exacerbate the sectarian tensions that have plagued the country. Brown (2014) explains that instead of defending the safety and security

of the nation, the militias, who were supported by the Government, used the fatwa to attack innocent people.

Mulla (2014), a Sunni cleric, argued that half a million Shia had been killed and mosques and sacred shrines had been destroyed 2005-2008, as was the case with the explosion of the holy shrines in Samarra, and in response to this Al Sistani initially did not issue a fatwa to fight ISIS, but when a Sunni city (Al Mosul) was occupied, Al Sistani issued a Fatwa to fight ISIS according to the following stipulations: first, protect Iraq; second protect Iraqi people; third, defend of the honour of the Iraqi people; and fourth, defend the holy cities.

When the war commenced between ISIS and popular mobilization forces, some Sunni politicians opposed and criticized it because they argued that these forces had in mind revenge against Sunni people. Aal-Kadhimi (2015) points out that there was talk of retaliatory actions by some members of the popular mobilization forces in certain areas, namely in Diyala. Shia residents took revenge on their Sunni neighbours, who had lived with them for years. But as soon as ISIS took control of the area, some Sunnis joined its ranks and confiscated their Shia neighbour's properties. However, Shia volunteers liberated some Sunni areas, while many Sunnis from Salahuddin joined the popular mobilization forces. Iraq's Sunni mufti Sheikh Rafeh al-Rifai, issued a statement calling for a general strike in the six Iraqi provinces with Sunni majorities, threatening dire consequences if such ISIS incursions were to re-occur (Brown, 2014).

The strike did in fact take place on the 10th of October 2014 and included the closure of schools, as well as government institutions and markets in the aforementioned provinces. Meanwhile, Facebook and other websites overflowed with violent and demeaning reactions similar to those that accompanied the instigating event. In contrast, the highest-ranking Shia authority in Iraq, Al Sistani, issued a fatwa condemning the abuse of Sunni sanctities, saying: 'this is to be condemned and denounced, and is contrary to the instructions of Shia Imams'. The Imam al-Khoei Foundation, which is influential among Shia religious circles, issued a statement denouncing events and called for the respect of everyone's sanctities (Mamouri, 2014). Therefore Al Sistani issued recommendations that had the same impact as the fatwa. These recommendations required Shia fighters not to seek revenge and to commit to humanitarian standards during war (al-Khafaf, 2015). This was adhered to, but it was also broken.

2.8   AL SISTANI'S RECOMMENDATIONS

This section examines literature in regard to Al Sistani's recommendations being considered as a humanitarian road map for fighters in how to deal with ISIS, especially in locations where many Iraqis have become victims of ISIS. The section discusses Al Sistani's recommendations and how they reduced sectarian tensions, and contributed to uncovering those who wanted to stir up strife among Iraqis.

Al Sistani's recommendations were considered by some to be more important for Iraq than his fatwa because they provided essential guidelines for those implementing his fatwa – both the existing army and security forces, and for the volunteers – regarding how they should deal with citizens in fighting areas and behave in the battlefield (Al-Rikabi, 2014). Thus, al-Khafaf (2015, p. 405) mentioned that:

> Al Sistani said let the dear fighters know, the ones who have been given the honour to be present in the battlefield against the transgressors, that:
>
> 1- It is necessary, then, to learn these conditions and etiquettes thoroughly and to follow them sincerely, for one who learns these conditions and follows them sincerely will receive his deserved reward and blessings from God, and one who neglects them will not receive [the blessings] he hoped for. [Al Sistani called the believers to Jihad and placed certain conditions and etiquettes on the conduct of the Jihad]. (http://www.Al Sistani .org)
>
> 2- When the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny) wanted to send a fighting contingent, he would sit down with them and advise them to represent God justly and to follow the good example of the religion of the Messenger of God. He would further say, 'Do not indulge in acts of extremism, do not disrespect dead corpses, do not resort to deceit, do not kill an elder, do not kill a child, do not kill a woman, and do no not cut down trees unless necessity dictates otherwise.' (http://www.Al Sistani .org)
>
> 3- (They) should follow guidelines and etiquettes informed [from] the actions of the Imam Ali (d. 661), who, when confronted with such situations, admonished his followers [to follow him]. The Muslim world agreed in unanimity that the actions, guidelines, and etiquettes of the Imam are a worthy example to emulate (http://www.Al Sistani .org).
>
> 4- [Al Sistani induced the fighters not to do what God has not deemed permissible.] What great travesty it is to kill innocent souls, and what great honour it is to safeguard innocent souls, just as God mentioned in His book [the

Qurʾan]: the killing of an innocent soul has dangerous consequences, both in this world and in the hereafter. (http://www.Al Sistani .org)

5- By the majesty of God! The lives of those who do not fight you are sacred, especially the weak among the elderly, the children, and the women, even if they were the families of those who fight you. (http://www.Al Sistani .org)

6- Never inflict harm on non-Muslims, regardless of their religion and sect. The non-Muslims [who live in predominately Muslim lands] are under the protection of the Muslims in those lands. Whosoever attacks non-Muslims is a betrayer and traitor. And rest assured that such an act of betrayal and treachery is one of the most repugnant actions … (http://www.Al Sistani .org)

7- By the majesty of God, do not steal the wealth of people. The wealth of a Muslim is forbidden [to you] unless he agrees to its procurement. Those who usurp from others, they have obtained a piece of fire from the fires of hell. God, exalted as He is, said, 'Those who devour the property of orphans unjustly, devour fire in their bellies, and shall assuredly roast in a blaze.' And in a tradition reported on by the authority of the Prophet, peace be upon him and his progeny, he said, 'Whosoever steals and usurps the wealth of another, God will turn away from him and will not accept and reward him for his good deeds until he repents and returns the possession to their rightful owner.' (http://www.Al Sistani .org)

8- Do not violate the sanctity of any sacred thing. Do not violate or infringe on it with your tongue or action. Be cautious and do not target a person due to the mistakes of others. God, exalted is He, says, 'And no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another.' Do not base [your actions] on suspicions, distorting the certainty. Certainty entails caution and suspicion entails attacking others without proof. Your hatred of someone does not justify that you violate his sanctity, for God says: 'And do not let the hatred of people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness.' (http://www.Al Sistani .org)

9- Do not deprive any people, who do not fight you, of their rights even if they anger you. It has been reported from stories about the life of the commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali (peace be upon him), that he afforded those of other religions the same [respect] he afforded to the Muslims as long as they did not wage war against him. And he would never launch a military assault unless he was attacked first. (http://www.Al Sistani .org).

10- Know that most of those who fight you are victims who have been led astray by others. Do not let those who led others astray be better than you. Let

your righteous actions, your well-wishing nature, your just conduct, your forbearance, and your avoidance of extortion, sin and aggression serve as an example for them. Whosoever helps misguided souls find the path of righteousness is like the one who saves a soul from perdition. And whosoever misguides a person is as if he has killed him. (http://www.Al Sistani .org)

11- Be mentor to the people you meet in battle that they feel secure with you and support you against your enemies. Help the weak among them in whatever you can. They are your brothers and your family. Show compassion towards them just as you show compassion towards your own. Know that you are within God's sight, and that He counts your actions, intents, and your inner dispositions. (http://www.Al Sistani .org)

12- Do not be hasty in situations where caution is required, otherwise you would cast yourself to destruction. Your enemies wish for you to act in haste and improperly in precarious situations and wish for you to rush without taking any precaution and professional advice. Organise yourselves and coordinate with one another. (http://www.Al Sistani .org)

13- Those (civilians) among you should be the well-wishers of the militants, acknowledging their sacrifice and protecting them from evils. They should not be suspicious about them. God has not assigned any right upon others unless he has assigned the same for them. Each of them enjoys equal rights. (http://www.Al Sistani .org)

All these points indicate that Al Sistani's fatwa was to protect all Iraqis regardless of religion or sect.

Iraq's diaspora interacted with this fatwa because they considered it binding as thousands of Iraqis had already heeded Al Sistani's request to fight ISIS forces, who openly declared their intention to massacre Shias and destroy their holy shrines in the cities of Karbala and Najaf (Al-Milani, 2014). Many of these fighters came from different countries to participate with ISIS because they considered it to be a sectarian war against Sunni. Al-Khalif argues that the fight was not a sectarian one between Shia and Sunni but a battle to defend the nation, and that the Shia would struggle and resist all of this until the last drop of blood in their veins (al-Khafaf, 2015).

When Shia Muslims in London heard about Al Sistani's fatwa to oppose ISIS, they prepared themselves to travel to Iraq and participate in the war against ISIS. Al-Milani (2014) claims that initial reporting of Al Sistani's call to arms caused confusion among Muslims in north-west London as some began planning travel arrangements, believing that the

pronouncement was an order for all Shia Muslims around the world to fight. He also states that he called Al Sistani's office in Najaf to enquire about the role of those living outside Iraq and the answer was, 'There is no need for anyone from outside to come and help because the local volunteers were capable of defending the country themselves.'

In Australia the situation was similar because Australia is a multicultural country. Some Australians went to fight with ISIS, while others volunteered against it. Black and Hosen (2009) claim that Australia's Muslims come from over 70 countries, belong to 50 different ethnic or cultural groups, and speak a variety of different languages and dialects, and 48% of this truly multicultural Islamic community are linked by their shared belief in Islam and their adherence to Islamic laws. Brown (2015, p. 2) comments that the Australian Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, said, 'We will do everything we humanly can to stop jihadist terrorists coming into this country and if they do return to this country; we will do everything we reasonably can to ensure that they are not moving amongst the Australian community".

Al-Milani (2014) states that overseas events have an impact on the community in Australia. As an example he said that some countries, such as Saudi Arabia, facilitate the dissemination of their conservative Wahhabi perspective through the financing of Islamic schools and mosques in Australia and invite extremist Muslims to go to Iraq and Syria to carry out clerics' fatwas. Questions raised include whether Al Sistani's fatwa or the reaction against it caused problems in Australia, and whether Muslims in Australia are ready to do everything to follow their clerics? These issues have not yet been addressed in the literature.

After 2003, there was a conflict between Iran and the US about who would have the stronger political influence inside Iraq (Taremi, 2005). ISIS attacked and occupied three provinces and arrived at the border of Baghdad. That encouraged both Iran and the US to help the Iraqi government. Iran was suffering from economic sanctions because of their nuclear program, and their priority was to ensure that Iraq would never invade it again (Finn, 2004). To that end, Iran has focused on establishing a Shia-dominated government in Baghdad that is friendly to Tehran. It has also cultivated Shia political networks in Iraq and created a number of powerful Shia militias. As a result, Iraq has become a clear Iranian ally and a major trading partner. This has tipped the strategic balance of power in the region in favour of Iran and against its rival, Saudi Arabia. Moreover, since the first day of the battle with ISIS, Iran has sent an army of experts to Iraq because of the collapse of the military establishment (Mamouri, 2014).

The US helped the Iraq government by providing military assistance. However, the question is whether Al Sistani Fatwa has helped these two countries to work together for the

stability of Iraq (Al-Rikabi, 2014). The enormity and seriousness of the ISIS threat on Iraq has also brought the United States and Iran onto the same strategic side. Shared interests in the stability of Iraq and the need to eradicate terrorists created a significant opening for cooperation between the two countries. Al Sistani, by his fatwa, cut the connection with both Iran and America, and made Iraqis depend more on themselves. At the same time, this Fatwa was a clear political message to Iraqi's neighbours, the Gulf countries and Turkey, that if they continued to fund and sponsor extremist Sunni militant groups, the leadership of the Shia Muslim world would no longer stand idly by – that if a fight is inevitable, the Shia are ready (Al-Rikabi, 2014).

2.9   AL SISTANI'S MESSAGE TO THE POLITICIANS

This part of the literature review explores Al Sistani's message to the politicians after they disputed the validity of the form of the new government. His message may have solved problems, but at the same time it was subject to criticism because some Shia politicians considered it as applying the Wilayat al faqih principle in Iraq (Al-Qarawee, 2016).

In April 2014 held elections to choose new Iraqi government. These elections resulted in the Dawlat Al-Qanoon political group (State of Law), an Iraqi party to whom Al Maliki belonged acquiring the largest number of seats in parliament. However, many politicians objected to allowing the incumbent prime minister, Nuri Al Maliki, to form the new government (Al-Qarawee, 2016) . Al Sistani then gave a message to the Iraqi people and it was this message that was very influential in causing Nuri Al Maliki to step down and not take office as the incumbent prime minister.

External pressure from neighbouring Arab countries and the west also affected the appointing of Al Maliki and that led to unrest in the country. This unrest motivated Al Sistani's representative, Sheikh Abdul Mahdi Al Karabali, to start hinting at the need for a change in the government through the Friday prayer sermons (Chivers, 2014). Consequently, Ban Ki Moon, the United Nations Secretary General, visited Iraq and met with Al Sistani in Najaf to discuss the situation (Al-Qarawee, 2016). It has also been revealed that members of Dawlat Al-Qanoon had previously sent a letter seeking Al Sistani's opinion and guidance regarding the formation of the government. The letter was answered by Al Sistani with a suggestion to change their candidate for the prime ministerial position to decrease political conflicts as the country, particularly while Iraq was facing the danger from the ISIS (Chivers,

2014). Subsequently, Maliki stepped down as a result of actions taken by a number of the Dawlat Al-Qanoon party members, following Al Sistani's opinion.

Some of the Dawlat Al-Qanoon members criticized Al Sistani because of his message to politicians and they considered it as a type of the Wilayat al faqih that Al Sistani claimed he did not believe in it. Mamouri (2014b) mentions that Al Maliki said 'no one had the right to make him step down from forming the new Iraqi government and he sent a message to Al Sistani asking him to take care of his followers instead of intervening in politics'. Al Maliki considered himself the winner because he had 105 seats from the 328 parliamentary seats. Another member of Dawlat Al-Qanoon, Hanan Al Fatlawi, declared that 'our country since 2003 followed the democratic process to build a democratic country depending on elections to form the government, the intervention of any cleric in politics is not acceptable because Iraq is not like Iran'.

Mamouri (2014) argues that when it came to the recent crisis, it would have been easy for Al Sistani to call for Al Maliki to step down through the Shia the parties in the parliament that were affiliated with him, or by calling on civil disobedience which would have led to the toppling of Al Maliki within a few hours. Al Sistani, however, called on Al Maliki to step down and did not ask the Shia opposition to take a strong stance that would render the situation more tense than it already was. Moreover, Al Sistani did not intervene in the political agreements between the parties and coalitions. He did so to avoid contradicting his principles regarding intervention in politics (Khatteeb, 2014).

2.10   CHAPTER SUMMARY

The literature shows that Al Sistani's ideas regarding the first Iraqi election after 2003 were a remarkable point in Iraqi history, particularly now that the nation was rid of Saddam's government which had subjected the Iraqi people to oppression for decades.

Al Sistani's intervention in politics raises many questions because most Shia theory about intervention in politics states that a cleric should not participate in politics. The Sunnis were not convinced of the legitimacy of Al Sistani's interference in politics so they did not take part in the first election and considered it illegitimate.

The principle of democracy is not familiar to most Muslim, or Muslim countries, with some democratic values being forbidden in these countries. These values include personal freedom, political freedom, equality, and Popular Sovereignty (El-Shibiny, 2010). Al Sistani however believes in these values and encouraged the people of Iraq to be free in choosing

their parliamentary representatives. Moreover, he advised the Iraqi politicians to be committed to the constitution. Thus it can be said that Al Sistani was influential in establishing the nucleus of a new democratic country in the Middle East (Rahimi, 2007).

During the last century, the hawza (seminary) of Najaf where the prominent Shia clergy lived faced difficult circumstances and challenges. Oppressive and authoritarian methods during Saddam's rule had limited the role of the Najaf hawza to teaching Islamic sciences without giving any opinion or participating in any political activity (al-Kifaee, 2010).

Al Sistani's Fatwa was not against any of Iraqi sects (al-Khafaf, 2015), but it was a reaction against ISIS groups who committed brutal acts of murder and displacement as well as punishing people on the basis of their religion. Al Sistani issued instructions and recommendations to volunteers urging them to respect human rights and deal gently even with the enemy. He advised them not to undertake any reprisals which could cause hatred among Iraqis. Al Sistani presented his advice when politicians asked him about his opinion regarding the new Iraqi prime minister after the 2013 elections. He had an extensive knowledge of Iraqi affairs, therefore his advice was comparable to that of most Iraqi party members who also did not want Al Maliki to be the Prime Minister. Moreover, Al Sistani also understood Middle Eastern affairs and indicated his prowess by removing the sectarian tension among Iraq's neighbours by choosing a new prime minister.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This study uses a qualitative approach to obtain, analyse and interpret data from research participants regarding Al Sistani's role in Iraq after 2003. Two different data collection methods are used in order to obtain direct and authentic data helpful to dealing with the research questions. The first method is to interview the participants. The second is to examine Al Sistani's texts. The in-depth interviews focusing on the role of Al Sistani in Iraqi political life were conducted by means of direct and open dialogue and conversations with the participants within the framework of one-on-one interview sessions. Through these conversations their opinions, beliefs, and perspectives about Al Sistani's role in Iraq after 2003 were explored (as explained in further detail later in this chapter).

This chapter provides all details of the methodology used in regard to the preparation and carrying out of this study, including the data collection and its analysis. The chapter concludes by discussing the researcher's ethical considerations and the limitations of the study.

3.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Although I am a citizen of Iraq, and a Shia Muslim, for the purpose of this research I am foremost a researcher. According to the conventions of qualitative research, I will allow the research and opinions of those I interview to be presented freely, and as free as possible from any influence and bias based on my own religious and cultural views. Doing so allows the reader to understand all opinions from both sides, Sunnis and Shias, and for this thesis to provide a clear image of how people understand Al Sistani's role in Iraq after 2003. Regarding access to Al Sistani's opinion, it should be acknowledged that he did not specifically address most of the questions about himself or his influence – the questions addressed in the interviews of others – during press interviews or through books issued by his office regarding Iraq's political affairs. The reasons for this are unclear. Therefore, this research primarily dealt with these questions and discussed them with the interviewees.

This research investigates the attitudes and perceptions of a sample of Shia and Sunni participants, who volunteered to take part in the study and present their perspectives of Al Sistani's intervention in political issues, and their views whether or not Iraqi people approve

of this intervention. Thus, this research goes some way toward exploring the extent of Al Sistani's effect on Iraqi society. Many events were occurring at the time of Al Sistani's interventions in politics, thus it is a complex issue to design a study to research and analyse these events and the Al Sistani phenomenon in order to identify whether the Iraqi people (Sunnis and Shia) agree with his actions or not. The researcher will use a method by which he gains knowledge and can plan to carry out this research.

Qualitative research is the field of inquiry that encompasses multiple epistemological positions and data collection methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of social - political phenomena in their natural setting (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Guest, Namey, and Mitchell (2012) argue that 'the strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide information about the "human" side of an issue, "… that is, the often contradictory behaviours, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals' (p. 3).

In the present study, the researcher employs a qualitative design method for a number of reasons. First, this research is about opinions and viewpoints – thoughts that come out of the lived experiences of those being interviewed. In general, the Iraqis have a range of opinions regarding Al Sistani. Some believe he is or was the saviour of Iraq who prevented the country when falling into civil war – a leader perhaps of the calibre of Nelson Mandela. As well as this, it can be generalised that the Iraqi sects (the Sunni and the Shia) also have different beliefs in Al Sistani. With data of this kind being analysed, researchers such as Neuman (2002), for example, insist that qualitative research is most appropriate as it studies social structures and the relation of a society's inhabitants to their surroundings. Secondly, as Hawazi (2008) suggests, another reason for choosing the qualitative method is that it is most suitable for addressing certain questions about culture and power. For reasons such as these I have chosen qualitative research as the most appropriate for studying perceptions of Al Sistani.

The qualitative approach is appropriate as it allows the researcher to become integrated into the natural environment of the problem in order to provide fruitful explanations as well as comprehensive understandings. Furthermore, the use of qualitative research allows the researcher to use interviews and other various data collection methods to obtain a significant amount of data for finding comprehensive answers to the research questions. It also helps the researcher to compare the source of one set of data against another to ensure the validity (or trustworthiness) of the research.

Bruce and Berg (2001) believe that qualitative researchers are more interested in 'how humans arrange themselves and their settings and how inhabitants of these settings make

sense of their surroundings through symbols, rituals, social structures, social roles, and so forth' (p.87).

One criticism against qualitative research is that may lack reliability and validity as small scale sampling makes it difficult to generalise (Golafshani, 2003). This could be for reasons such as the number of those surveyed. Analysis based on the small number of participants used in this research may not reflect the views of the wider population, or the views on Sunnis and Shia generally. Another point of criticism concerns ethical issues in qualitative inquiry, for example the dynamics of the power relations between the researcher and participants (Berg & Lune, 2004). One may question if the presence of the researcher – and his viewpoints – has an effect on the data gathered.

In regard to possible bias on behalf of the researcher, while I am a citizen of Iraq, and a Shia Muslim, during the conducting of this research I constantly reminded myself of what I regarded as an important role of the qualitative researcher. This was to remain reflectively vigilant of potential personal bias and to constantly strive for an appropriate position of neutrality. While there is an unlikelihood of complete freedom from religious and cultural views, I strove to consistently monitor my subjective positioning when communicating with participants. I recognised that for the purpose of conducting ethical research, one should strive to not judge from the standpoint of one's own beliefs and assumptions but to be empathetic to the religion and culture of the other. In addition, the reduction of bias was assisted through the strategic selection of interview questions and I sought to allow the opinions, responses and 'voice' of all participants to speak for them.

3.3   DATA COLLECTION

This research employs two methods of gathering data. The first method is through the use of semi-structured qualitative interviews. The second is through textual analysis of written data stemming either directly from Al Sistani, or through his organisations.

3.3.1. Data collection methodology: the interview

Minichiello, Aroni, and Hays (2008) define the interview as 'a means of gaining access to information of different kinds by asking questions in direct face-to-face interaction' (p.21). In qualitative research interviews are typically open-ended. This means that the questions asked require an extended answer and allow the person being interviewed to choose their own words, decide what their responses to the question(s) will be, and decide how extensively they will answer the question. It allows each participant to freely respond in their own words

to the open-ended questions (Tracy, 2012). Of course, the qualitative interview is more than a question and answer event. The interviewer also can make decisions throughout the process, perhaps being responsive in turn to the responses of the interviewee.

The semi-structured qualitative interview is typically a flexible method of gathering data. It allows for greater spontaneity, as well as an adapting interaction between the researcher and the study participants in order to obtain more details (Bruce & Berg, 2001). Patton (2002) indicates that 'in qualitative research, people use interviews to find information that usually cannot be uncovered just by observation. Furthermore, he adds that researchers cannot observe feelings, thoughts or even situations that preclude the presence of an observer' (p.265). Therefore the interview tends to be a suitable tool in allowing researchers to interact freely with the interviewees to gain an in-depth understanding of their feelings, thoughts and perspectives (Patton, 2002, p. 265). For a subject like Al Sistani's role in Iraq, the researcher needs to enable the participants to be comfortable and relaxed, in order to have the best opportunity of eliciting information and ideas. Thus Liamputtong (2009) argues that semi-structured interviews provide a more relaxed atmosphere in which people may feel more comfortable having a conversation as opposed to filling out a survey.

Importantly, in this research effort was made through creating a peaceful, unhurried atmosphere to enable the participants to be comfortable and relaxed in order to have the best opportunity of eliciting information and ideas. Part of doing this involved creating a relaxed and congenial atmosphere using collegial dialogue and a conversational style of interaction. This helped the interpersonal development of meanings and ideas, a valued outcome as it was important that opinions, beliefs, and perspectives could be shared and explored.

3.3.2. Data collection in this research

For this research – as in all research – the data collection must be appropriate for the investigation, for gathering the information required to explore and discuss the research questions. As stated earlier, data collection in this research involved two sources.

The first source: interviews of Iraqis in Australia

The first method used to collect the data was interviews (discussion interviews). These interviews were conducted to gather information and opinions from others regarding the following questions relating to the research:

- Why did Al Sistani issue an election Fatwa in 2004 while most of the Sunni areas were suffering from terrorism and therefore could not participate in elections?

- Why did Al Sistani issue a Jihad Fatwa against ISIS but not against American occupation forces when they invaded Iraq?

- Does Al Sistani support democracy?

- What is the attitude of the Iraqi diaspora in Australia to Al Sistani, and to what extent do they follow his leadership?

Note, these questions were carefully shaped to achieve the aim of gathering information to address the three primary research questions:

Selection of interviewees

I conducted interviews with nine participants in Australia and five in London. These included Iraqi international students and some of their partners from the Sunni and Shia sects at the University of Southern Queensland who had recently come to Australia (both men and women) as well as interviewing one Australian cleric.

Certain criteria were used for selecting suitable participants. One of them was that the participants who took part in this study had to be Iraqi citizens because the subject of research is Iraqi affairs. They also needed to be representative of different ethnic backgrounds, including the two Iraqi major sects (Sunni and Shia). The cultural knowledge of the participants was also significant – so it was important to select participants from a wide range of backgrounds. This was not easy to do in London, where it turned out that all five participants were Shia, and either politicians or clerics. However, in Australia – where I found many Iraqis interested in this research by "word of mouth" – I chose participants with various characteristics including students and their partners, clerics, intellectuals with Islamist leanings or with secular leanings. I also chose a mixture of both educated and much less educated participants.

The purpose of choosing participants from varying backgrounds was to get a variety of viewpoints. I also tried to achieve reasonable gender balance and there were 10 men and 4 women. This was done as I wanted to hear voices of women as well as men because they have different roles in Arab society, and may have varying viewpoints. Although I did my best to choose an unbiased selection of interviewees, the selection was not random and was made by myself.

In the face-to-face interviews with the Iraqis who came to Australia at the beginning of this study, I asked many "open-ended" questions, mainly relating to Iraq and Al Sistani's role after the year 2003. The questions were prepared beforehand, and designed to obtain thoughts and responses relevant to the three research questions:

1. To what extent do Iraqi people accept Al Sistani's role as a cleric with political influence? Do they approve of his approach to political intervention?

2. Do Iraqis see Al Sistani as holding special hope for Iraq in regard to the nation's problems, and to how Iraq is viewed by the rest of the world?

3. How does Al Sistani himself see his role?

The questions were carefully designed. Many of them are "leading" questions – they were designed to stir a response in the participants. It was felt that this was more likely to trigger a frank and open response from the participants rather than if asked a more generalised questions. For example, the question: "Are the Iraqi people ready to become a democratic country, as Al Sistani wants, after years of tyranny and injustice?" might be considered to be a question to cause the interviewees to think this the viewpoint of the researcher. However, it was felt that the question asked was more likely to trigger a reaction that would provide an honest answer.

Throughout the interviews I do not believe there was any animosity felt by the participants – whether Sunni or Shia– toward myself, the interviewer, based on any perceptions of my beliefs or viewpoints. The mood of the interviews was very much a mood of mutual respect, where it was felt that the participants realised they could speak with freedom and confidentiality.

The interview questions were numerous and changed from one participant to another. Sometimes certain questions were asked in a different way, sometimes they were not asked at all, and on other occasions totally different questions were spontaneously asked, according to my perceptions as the interviewer as to what questions might best obtain helpful information about the primary research questions and the sub-questions.

A large number of interview questions were used. The following questions were considered to be the most relevant:

The 2005 elections:

- Was Al Sistani right when he invited Iraqis to participate in the 2005 elections?

- Why did Al Sistani invite people to hold an election while Sunni provinces were being attacked by terrorists?
- What is the difference between Al Sistani's interventions and the doctrine of Wilayat al faqih [the guardianship of the jurist, as proposed by Ayatollah Khomeini]?
- Do the Sunnis think that Al Sistani's interventions in politics are an attempt by Al Sistani or Shia clerics to obtain more power?

Regarding democracy:

- Does Al Sistani support democracy?
- What is the point of view of Shia clerics towards democracy?
- Are the Iraqi people ready to become a democratic country?
- How satisfied are the different sects (overall) with Al Sistani ?

Al Sistani's fatwa against ISIS:

- Why did Al Sistani not issue a fatwa against the US when they occupied Iraq while he did issue a fatwa against ISIS?
- Is this fatwa really against the Sunnis?
- Does this fatwa interfere in the political affairs of Iraq?
- Is this fatwa an agreement between Al Sistani and Iran?

Al Sistani and the forming of the new Iraqi government:

- Did Al Sistani contribute to the ousting of al-Maliki from power?
- Were Al Sistani's interventions in politics justified?

Preparing for the interviews

Before conducting interviews with the participants, I collected information about them on matters such as when they came to Australia, because their time of arrival was very important in indicating the scale and currency of the information possessed by the participants. Knowing if the participants are Shia or Sunnis also helped to achieve a balance between them. Knowledge of their cultural background – whether they have Islamic or secular leanings – was also very important in order to obtain diverse perspectives. Moreover, before conducting the interview.

The interviews were considered 'elite interviews' as they were designed to collect data through asking different types of questions: tightly structured, semi-structured and open-ended questions. However elite interviewers are best suited to semi-structured and open-ended questions. Berry (2002) claim that this is:

> Because they allow [the interviewees] to express their opinions in all their complexity, creating greater comfort with the subsequent 'straightjacket' closed questions which will allow for greater detail and may include time-specific or contextual questions (p.679).

Open-ended questions create an effective interview because a good interviewer is not one who writes the best questions but the one who is an excellent conversationalist (Peabody et al., 1990), and this is what open-ended questions do – they stimulate conversation. These types of interviews also require more preparation, however, making them more complex, but also more enjoyable and effective.

Preparation includes writing official letters and correspondence to explain the research project to the respondents. It also includes providing sample questions and setting the ground rules for the interview, which will make the respondents feel secure, relaxed, and comfortable (Rivera, Kozyreva, & Sarovskii, 2002). Furthermore, open-ended questions provide rich data because the information they give is first-hand, authentic, directly from those involved – the decision makers – including Al Sistani (via intermediaries) and Iraqi politicians in this research – which allows a rich understanding of their actions and positions.

Conducting the interviews

Between the December 1, 2016 and May 10 2016 I interviewed 9 Iraqis living in Australia. Six of these were men, and three were women (the partners/wives of some of the men). The interviews occurred in the homes of the subjects in Toowoomba and Brisbane. Details of the participants follow.

At the beginning of each session I explained to the interviewee the purpose of the project. Then I asked for permission to record the interview, explaining that I preferred to record it because I wanted to be more focused during interview, without being overly concerned with taking written notes.

In preparation I had prepared a list of questions. Not all questions were asked, and new questions were sometimes created during the course of the interview if this was found to be appropriate – depending on how the interviewee responded to previous questions.

Not all those interviewed allowed the recording of the sessions. For those who didn't, I kept very busytaking written notes. The length of the interviews was 45 minutes to 1 hour.

The interviews with the five London subjects were conducted in a similar fashion, in London between March 17 and March 21 2015 - the coding system will be explained in part 4.2.2 . All interviews were conducted in Arabic.

Profiles of the Australian interviewees

Australian men (6 in total)

1MSuJ is a Sunni from Mosul who emigrated to Australia via the Australian embassy in Jordan in 2012. He worked as a teacher and was married with three children. He left Iraq with his family during 2012 after receiving threats from Sunni militant groups. (Interviewed December 1, 2015 in Brisbane.)

2MSuSt is a Sunni international student who came to Australia from Mosul in 2008 to study a PhD in Mechanical Engineering. He was keen to take part in this study because he thinks that the role of cleric should not be very influential in the new Iraq. (Interviewed January 19, 2016 in Toowoomba.)

3MShP is a Shia doctor who left Iraq initially in 1994 to go to Syria because of his opposition to Saddam's regime. He then migrated to Australia in 1996. He was elected as President of the Iraqis community in Australia on a number of occasions. He travels to Iraq every year to assist humanitarian organizations with charity projects. (Interviewed March 7, 2016 in Brisbane.)

4MShCl is a Shia cleric living in Australia. He left Iraq in 1991 then returned in 2003. He has been very active in the Islamic community in Australia, and in encouraging people to support the new Iraqi political process after 2003. (Interviewed February 6, 2016 in Brisbane.)

5MKuP is a Kurd (the only one in this research) who emigrated from Iraq for Syria in 1991, then immigrated to Australia in 2006. He has a Bachelor of Islamic Science from one of the Syrian universities. His beliefs lean towards secularism, and he did not believe in any role for clerics in the new Iraq. (Interviewed May 10, 2016 in Brisbane.)

6MSuSt is a Sunni international student who came to Australia from Mosul in 2012 to study for a PhD in Economics. He was very happy to take part in this study because he believes that his sect was a victim after 2003, and because he disapproves of clerics' interventions in politics. (Interviewed December 26, 2015 in Toowoomba.)

Australian women (3 in total)

7FShT is a woman from Baghdad who worked as an oil engineer. She came to Australia in 2012 with her husband who was international student. This woman does not believe in any role for clerics in the new Iraq, thus her ideas were close to secularism. (Interviewed May 5, 2016 in Brisbane.)

8FShSt is a single Sunni woman from Baghdad who came to Australia in 2013 as an international student to study for a PhD in Administration and Economics. She lived in Iraq during the sectarian conflict between 2005 to 2008, and was very motivated to participate in this research. (Interviewed December 28, 2015 in Toowoomba.)

9FSuHw is a Sunni woman who came to Australia from Ramadi in the west of Iraq in 2012 with her husband, who was an international student. She lived in Iraq during the sectarian

conflict between the Sunni and the Shia and some her family were killed by the rebels in those areas. (Interviewed December 24, 2015 in Toowoomba.)

Profiles of the London interviewees

London men (5 in total)

10MShP is the code for, an Iraqi politician who left Iraq in 1979 because of his opposition to Saddam's regime. He lived few years in Iran then emigrated to Britain. When Saddam's regime fell, he returned to Iraq to become one of those involved in writing the Iraqi constitution, and he had direct contact with Al Sistani's office to get any notes regarding this. He was Minister of National Reconciliation and acting Minister of Agriculture during Al Maliki's first government. (Interviewed March 21, 2016 in London.)

11MShCl is the code for Al Sistani's brother in law and responsible of most of Al Sistani's office in Europe and North America. He is also manager of the Imam Ali Foundation at Al Sistani's main office in London. He has been undertaking various roles such as providing general Islamic guidance to the Muslim communities in the UK, Europe and North America. He is also responsible for informing all of these offices regarding any updates coming from Al Sistani's office in Najaf. (Interviewed March 17, 2015 in London.)

12MShCl is a representative of a famous Iraqi cleric in London and he is an important Islamic figure in Britain. He has had published many Islamic and political works that deal with Iraqi affairs. He also runs an important Islamic institution in London and has undertaken many activities for the Iraqi community in London. He was appreciated for his participation in this research because of his long experience working with the clergy as well as his extensive knowledge of Iraqi affairs after 2003. (Interviewed March 20, 2015 in London.)

13MShP is an Iraqi politician who left Iraq in the 1980s and who has undertaken many Islamic studies. He worked as a lecturer in philosophy in various Arab countries, and he has been a keen follower of Iraqi Islamic affairs after 2003. (Interviewed March 19, 2015 in London.)

14MShP is an Iraqi politician who left Iraq in 1980 because of his opposition to Saddam's regime. He completed a PhD in social sciences from a Hungarian Universities. He came back to Iraq after 2003 to participate in the electoral campaigns of 2010 and 2014, but did not win. He is poet and an author who has written many articles regarding Iraqi affairs. He believes in the separation of religion from politics. (Interviewed March 18, 2015 in London.)

The second source: Al Sistani

The second method used to collect data for this research was planned to involve the collection of data from Al Sistani first-hand and then to provide an academic assessment of this data myself. The plan was to gather first-hand preliminary data by interviewing Al Sistani in person. Then I would examine and analyse this data.

This is not unlike undertaking a literature review, which would then be followed by a very thorough critical analysis. Part of this analysis would involve gathering data that I would use side-by-side with the interviewees' responses to discuss the primary research questions.

Thus, there would be two means in this research of exploring answers to the four questions listed: one, by interviewing others; two, by seeking primary contact with Al Sistani and then assessing the data gathered from this. Gathering the data by these means, I would have the opportunity to explore the thoughts of a small number of Iraqis – those interviewed, and Al Sistani himself. To gather this data, my plan was to meet personally with Al Sistani, and ask him the same questions I asked the subjects I interviewed. I would then examine the data gathered and endeavour to pass impartial judgements and insights into what I had uncovered.

However, I was unable to organise a meeting with Al Sistani. Instead, I depended on several related sources for data collection. These were:

1. I travelled to London to meet with one of most important representatives of Al Sistani in Europe – his brother-in-law, Mortada Al Kishmeri. He is manager of all Al Sistani's offices in Europe and he coordinates with Al Sistani's office in Najaf (Rahimi, 2007). This office in London was very helpful in pointing me in different directions to gather data.

2. The second principal source I used to access Al Sistani is a book (in three parts) called *Texts issued by his Eminence Al Sistani on the Iraq issue.* These books have been written by Hamid al-Khafaf (in 2005, 2007, and 2015) and they are recognized by Al Sistani office in Najaf. al-Khafaf is Al Sistani's representative in Lebanon and considered to be Al Sistani's spokesperson (Rizvi, 2010). He is also a brother-in-law of Al Sistani. These books contain all Fatwas and texts which Al Sistani issued from 2003 until 2015. They also include most of Al Sistani's interviews with journalists.

3. A third source used was the website of the Najaf School at http://www.najaf.org This is perhaps the most reliable source from which texts can be cited. Al Sistani's literature is well organized (and detailed here better than anywhere else) by the administrators of this site. Al Sistani's own website http://www.Al Sistani .org, is as reliable as www.najaf.org. However, I chose the former to use as http://www.najaf.org has designated a whole section for Al Sistani's statements, Fatwas, answers to questions, and correspondence.

4. A fourth source was a book authored by Al Sistani he called *Jurisprudence for Diaspora.* Al Sistani was very interested in the diaspora. This book explains for expatriates matters concerning jurisprudence and religion. As we have said, Al Sistani tends to taqlid theory, therefore expatriates might tend to follow everything

that comes from Al Sistani concerning political issues. It is important to know the diaspora's opinion regarding Al Sistani's intervention in politics. This book offers much information in this area.

Travelling to London and seeking (and undertaking) interviews with the participants and others whom I met and sought out led to a 'snowballing' effect where I was provided with information that could contribute to the study, or to other participants through their social networks (Guest et al., 2012). This is how I met with Al Sistani's associates, and with politicians, scholars and people opposing Al Sistani's ideas. For example, when I met with 11MShCl, he advised me to meet 13MShP, who became another very good source of data.

Throughout Al Sistani's years in Iraq, he did not do any TV interviews, but he did meet with journalists. Al Sistani's refusal to make public appearances and/or public speeches has made some people, particularly Sunnis, sceptical of him. Iraqi Sunnis might think Al Sistani is not sincere in his calls as they observe the continuity of violence in Iraq (Fuller, 2009). Thus, it has been important to examine his own words through his public announcements and interviews.

I critically evaluated the texts and fatwas from three perspectives. I created three sections in my note taking that represented three different aspects of the meanings of these texts and fatwas. These sections are labelled: description of the text, personal meaning, and textual meaning. 'Description of the text' explains Al Sistani's own view. 'Personal meaning' reflects my own interpretation of Al Sistani's writings. 'Textual meaning' refers to the meaning of the text, as perceived according to my best interpretation. Undertaking this process – although such an undertaking might not be apparent in the analysis – helped significantly in allowing me to conduct this study with a minimum of bias, and maximum opportunity for uncovering data.

3.4   DIFFICULTIES FACED BY THE RESEARCHER

Ethical approval for this project was granted by the University of Southern Queensland Human Research Ethics Committee (USQHREC). However, despite this, and my endeavours to avoid potential ethical issues, there are some limitations in my research. Many of these difficulties involved Al Sistani's growing popularity. Al Sistani became a global phenomenon, and particularly a holy man to the Shia of Iraq. There was a reluctance to criticise him or accuse him regarding his political interventions in the Iraq issues.

3.4.1. Selection of participants

Initially the intention was to travel to Iraq to interview Al Sistani himself, as well as Iraqi politicians, academics with political interests, journalists, and 'normal' people from the two major Iraqi sects (Sunni, and Shia) with the purpose being to examine Al Sistani's role after 2003.

However, after 2014 when the war broke out between Iraqi forces and ISIS, for security reasons the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) issued warnings about going to Iraq. Consequently, the university informed me that I couldn't go to Iraq to conduct this study.

I also attempted to interview the Kurds, another significant Iraqi sect, but the Kurds refused the idea, arguing that Al Sistani did not influence their political life in Kurdistan. Most of them (the Kurds) consider themselves as not belonging to Iraq, and so they have paid minimal attention to Al Sistani and the concerns of this study. In addition, Kurds are prouder of their nationalism than their religion, and they have been exercising autonomy since 1991.

3.4.2. Fear of recrimination

Although not everyone knows a lot about Al Sistani, in the Muslim world he is well-known, and among Iraqis everyone knows of him and much about what he does and has done, especially politically. He has something like what the Western world would call a 'cult following', particularly among Shia. He has millions of followers and supporters; thus it is difficult to criticize him.

No matter what one's thoughts are, we tend to shy away from potential conflict and ridicule – so we often keep quiet when we perceive our opinion as being in the minority. And if we are part of a large majority with the same opinion, there can often be a lack of tolerance, and even an unwillingness to hear from those with an opposing viewpoint. There were many people and politicians who refused to do an interview with the researcher for this reason.

This also meant that those who were willing to do an interview were more likely to support Al Sistani, and therefore not represent a cross-section of the community. This is not just the case in Iraq, but I had to face the possibility that it could be the same also in diaspora communities around the world.

3.4.3. Interviewing Al Sistani in person

Throughout his life Al Sistani has refused to face the media. He will not cooperate with the media or do any interviews with them, except for occasionally undertaking interviews with

independent journalists. This has meant that there are very limited media sources for gaining direct quotes from Al Sistani. This, and because he is so popular, means that an interview by someone with a low profile such as myself was unlikely (while well-known journalists are lining up with requests). I sought an interview but my request was declined.

3.4.4. My response to the difficulties

My response to the issues mentioned above was to select participants living outside of Iraq, within a Western environment, and within a situation where they were studying at a university. I felt this would minimise such potential ethical issues, as I felt they would have more freedom to talk frankly about Al Sistani, and most of them had recently left Iraq.

A second group of participants was chosen from among clerics in Britain. These were clerics I encountered in my visit to London, at the main office of Al Sistani in London run by Murtadha al-Kashmiri. Some of these clerics were politicians. I hoped they could speak with full freedom because they were in the UK. However, I was aware that they may have a bias toward Al Sistani, or for other reasons – such as political reasons regarding their work which I knew nothing about – be unwilling to be totally trigger a frank and open response with me.

Furthermore, I interviewed each participant separately to avoid any obligation they might have felt toward others, particularly in the Iraqi community to which they both belong. Most of them refused to mention their real names.

Of course, throughout the analysis and discussion that follows I was 'on guard'; ready to explore the responses of the interviewees in a critical light. Part of this involved a rational and critical response by myself, as the researcher, to their responses to the questions I asked during the interviews.

3.5   DATA ANALYSIS

3.5.1   Data analysis in this research

Steps in data analysis of interviews

- Further notes were made immediately, then I called the participants for clarification several times if required within 24 hours.
- Data was then gathered for safekeeping onto several electronic formats.
- Translation was then undertaken, one interview at a time. Thus I began to immerse myself in the data.
- After translation I analysed the data, and broke it down in relation to each question. Then I:
    a. Sectioned the data and labelled the data with codes for each participant.

b. Made brief profiles of each participant.

c. Made longer narratives of what each participant said.

d. Tabulated the responses of each participant to the questions.

- Finally, I addressed the research questions in five chapters – Chapters 5-9. I did this by first providing more background material from my textual analyses, and then breaking down different sections according to the data compiled from the interviews.

3.5.2 Data analysis methodology

Thematic analysis, according to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 9) is 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data.' Thematic analysis is a type of qualitative analysis that is used to "analyse classifications and present themes that relate to the data" as well as illustrating them (data) in major detail using interpretation techniques (LeCompte, 2000, p. 148). Thematic analysis is widely used in qualitative research, and considered to be the most appropriate method for any study that aims to investigate and interpret qualitative data (Joffe, 2012).

Thematic analysis allows the researcher to deduce latent meanings underpinning sets of manifest themes which requires interpretation (Joffe, 2012). This enhances the accuracy and complexity of the data as well as the understanding of the data. Alhojailan (2012, p. 40) claims that, 'As qualitative research requires understanding and collecting different aspects and data, using thematic analysis in this study provides an opportunity to understand the potential of any issue more widely'.

In this study, the use of thematic analysis allowed me to link different concepts and opinions of participants and compare them with data collected in different situations at different times during the project. Braun and Clarke (2006) observe that:

> The process of analysing data through using the thematic analysis approach was done through the following six phases: becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report (p.86).

After completing data collection, I began transcribing the data into written form. "The process of data analysis of this study starts with reading and re-reading data in order to become familiar with what the data entails, paying specific attention to patterns that occur" (Boyatzis, 1998).

The next step was to generate an initial list of items from the data set that have a reoccurring pattern (Braun & Clarke, 2006) such as if the participants considered that Al

Sistani's fatwas encouraged violence or was a means of peace. This systematic way of organizing, and gaining meaningful parts of data as they relate to the research question is called coding. Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2011, p. 11) point out that coding is about 'comparing theme frequencies, [and] identifying these themes co-occurrence by interpretation of these codes'. For example if most of the participants believe that Al Sistani's intervention in politics promotes sectarian unity, which did not exist before 2003.

After the interpretation of codes, it is important for the researcher to review themes to explore how they support the data and the overarching theoretical perspective. If the analysis seems incomplete, the researcher needs to go back and find what is missing. The researcher needs to define what each theme is, which aspects of data are being captured, and what is significant about the themes (McAdams & Losoff, 1984; Vaterlaus & Higginbotham, 2011). Then the researcher writes the report and must decide which themes make meaningful contributions to understanding what is going on within the data to answering research questions which should be refined later as final themes (Wood, Dendy, Dordek, Germany, & Varallo, 1994).

Al Sistani has several opinions regarding all the issues addressed in the research questions. Hence, a comparison between how Al Sistani and the research participants evaluate and interact was possible with these research questions. I undertook this evaluation by focusing on the subjects (content and questions) through focusing on the answers of the Sunnis, the Shia and Al Sistani himself, and comparing the differences in the data content.

There are many benefits in the use of the thematic analysis approach produced through interviews because the verbal data can be transcribed, and therefore this technique enables the researcher to summarise key features of that set of data. Thematic analysis is also flexible and productive in data interpretation, the analysis of different data stages, coding and categorising. (Braun & Clarke, 2006) argue that 'one of the benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility' (p. 78). Thematic analysis allows flexibility for commencing data analysis at any time through the project, where there is no link between the data gathered and the result of the process itself (Hayes, 1997). Some of the strengths associated with thematic analysis are that, "it is a tool to use across various methods, it is suitable even for novice qualitative researchers, and it [will] supply a wide range of analytic options " (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, pp. 81-83).

This thematic analysis helps the researcher to study the data in depth and analyse and interpret the participants' disclosures accurately and successfully (Anderson & Felsenfeld, 2003). In this study, it helped me to look behind what the participants said in order to

understand the political role of Al Sistani in Iraq and how the Iraqi sects have evaluated this role. Then, before interpreting the results, I carefully examined the data to capture all similarities and differences.

This study also aimed to collect information to investigate the variables relating to the differences of views among Iraqis regarding role of Al Sistani and how he managed to convince Iraqis of his interventions in politics.

3.6   SUMMARY

In this chapter I have described my research journey from its beginning in terms of its ontological approach, epistemological assumptions, the research methodology, as well as the collecting and analysing of the data, explaining access and demonstrating my role as a researcher of Al Sistani's role in Iraqi politics since 2003. I have outlined the ethical matters which I had to take into consideration whilst conducting this research. In the subsequent chapters the empirical research is presented with the focus being on Iraqis' opinions (from the viewpoints of belonging to different sects) primarily of Al Sistani intervention in politics. However, before considering the collected evidence in detail, the following chapter details the findings of this thesis.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1   INTRODUCTION

The data collection methods of this research are twofold: interviews conducted with the participants, and textual analysis of written data stemming either directly from Al Sistani, or through his organisations. Both are presented in this chapter.

The interview data has been summarised and is presented below according to headings based on the interview questions asked. The textual analysis – a very different form of data in comparison to the interview data – is presented in the form of sample texts gathered during the process of undertaking this study. This is raw data gathered from Al Sistani in an attempt to let him have his say (or provide his response) to the same questions asked of the interview participants. Of course, as explained earlier in this research, the data gathered here is not taken directly from any interviews with Al Sistani, but instead taken from sources representing Al Sistani. These sources include interviews and official comments by himself and those representing him. These primarily come through his official website.

Only a sample of relevant data from Al Sistani is provided in this chapter. More will be provided throughout the following analysis chapters.

The following data from 14 interviews is summarised below. It is further detailed throughout the following analysis chapters.

4.2   THE INTERVIEWS

4.2.1   The most significant questions

The following data from 14 interviews is summarised below. It is further detailed throughout the analysis chapters. The interview questions used to gather this data are:

The 2005 elections:

- Was Al Sistani correct when he invited Iraqis to participate in the 2005 elections?
- Why did Al Sistani invite people to hold an election while Sunni provinces were being attacked by terrorists?
- What is the difference between Al Sistani's interventions and the doctrine of Wilayat al Faqih [the guardianship of the jurist, as proposed by Ayatollah Khomeini]?
- Do the Sunnis think that Al Sistani's interventions in politics are an attempt by Al Sistani or Shia clerics to obtain more power?

Regarding democracy:

- Does Al Sistani support democracy?
- What is the point of view of Shia clerics towards democracy?
- Are the Iraqi people ready to become a democratic country?
- How satisfied are the different sects (overall) with Al Sistani?

Al Sistani's fatwa against ISIS:

- Why did Al Sistani not issue a fatwa against the US when they occupied Iraq while he did issue a fatwa against ISIS?
- Is this fatwa really against the Sunnis?
- Does this fatwa interfere in the political affairs of Iraq?
- Is this fatwa an agreement between Al Sistani and Iran?

Al Sistani and the forming of the new Iraqi government:

- Did Al Sistani contribute to the ousting of al-Maliki from power?
- Were Al Sistani's interventions in politics justified?

4.2.2 The purpose and meaning of coding the participants' names

The names were coded to maintain anonymity. This is the case for all the participants, including the clerics and others in London. This was done for the purpose of ethical protection, but also to help provide useful information when presenting, summarising and analysing the data. The coding system used is this:

Which group?   Australian males are 1-6.

Australian females are 7-9.

Londoners are 10-14.

Which gender?

M for males.

F for females.

Which sect?

Su for Sunni.

Sh for Shia.

Occupation

Cl for cleric.

J for jobseeker.

St for student.

P for politician.

Hw for home worker (housewife).

Eg: MSuJ means this participant is 1 of 6 Australians, male (M), Sunni (Su), a Jobseeker (J).

4.2.3 Tabulated answers to interview questions

Following in Tables 4.1-4.6 are summary tables of the answers of the participants to the 14 most significant questions. Overall, of the 14 participants there were:

11 Men (M), 3 Women (F).

8 Shia, 5 Sunni, 1 Kurd.

5 Politicians, 4 Students, 3 Clerics, 1 Housewife, 1 Jobseeker.

All those interviewed in London were Shia, and men (3 Politicians, 2 Clerics).

Table 4-1 Interview answers (A) from the male participants interviewed in Australia.

QUESTIONS (A)	6 MALE PARTICIPANTS FROM AUSTRALIA					
The 2005 elections:	1MSuJ	2MSuSt	3MShP	4MShCl	5MKuP	6MSuSt
• Was Al Sistani right when he invited Iraqis to participate in the 2005 elections?	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
• Why did Al Sistani invite people to hold an election while Sunni provinces were being attacked by terrorists?	To let Shia get power.	To let Shia control Iraq.	Till now Sunni areas were not secure.	Sunnis did not support the new political process from the beginning.	The USA wanted more legal control.	To let militants scare the Sunni and not let them boycott the election.
• What is the difference between Al Sistani's interventions and the doctrine of Wilayat al Faqih [the guardianship of the jurist, as proposed by Ayatollah Khomeini]?	No difference.	No difference.	Yes, there is a difference.	Yes, there is a difference.	Yes, there is a difference.	No difference.
• Do the Sunnis think that Al Sistani's interventions in politics are an attempt by Al Sistani or Shiaclerics to obtain more power?	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes

Regarding democracy						
• Does Al Sistani support democracy?	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
• What is the point of view of Shia clerics towards democracy?	Not supportive.	Not supportive.	Support.	Support.	Support.	Support.
• Are the Iraqi people ready to become a democratic country?	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
• How satisfied are the different sects (overall) with Al Sistani ?	Not satisfied.	Not satisfied.	Not satisfied.	Not satisfied.	Satisfied.	Satisfied.

Table 4.1 (above) shows a basic summary of answers to 8 of the interview questions. It can be seen from this table that patterns and themes can be found in the data. These are outlined in Tables 4.7-4.10.

Table 0-2 Interview answers (B) from the male participants interviewed in Australia.

QUESTIONS (B)	6 MALE PARTICIPANTS FROM AUSTRALIA					
Al Sistani's fatwa against ISIS	1MSuJ	2MSuSt	3MShP	4MShCl	5MKuP	6MSuSt
• Why did Al Sistani not issue a fatwa against the US when they occupied Iraq while he did issue a fatwa against ISIS?	There was agreement with THE USA to occupy Iraq. While ISIS threatened the future of the Shia.	The USA army was to remove Saddam so Al Sistani distanced himself from military resistance while ISIS came to remove the Shia.	Al Sistani issued a Jihad Fatwa because he wanted to rid Iraq of a tyrant. While ISIS came to remove the Shia.	America had the military capability for massive destruction. ISIS Always wanted to remove the Shia.	Al Sistani did not have enough strength to face the Americans militarily.	Shia not target therefore Al Sistani did not issue Jihad Fatwa against the USA , but ISIS targeted the Shia.
• Is this fatwa really against the Sunnis?	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
• Does this fatwa interfere in the political affairs of Iraq?						
• Is this fatwa an agreement between Al Sistani and Iran?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Al Sistani and the forming of the new Iraqi government:						
• Did Al Sistani contribute to the ousting of al-Maliki from power?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
• Were Al Sistani's interventions in politics justified?	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

Table 4.2 above shows a basic summary of answers to 6 of the interview questions. It can be seen from this table that patterns and themes can be found in the data. These are outlined in Tables 4.7-4.10.

Table 0-3 Interview answers (A) from the female participants interviewed in Australia.

QUESTIONS (A)	3 FEMALE PARTICIPANTS FROM AUSTRALIA		
The 2005 elections:	7FSuSt	8FShSt	9FSuHw
• Was Al Sistani right when he invited Iraqis to participate in the 2005 elections?	No	Yes	Yes
• Why did Al Sistani invite people to hold an election while Sunni provinces were being attacked by terrorists?	To let Shia get power.	To make Iraqis be self-governing.	To cause the Shia of Iraq to gain control and govern Iraq.
• What is the difference between Al Sistani's interventions and the doctrine of Wilayat al Faqih [the guardianship of the jurist, as proposed by Ayatollah Khomeini]?	No difference.	No opinion.	Yes, there is a difference.
• Do the Sunnis think that Al Sistani's interventions in politics are an attempt by Al Sistani or Shia clerics to obtain more power?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Regarding democracy			
• Does Al Sistani support democracy?	No	No	No
• What is the point of view of Shia clerics towards democracy?	Not Supportive.	Not Supportive.	Support.
• Are the Iraqi people ready to become a democratic country?	No	No	No
• How satisfied are the different sects (overall) with Al Sistani ?	Not Satisfied.	Satisfied.	Satisfied.

Table 4.3 above shows a basic summary of answers to 8 of the interview questions. It can be seen from this table that patterns and themes can be found in the data. These are outlined in Tables 4.7- 4.10.

Table 0-4 Interview answers (B) from the female participants interviewed in Australia.

QUESTIONS (B)	3 FEMALE PARTICIPANTS FROM AUSTRALIA		
Al Sistani's fatwa against ISIS	7FSuSt	8FShSt	9FSuHw
• Why did Al Sistani not issue a fatwa against the US when they occupied Iraq while he did issue a fatwa against ISIS?	Because it will be like a suicide action, and he issued it against ISIS as they came to remove the Shia.	He wanted to rid Iraq of Saddam. He issued it against ISIS because they target the Shia.	Iraqi people cannot resist the US while he can do it against ISIS.
• Is this fatwa really against the Sunnis?	No	Yes	No
• Does this fatwa interfere in the political affairs of Iraq?	Yes	No	Yes
• Is this fatwa an agreement between Al Sistani and Iran?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Al Sistani and the forming of the new Iraqi government:			
• Did Al Sistani contribute to the ousting of al-Maliki from power?	N/a	Yes	Yes
• Were Al Sistani's interventions in politics justified?	No	Yes	No

Table 4.4 above shows a basic summary of answers to 6 of the interview questions. It can be seen from this table that patterns and themes can be found in the data. These are outlined in Tables 4.7-4.10.

Table 0-5 Interview answers (A) from the male participants interviewed in London.

QUESTIONS (A)	5 LONDON PARTICIPANTS				
The 2005 elections:	10MShP	11MShCl	12MShCl	13MShP	14MShP
• Was Al Sistani right when he invited Iraqis to participate in the 2005 elections?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
• Why did Al Sistani invite people to hold an election while Sunni provinces were being attacked by terrorists?	Al Sistani's invitation for the Iraqis to host an election was a reaction against USA after they wanted to impose a new constitution without an election.	The security situation was good, but the Sunni boycotted it because the truth would finally appear that Iraq had a larger population of Shia than Sunnis.	Shia areas were unstable on the day of the election, but Al Sistani wanted to get from control from the USA by election.	The Sunni areas were secure but the Sunni felt that the Shia would gain power by the election.	There are two real reasons firstly: Shia would win. Secondly: Iraq would align with a different set of countries which are predominantly Shia, such as Iran.
• What is the difference between Al Sistani's interventions and the doctrine of Wilayat al Faqih [the guardianship of the jurist, as proposed by Ayatollah Khomeini]?	Yes, there is a difference.	Yes, there is a difference.	Yes, there is a difference.	No opinion.	Yes, there is a difference.
• Do the Sunnis think that Al Sistani's interventions in politics are an attempt by Al Sistani or Shia clerics to obtain more power?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Regarding democracy					
• Does Al Sistani support democracy?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
• What is the point of view of Shia clerics towards democracy?	Supportive.	Supportive.	Supportive.	Supportive.	Supportive.
• Are the Iraqi people ready to become a democratic country?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
• How satisfied are the different sects (overall) with Al Sistani ?	Very satisfied.	Very satisfied.	Very satisfied.	Very satisfied.	Satisfied.

Table 4.5 above shows a basic summary of answers to 8 of the interview questions. It can be seen from this table that patterns and themes can be found in the data. These are outlined in Tables 4.7-4.10.

Table 0-6 Interview answers (B) from the male participants interviewed in London.

QUESTIONS (B)	5 LONDON PARTICIPANTS				
Al Sistani's fatwa against ISIS	10MShP	11MShCl	12MShCl	13MShP	14MShP
• Why did Al Sistani not issue a fatwa against the US when they occupied Iraq while he did issue a fatwa against ISIS?	He does not want to support the Ba'ath party while he did it against ISIS because ISIS announced that they came to remove the Shia from power.	The US was far more powerful. The people were tired from the economic blockade. And r Saddam was a criminal, so why would Al Sistani support him by issuing a Jihad Fatwa. ISIS wanted to destroy all holy places in Iraq.	Al Sistani saved Iraq when he did not issue a fatwa in 2003 because the Iraqi people at that time were not able to resist the occupying force. While ISIS come to kill all the Shia in Iraq because they consider them not to be real Muslims..	The disparity of power between the USA and Iraq made Al Sistani not issued a fatwa while he did that against ISIS because Shia have ideological, religious and political differences with ISIS.	Al Sistani could not issue as fatwa against the Americans because the Shia at that time were suffering from the rule of Saddam, while he did it against ISIS because they came to remove the Shia from power.
• Is this fatwa really against the Sunnis?	No	No	No	No	No
• Does this fatwa interfere in the political affairs of Iraq?	No	No	No	No	No
• Is this fatwa an agreement between Al Sistani and Iran?	No	No	-	-	No
Al Sistani and the forming of the new Iraqi government:					
• Did Al Sistani contribute to the ousting of al-Maliki from power?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
• Were Al Sistani's interventions in politics justified?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 4.6 above shows a basic summary of answers to 6 of the interview questions. It can be seen from this table that patterns and themes can be found in the data. These are outlined in Tables 4.7-4.10.

The next section details patterns and themes emerging from the findings of all participant interviews.

4.2.4 Themes emerging from the interviews

The following tables have been created by reading and thinking about all the answers summarised in Tables 4.1-4.6. There are common themes or patterns that emerge from the answers, as detailed below.

Table 0-7 The 2005 elections: Patterns and Themes, all participants.

The 2005 elections	ALL PARTICIPANTS
• Was Al Sistani right when he invited Iraqis to participate in the 2005 elections?	PATTERN: All 8 Shia said yes. 4 of the 5 Sunnis said no. the 1 Kurd said no. No patterns with the other variables. THEME: The Sunnis did not agree with Al Sistani. The Shia generally agreed.
• Why did Al Sistani invite people to hold an election while Sunni provinces were being attacked by terrorists?	PATTERN: The Sunnis all believed this was so the Shia would get more power and control. The Shia's had a mix of responses ranging from Al Sistani wanting to stop the US from having too much control to Al Sistani wanting the Shia to have more power. THEME: The Sunnis did not believe Al Sistani cared for their interests.
• What is the difference between Al Sistani's interventions and the doctrine of Wilayat al faqih [the guardianship of the jurist, as proposed by Ayatollah Khomeini]?	PATTERN: Of the 5 Sunnis, 4 said no difference. Everyone else said there is at least some difference, but what that difference is varied. THEME: Only Sunnis believe there is a difference between Al Sistani's interventions and the doctrine of Wilayat al faqih.
• Do the Sunnis think that Al Sistani's interventions in politics are an attempt by Al Sistani or Shia clerics to obtain more power?	PATTERN: All participants except the Kurd and 1 Shia answered yes to this. THEME: Most agree that the Sunni see Al Sistani and Shia clerics as being motivated by power.

Table 4.7 above shows common themes emerging from the participants answers to the interview questions. It can be seen from this table that there is a clear difference between how the Sunni view Al Sistani, and how the Shia view him. The Shia support him and his actions while the Sunni believe he does not care for their interests and is motivated by power for himself and the Shi's clerics.

Table 0-8 Regarding Democracy: Patterns and Themes, all participants.

Regarding Democracy	ALL PARTICIPANTS
• Does Al Sistani support democracy?	PATTERN: All those in London said yes. The three women and 2 of the Sunni men in Australia said no. No clear pattern except all women said no, and a total of nine said yes. THEME: Most of those interviewed felt that Al Sistani supported democracy.
• What is the point of view of Shia clerics towards democracy?	PATTERN: Four said he was not supportive, and three of these were among the 4 Sunni. THEME: Sunnis do not believe (or want to believe) that the Shia clerics are supportive of democracy.
• Are the Iraqi people ready to become a democratic country?	PATTERN: Five said no, and 4 of these were the Sunni who were interviewed. THEME: The Shia believe it is good for Iraq to be a democratic country.
• How satisfied are the different sects (overall) with Al Sistani ?	PATTERN: Three of the 4 Sunnis were not satisfied. All other participants were. THEME: Sunnis are not satisfied with Al Sistani.

Table 4.8 above shows common themes emerging from the participants answers to the interview questions. It can be seen from this table that the Sunni do not support Al Sistani and see his involvement in the politics of Iraq as 'interference', and the Shia support Iraq being a democratic country.

Table 0-9 Al Sistani's Fatwa against ISIS: Patterns and Themes, all participants.

Al Sistani's Fatwa against ISIS	ALL PARTICIPANTS
• Why did Al Sistani not issue a fatwa against the US when they occupied Iraq while he did issue a fatwa against ISIS?	PATTERN: No real pattern, except Shia supported this action, and Sunni felt it would be harmful for them. THEME: Sunni do not trust Al Sistani.
• Is this fatwa really against the Sunnis?	PATTERN: None.
• Does this fatwa interfere in the political affairs of Iraq?	PATTERN: Generally the answer was no, but the Sunni said yes. THEME: The Sunni believed Al Sistani was interfering in Iraq's political affairs.
• Is this fatwa an agreement between Al Sistani and Iran?	All 5 Sunnis said yes. The Kurd and one Shia also said yes. THEME: The Sunni do not trust Al Sistani and believe he is working with Iran.

Table 4.9 above shows common themes emerging from the participants answers to the interview questions. It can be seen from this table that the responses to the interview questions varied significantly according to whether the participants were Sunni or Shia. Generally, it is the Shia who trust Al Sistani, while the Sunni believe Al Sistani is working on an agenda that will only benefit the Shia's and Iran.

Table 0-10 Al Sistani and the forming of the new Iraqi government: Patterns and Themes, all participants.

Al Sistani and the forming of the new Iraqi government:	ALL PARTICIPANTS
• Did Al Sistani contribute to the ousting of al-Maliki from power?	PATTERN: All except for 1 participant said yes. THEME: Al Sistani contributed to ousting al-Maliki from power.
• Were Al Sistani's interventions in politics justified?	PATTERN: 4 of the 5 Sunni's said no. All other participants said yes. THEME: The Sunni do not agree with the actions of Al Sistani. The Shi' a do.

Table 4.10 above shows common themes emerging from the participants answers to the interview questions. It can be seen from this table that the Sunni participants do not support Sistani.

4.2.5   Narrative summaries of the answers of each participant.

(1MSuJ): This participant is a male Sunni from Mosul, in the north of Iraq. During my interview with this person I felt that he considered Al Sistani to be a part of Iraq's problems, and that the cleric should not have anything to do with policy. He also believed there is a conspiracy against the Sunni and that the election is an agreement between the Americans and Al Sistani to remove the Sunni from governance. He said: "I reject the intervention of Al Sistani in politics because he is biased [toward] his sect and to some of the Shia politicians [and] the people around him may hide some information and may change some things depending on the situation". Moreover, he thought that Al Sistani implemented Iran's plan in the region and all his interventions in policy were in agreement with Iran. (I thought perhaps he had been influenced by the media channels, and that it is normal to find Sunni people do not believe in Shia clerics actions because of sectarian problems that occurred after 2003).

(2MSuSt) This Sunni man was a PhD student who did not support most of Al Sistani actions. He said he participated in the Iraqi elections from Australia because he believed there was no chance for Iraqis to rebuild their country just through an election, so he didn't really care much about the elections. He believed that if Al Sistani supported democracy in Iraq it was only because for the elections, and that was so that the Iraqi people would have to bear the responsibility if any new government should fail. He also believed that not all Iraqi are ready for democracy because of the hunger, deprivation and siege during Saddam's rule. And most politicians knew that if they opposed the views of Al Sistani they would be moved out of the political process.

(3MShP) This man had been living out of Iraq since 1994. He supported most of Al Sistani's opinions and actions. He supported Al Sistani when he issued his fatwa against ISIS and he did not consider it as a sectarian action. He mentioned that in 2005 the sectarian war in Iraq was beginning and there were many car bombs exploded in Baghdad in areas inhabited by the Shia. But Al Sistani did not exploit this issue by issuing a Jihad Fatwa against Sunnis but always called for unity. He said the purpose of the fatwa was to protect Sunni areas from ISIS and so that ISIS did not reach the Shia areas. He did not think that Al Sistani received orders from Iran regarding the fatwa against ISIS. He said, "I do not agree that the fatwa was issued with Iranian cooperation but there were common interests between the two countries". He also agreed with Al Sistani regarding his fatwa to invite people to go to election. He believed that the Shia diaspora followed Al Sistani's fatwa for two reasons. The first is to give legal legitimacy to the elected government in order to claim their rights, and the second reason was that the diaspora wanted to return to their country in order to participate in building the new Iraq.

(4MShCl) This man is a cleric who had lived in Australia since 2000. He does not support all Al Sistani opinions regarding Iraq. Regarding Al Sistani's message for Al Maliki to step down he believed that Al Sistani was biased against Maliki because the community inside and outside of Iraq was against Al Maliki having a third term in office. He said Al Sistani wanted a change in governance but most of the corrupt officials remained. He said some of the acts of sabotage were nothing but revenge, and that the whole world saw how the popular mobilization forces helped the families who had been besieged. He believes that Al Sistani's encouragement to people to go to election was good because it did not call his people to control the government by force, but by democratic means. He said the fatwa was a true expression of a Shia cleric wanting to practice democracy.

(5MKuP) This Kurdish man was opposed to Saddam's regime and left Iraq in 1991. He studied Islamic sciences, specialising in Sunni Islamic affairs. He agrees with many of Al Sistani's views, even though he follows the Sunni doctrine and his ideas are very secular. He believed that Al Sistani does not believe in Wilayat al-Faqih because he did not want to obtain an official position in Iraq. He said Al Sistani knows that Iraq has different sects, not just Shia thus it is hard to apply the Wilayat al-Faqih principle. He also believes that the clergy should not enter politics because some clerics confuse their political programs with their religion. Any criticism of these political programs then becomes a political issue and in Arab societies this can lead to the issuance of fatwas of murder and infidelity and apostasy against political opponents. He said Al Sistani did not support Al Maliki for a third term in

office because he feared that Al Maliki would become a dictator in the new Iraq. He said this is why most parties did not support Al Maliki for a third term. Finally, he said Al Sistani did not issue a fatwa in 2003 against the US because Al Sistani felt Iraq did not have enough strength to face the Americans militarily, and the Americans occupied Iraq to eliminate the system of government run by the Sunni.

(6MSuSt) This Sunni man was a PhD student (in Mechanical Engineering) from Mosul who came to Australia in 2015. He did not support most of Al Sistani's actions. Regarding the elections conducted in 2005 (6MSuSt) he believed that Al Sistani intervened too many times in politics. He said that the Shia politicians performed poorly and that Al Sistani was the main reason for their presence in the political process so he was responsible. He believed that Al Sistani does not believe in the democracy because he guides Iraq toward Iran in the application of many things such as the imposition of the veil and the isolation of males and females. Regarding Al Sistani fatwa, he said that some members of his special forces insulted this fatwa and carried out acts of reprisal.

(7FSuSt): This Sunni participant was a PhD student from Baghdad who had lived through the sectarian crisis from 2005 until the end of 2008. She said this was one of the most difficult periods in the history of Iraq, with people killing each other just because their name indicated they were Shia or Sunni. She said was not influenced by the media but she was just presenting her ideas according to the reality supported by evidence. Like most Sunnis her thoughts were that the Shia and Al Sistani worked together to get power after 2003. About Al Sistani's fatwa, she said: 'There were a lot of areas unsafe, so it was wrong to hold elections [and] the election cannot be trusted because [Iraq] was under occupation and [it was known in advance that the Shi's would win]'. She agreed with Al Sistani not issuing a fatwa against the USA in 2003, stating: 'I supported Al Sistani when he did not issue a Jihad in 2003 because if he did it would be like a suicide action because of the inequality of power between the USA and Iraq'. On the whole, she did not support the intervention of the clerics in politics and she believed the clerics should stay away from politics, because if they intervene that will make a gap between communities.

(8FShST) This participant was a Shia woman and she did not support all Al Sistani's actions regarding Iraqi issues because she believed that the clerics should not be involved in politics. She believed that "the separation of religion from politics is worthwhile and prevents the clergy from intervening. This is important because Iraq contains several sects and this may cause some sensitivity among these communities. History does not suggest that Iraq could be governed by clerics. Al Sistani is Iranian yet he interfered in Iraqi issues. He did not

have sufficient authority to do that." She also thought that Al Sistani issued the fatwa in agreement with Iran because Iran wanted to stop ISIS in Iraq and prevent them from getting into to Iran. She supported Al Sistani in not issuing a fatwa against the USA in 2003 and explained that, 'Al Sistani did not issue a Jihad Fatwa because he wanted to rid Iraq of a tyrant (Saddam), and also because the economic embargo imposed on Iraq did not qualify it to do jihad against USA'.

(9FSuHW) This Sunni woman is from the west of Iraq. She did not agree with Al Sistani's opinions or actions, or his fatwa regarding the elections. She said his invitation was intended so that the Shia people would gain power and that nothing would change, because the Shias of Iraq made their plans with Al Sistani's help to run Iraq after 2003, and also with the help of their alliance with Iran. All this was done to marginalize the role of the Sunnis in Iraq. She said it was because of this that the Sunnis boycotted the elections. She added that the election of 2005 was planned in advance so that the Shia of Iraq could gain control and govern Iraq. She said that Al Sistani took advantage of the situation to make the Shia rule. She said she felt Al Sistani did not believe in democracy because the term democracy includes freedom of religion. She also said about Al Sistani's fatwa that: 'I'm not in support of this fatwa because many of the popular mobilization forces were undisciplined [and] there were a lot of acts of sabotage and revenge. This Fatwa has led to the killing and displacement of people and was a blatant interference in politics. In addition, many Iranians have come to Iraq under the pretext of a fatwa and taken a bad role.'

(10MShP) This man is one of the important Iraqi figures who left Iraq in 1980 because of his opposition to Saddam's regime. He had a doctorate in Islamic jurisprudence and had many publications and works, and had a lot of information about the Shia clerics and their role since the establishment of the Iraqi government in 1921. He was in full agreement with all Al Sistani's proposals regarding his role in Iraq since 2003. He thinks that Al Sistani's role saved Iraq from civil war because Al Sistani always calls for wisdom and sanity in dealing with problems. In explaining to me the opinions of westerns communities regarding Al Sistani interventions in Iraqi issues he said, 'I met with western officials who said, 'Despite all that happened to the Shi'ites Al Sistani showed statesmanship'." He said Al Sistani is a man of peace and was not dragged into hasty reactions. When I asked him about whether Al Sistani's Jihad Fatwa was a type of intervention in politics he answered, 'Yes, it is considered interference in politics [but] because the life of people [was] threatened with danger, so Al Sistani must issue a fatwa to protect people'.

(11MShCl): This participant is related to Al Sistani and has managed of all the Al Sistani offices in Europe. He thus offered perspectives that were created through working close to hand with logistical matters related to Al Sistani's role in Iraq after 2003. It was anticipated that there would be a natural bias generated through close connection and position. His perspectives provide interest and contrast with the other participants as he had been sympathetic and in agreement with all of Al Sistani's political interventions (as might be expected). He had been a link between the Al Sistani office in Najaf and all the diaspora in Europe... A specific view expressed by him states that, 'The Dawa party failed in the management of the country during the eight-year rule of Al-Maliki and therefore contributed to the spread of administrative and economic corruption. Al Maliki believed himself to be the only one capable of running the country but he had failed in that. Al Sistani … as a cleric, has a well-established right to express his opinion in politics and give advice on what he sees as Iraq and the Iraqis interests and to maintain the unity of the country and avoid civil war.' If I asked him for information that he did not have, he would ask one of his aides to provide further research about the matter. Regarding Iran's influence on Al Sistani, he believed that no one was influencing Al Sistani's opinion, even though Iranian politicians sometimes sought his advice.

(12MShCl) This participant was able to provide perspectives based on close understanding and relationship with the Shia religious establishment and because he belongs to a family of clerics and he is the representative of one of highest Shia cleric in Iraq (al Khoei). He agreed with all of Al Sistani's actions and he added more sources of information for this project. He did, however, criticize the performance of Iraqi politicians after 2003 and seemed to be unconvinced by them. He added that, 'I did not go to any elections and I did not elect any candidate because I do not want to give my vote to people that I do not know or have not heard of.' He also believed that what was planned for Iraq from the very beginning of 2003 was good, especially after Al Sistani's demand to hold elections had boosted the chances that Iraq would become a democratic country. But he added that ambitious politicians and conflicts between communities and the bloc parties made it difficult for Iraq to achieve this. Meetings with him were informative in that he had many views, perspectives and stories about clerical issues in Iraq.

(13MShP) This participant is one of the politicians who came to Iraq in 2003 to participate in the new political process and he was influential in this political process. He has held many positions including Minister for various portfolios, and he has been a parliamentary deputy. He seemed well informed about Al Sistani and with a range of

perspectives developed from close association with the political process. I gauged that his particular Islamic background was influential in aligning opinions with those of Al Sistani, and he was thus a supporter of all Al Sistani interventions in politics. He believed the country was not ready for the 2005 election but that there was no way to be ready except through practice. He saw Al Sistani's fatwa against ISIS as 'a good chance to make Sunni and Shia fight together against one enemy which is ISIS". As a politician, this participant provided political views and information about Al Sistani's role in Iraq after 2003.

(14MShP) This Shia participant is a well-known figure. He left Iraq in 1980 believing that secular decisions should be left in the hands of the state, but most of his views supported Al Sistani's role in Iraq after 2003. He believes Al Sistani supports democracy and stated: "Democracy means elections by the people, and the exchange of authority by peaceful means. Al Sistani is not a secular person or politician but Al Sistani has ideas close to democracy so he believes in pluralism and freedom for all religions including Christianity." He felt that Al Sistani's role was to let people depend on democratic means and to let the people decide their fate. He also supported Al Sistani decision in asking Al Maliki to step down mentioning that, "During the reign of Al Maliki, Iranian influence over Iraq had increased dramatically so Al Sistani wanted to stop this influence by replacing Al Maliki with a new Prime Minister acceptable to Iraqis and the international community."

4.3   DATA SAMPLES FROM THE MEDIA

A range of texts have been explored and read throughout this study. Much literature on this and related topics were investigated. What was thought to be most relevant has been presented in the Literature Review in Chapter Three, as well as in various other parts of this thesis. In this section, further sources are presented in order to obtain different perspectives about Al Sistani's views, opinions, stances and thoughts.

The first research question is: To what extent do Iraqi people accept Al Sistani's role as a cleric with political influence? Do they approve of his approach to political intervention? The following extracts are, quoted in detail, as they are relevant to this question. They indicate the kind of media texts that have expressed influential views in Iraq and are presented here for the purpose of later discussion and refence.

Teaching Iraq freedom: how Ayatollah Al Sistani inspired unity and nationalism

(Shakdam, 2016)

Plagued by the poison the Black Flag army has dispensed onto the land, Iraq remains a nation very much at war – fragmented in its lands, torn apart in its ethno-sectarian make-up, occupied still by the powers that be, that and won't let go, Iraq has not yet spoken its last.

If Iraq does not yet breathe peace and unity, it is nevertheless learning to think, and imagine itself the nation-state it always was, and forgot to be – all because one of Shiite Islam most devoted sons held vigil in Najaf.

For those who know their history, and recognize in Najaf both the capital city of Islam's First Imam, and the resting place of Islam's greatest martyr – the very soul the last prophet of God raised upon his blessed shoulders so that he, Ali ibn Abutalib would reach to the Heavens, Najaf seems indeed an evident choice.

If Kufa was indeed Imam Ali's political capital, it is Najaf he chose for his last resting place … after murderous hands dared raised a sword against Islam's Sword.

A holy city among holy cities, a beacon of hope, salvation and true allegiance, Najaf has always stood an island over the tumult of worldly affairs, a shrine, and a protection against the pettiness of men. There, behind the walls of its mosques, its schools and its libraries, the greatest religious minds of our ages have flourished and shun forth a light, which time only elevated, never to dim.

A jewel of Shia Islam, Najaf sits a beating spiritual light – a symbol of time long gone, a reminder of a leadership lost, a witness to the Words, a custodian still to Ahlulbayt tradition, a keeper of the oath once given.

A city of Islam, Najaf bows to no one but God. A city of Islam, Najaf guards the shrine of Islam's First Imam, he, who stands the gate to Knowledge itself.

It is there, in Najaf, the city which witnessed the last breath of our Imam, that a teacher would come and forever change the fate of Iraq. Fate would have it, that his own mind was moulded to the teachings of yet another brilliant son of Najaf, Ayatollah Abul Qasim al-Khoei.

In hindsight, it seems only natural. In hindsight it appears evident that just as Najaf towered over the Islamic world under the leadership of Imam Ali, for his faith was true, and bore no equal; that, as hordes descend onto Iraq to swallow Islam whole, Imam Ali's followers would oppose a resistance, and a might only Najaf could inspire.

From his religious retreat in Najaf, a quiet figure in Iraq's broken socio-political landscape, Grand Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani has risen as a giant among the people, together a guide and an inspiration for those who still hold Freedom as their God given right.

But how much is actually known of the Grand Ayatollah's role in inspiring Iraq back to unity? What knowledge do we truly entertain of the cleric, who singlehandedly demonstrated what true Resistance can achieve, when anchored in Islam?

While Ayatollah Al Sistani's character differ from that of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the forefather of Iran Islamic Revolution, in both those clerics it is Shia Islam purest voice which speaks – it is the teachings of Imam Ali, Imam al-

Hasan, and Imam al-Husayn which echo still; each to its own particular light, but all from the same source.

But how could one man imprint so much onto a country? A country at war at that …

For a secular mind such a question remains impenetrable. To those who understand and know Islam for the wisdom it offers, the ethical model it champions, and the Freedom it fiercely guards, and forever strive to promote, Ayatollah Al Sistani's role in pulling Iraq out of the precipice it was heading toward, was easily foreseeable.

There is great power in Islam, and much of its source is rooted in the very Resistance which the Prophet Muhammad presented, and which his progeny then lived by, and for.

A man of God whose life purpose has been to serve the divine, and the divine alone, Ayatollah Al Sistani has inspired generations of men, and women to reach further out from their station, so that they would also find purpose in their submission to God. There lies concept seculars and liberals fail to grasp.

A Justice onto the world Islam offers Freedom in Submission to God. But there could never be real Freedom without absolute Submission, and only through Submission can one rise truly free.

Freedom comes at a cost though – just as submission does, since one can only bow to God's will and find Liberty in the exercise of His Commands. It is from this desire to serve God which resistance was first born.

Resistance in Islam is first enounced in Muslims' declaration of faith, when testament is made that there is only One God, and that Muhammad is His prophet. Behind those words lies a Truth which suffers no association, no challenge, no contention. In the service of this Truth, and this ideal, Resistance is worship … and worship becomes an act of Resistance.

It is Ayatollah Al Sistani's faith, his submission, his devotion, and his strengthen dedication to Islam's purest tradition which allowed for Resistance to rise a rampart once more against those who seek destruction as their daily bread.

Before the evil of Daesh, before the clamours of those new Kharijites, Ayatollah Al Sistani offered but the certainty of a life spent in Islam's light.

It was his call which millions answered as if one. It is under his impetus that Iraq was pulled from the abyss.

It is his voice, his rallying cry, and the trust he put in all Iraqis which echoed a fierce wind of resistance throughout the scorched nation. If Iraq fell an orphan to the clutch of Wahhabism, it is as a free, united nation it rose against its invaders.

Beyond creeds, ethnicities and political affiliations, Iraq was forged once more before the shrine of its Imam. And while it was Ali's followers again who answered first the call of their brethren, it is Iraq as a united, yet pluralist body which pledged its allegiance to the flag.

Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani's commands it needs to be said, came not by way of force, or obligation – but injunction.

A servant of Shia Islam, it is the Grand Ayatollah's respect of men's innate freedom of choice which compelled millions.

A leader at the service of his people … of all people, it is ultimately Ayatollah Al Sistani's character which commanded respect, called for loyalty, and inspired true nationalism.

A light today has been awaken in Najaf … a light similar to that which was brought forth to Iran … the same light which has defined, fed, and sustained Islam: Justice.

Obama Sent a Secret Letter to Iraq's Top Shiite Cleric

(Slavin, 2010)

President Obama has sent a letter to Iraq's top Shiite Muslim cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani, urging him to prevail upon Iraq's squabbling politicians to finally form a new government, an individual briefed by relatives of the reclusive religious leader said Thursday.

The individual, who asked not to be named because of the sensitivity of the topic, said the information came from members of Al Sistani's family in the Iranian holy city of Qom, where Al Sistani maintains a large complex of seminaries, libraries, clinics, and other humanitarian organizations.

Iraqi factions have sought in vain since the March 7 parliamentary elections to agree on a government to replace that of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. The impasse is of increasing concern to the United States as it draws down its forces to 50,000 and relinquishes a combat role at the end of this month. There have been a number of violent incidents in Iraq in recent weeks including bombings and shootings that have raised questions about the country's future stability. (Fifteen Iraqis died Thursday; 53 were killed on Wednesday, according to media reports.)

In a speech Aug. 2 before disabled veterans, Obama reiterated that the U.S. mission in Iraq is changing "from a military effort led by our troops to a civilian effort led by our diplomats." In this new phase, the Iraqis are to assume overall responsibility for the country's security, with U.S. intervention in limited circumstances to conduct counter-terrorism operations and to protect Americans. U.S. forces will also continue to train Iraqis and monitor Iraqi air space.

Mike Hammer, spokesman for the White House National Security Council, would not confirm or deny that Obama had sent the letter to Al Sistani .

"We do not comment on Presidential correspondence," Hammer wrote in an email Thursday.

The letter was delivered to Al Sistani by a Shiite member of the Iraqi parliament, according to the source briefed by Al Sistani relatives. He did not identify the individual.

Daniel Serwer, an Iraq expert at the U.S. Institute of Peace, said that to his knowledge Al Sistani has never met with a sitting U.S. official — or at least not acknowledged doing so.

The Al Sistani -linked source said the letter was sent shortly after Vice President Joseph Biden visited Baghdad over the July 4 weekend and failed to bring about a resolution of the dispute. Biden said at the time that he was "optimistic" that a new government would be formed and that the problems Iraq faced were "not a lot different" than that facing other countries with parliamentary systems.

The second research question is: Do Iraqis see Al Sistani as holding special hope for Iraq in regard to the nation's problems, and to how Iraq is viewed by the rest of the world? The following extracts are samples of relevant material involved in the textual analysis:

Al Sistani's critics want greater activism in Iraqi politics

(Mamouri, 2014c)

Under his religious leadership, Grand Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani has been committed to moderation and has treated with tact and wisdom the situation in Iraq, which may ignite with each crisis, small or large. However, it gradually became apparent that Al Sistani's behaviour does not appeal to some Islamist currents, because he did not succumb to their political agenda.

Al Sistani has been heavily criticized by some Sunni and Shiite parties for not supporting resistance movements against the Americans when they were in Iraq and for not entering the sectarian conflict in favour of one side against another. But these criticisms were usually directed at him by Islamist parties or groups from outside the religious establishment. This time, however, the criticism is coming from within the religious establishment, and from those in the same Islamist trend.

Sheikh Mohammed al-Yacoubi, the religious leader of the Al-Fadilah (Virtue) Party, which is part of the Iraqi government, has scathingly attacked Al Sistani in a series of speeches over the past month. Yacoubi considered Al Sistani hostile to what's right, called him the pharaoh of the times and considered his positions a betrayal of the Shiites.

The reason for all this is that Al Sistani did not cave to the demands of religious parties to establish a religious state applying Sharia in Iraq. Al Sistani had recently rejected the Jaafari personal status law because it included violations of human rights, rights of other sects and rights of religious minorities.

Historically, criticisms against Al Sistani started from the early 1990s, when a political current within the Najaf hawza (Shiite seminary) opposed the traditional approach, which was represented and led by Al Sistani . That current received indirect support by the former Iraqi regime because it represented an Arab religious reference against the traditional Shiite current, which was often of Iranian origins. That trend later became known as the Sadrist movement, named after its founder Mohammad al-Sadr, Muqtada al-Sadr's father.

The phrase "the silent hawza" was made famous by Mohammad al-Sadr as he criticized Al Sistani's approach, who preferred to work in a calm way and deal wisely with the overall situation instead of taking revolutionary positions. In contrast, Sadr used the "vocal hawza" approach, which adopted a revolutionary discourse in leading the Shiite community.

The conflict continued after the regime's fall. Muqtada al-Sadr adopted his father's discourse in dealing with the US occupation, as he put it. But gradually, and especially after the US troops left Iraq, the rift between Muqtada al-Sadr and Al Sistani's followers was reduced significantly. That was helped by Al Sistani's positive role in resolving the crisis that took place between Sadr's followers and US forces in Najaf in 2004.

Some groups remained separate from the main Sadrist current regarding their anti-Al Sistani attitudes. The most prominent of these groups is the Virtue Party, led by Yacoubi, one of Mohammad al-Sadr's followers. There are also militias

that broke away from the Sadrist movement, joined the Iranian side and considered themselves not bound by Al Sistani's orders but affiliated with the supreme leader of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. The most prominent of these groups is Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq.

The position of the Iranian regime has not been welcoming of Al Sistani since he became a religious leader until the fall of Saddam in 2003. Yet, the situation later changed because of the key and visible role played by Al Sistani in managing the situation in Iraq in general and the leadership of the Shiite community in particular.

There is another extreme Shiite current known as the Shirazi current, which criticizes Al Sistani because of his call for affection and closeness with the Sunnis and for opposing violations carried out against their sanctities by Shiite extremists.

When searching for a reaction to the criticisms from within or outside the religious establishment, it is very difficult to find any position by Al Sistani himself, his office or his followers. That is because Al Sistani has followed the policy of silence and indifference for things that are not crucial, especially those that may cause strife and conflict. Al Sistani also ordered his office to not issue any statement or declaration in such situations, according to what a source close to Al Sistani told *Al-Monitor*.

Al Sistani's moderate and tolerant positions have made him a man of peace and a safety valve in Iraq. Yet, despite that, many fear that his discourse has become inaudible to the decision-makers in the country. On the other hand, many worry about what will happen when Al Sistani departs, as there are schemes by his rivals to acquire the Shiite leadership in Najaf after Al Sistani's departure.

The third research question is: How does Al Sistani himself see his role? The following extracts are samples of relevant material involved in the textual analysis:

Ayatollah Sistani urges Iraq to protect Kurds amid tensions

(T.V, 2017)

Iraq's most senior Shia cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani has called on the government to protect the Kurdish population in the north amid rising tensions between Baghdad and Iraq's secessionist Kurds.

Ayatollah Al Sistani's call was issued at the Friday prayer in the holy city of Karbala by one of his representatives, Reuters reported.

According to Iraq's Alforat News Agency, Ayatollah Al Sistani called the presence of the Iraqi forces in Kirkuk a victory for all Iraqis.

Ayatollah Al Sistani also warned against any retaliatory moves, and urged Kurdish leaders to cooperate with the federal government on the basis of Iraqi law.

Ayatollah Al Sistani stated that the country's Arabs, Kurds, and Turkmens had to move shoulder to shoulder towards resolving standing problems.

Earlier in the day, security said Iraqi forces took control of the last district in the oil-rich province of Kirkuk, which was still in the hands of Kurdish Peshmerga militants following a three-hour battle.

Forces partaking in the operation to recapture Altun Kupri comprised Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service units, Shia-dominated Popular Mobilization Unites and the Federal Police.

The Peshmergas withdrew from the district after battling the advancing Iraqi troops with machineguns, mortars, and rocket propelled grenades, security sources said, according to the agency.

The district, known as Perde in Kurdish, lies on the road between the city of Kirkuk, the province's capital, which had been returned to government control on Monday, and Erbil, the capital of the semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan in the country's north.

Kurdish forces had been holding parts of Iraqi territory since 2014, when the Takfiri terror group of ISIS began an offensive across Iraq. The Kurds joined the fight and began overrunning territory in the process.

The Baghdad government had long insisted that the Kurds pull out of the territories they had overrun. But the Kurdish militants had refused.

The oil-rich Kirkuk Province, which lies only partly within Kurdistan's borders, voted in a September 25 referendum on Kurdistan's separation from Iraq.

The referendum was held despite strong opposition from the central government in Baghdad, the international community, and Iraq's neighbouring countries, especially Turkey and Iran.

Ayatollah Al Sistani had also voiced opposition to the referendum. He had warned against the unfavorable repercussions of separation and division in the Iraqi nation, stressing that this would pave the way for foreign interference in the affairs of the country.

Following the vote, Baghdad imposed a ban on direct international flights to the Kurdish region and called for a halt to its independent crude oil sales (Economist, 2017).

Iraq's Most Influential Man Gets Pulled Back Into Politics

(Kaplow, 2014)

The most influential man in Iraq has been speaking up again after a period of relative quiet. It's not Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, or the head of the ISIS militants who are taking over much of the west and north of the country. It's an aged cleric, the Grand Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani, who can be compared to something like a pope for the country's majority Shiite Muslims.

He stays out of the limelight, rarely meets with Westerners and doesn't do interviews. But he has generally been a calming influence and often helpful to U.S. efforts in Iraq.

One scene I remember from covering Iraq was a large bombing at a Shiite shrine in Baghdad. I saw a group of angry men arguing amid the shattered glass and debris along the main street. They were calling out for action, presumably

revenge against Sunni Muslims whose partisans were responsible for the blast. Finally, a man at the centre of the crowd reminded them that they could not respond without the direction of the Shiite religious hierarchy, meaning

Al Sistani's , who had been consistently preaching for restraint. That immediately quieted the crowd.

Sometimes, people compare Shiites to Catholics, who have the Vatican for guidance.

A Call To Arms

Iraqis talked about how Al Sistani lives in a simple home in a small alleyway in the holy city of Najaf, and talked of his supreme Islamic scholarship. You'd hear about them making visits to him to wish him well or seek his advice on some personal matter.

Al Sistani's influence has lessened some since, amid the chaos the country has experienced. But in the past two weeks, he has emerged to address the dire crisis facing the country amid the militant Sunni extremist surge. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, the group leading the onslaught, targets Shiites directly in many cases.

Through his statements and spokesmen, Al Sistani called last week for the formation of a new government that would unite the nation — an apparent reference to Maliki's failure to win the trust of Sunnis and Kurds. And the week before that, Al Sistani issued a call to arms — telling able-bodied men to rush to the aid of the failed armed forces.

"Whoever is capable of holding a weapon and fighting the terrorists," Al Sistani's statement read, "must volunteer his name in the security forces in this sacred goal."

Influential Edicts

Al Sistani's website offers advice on family and social issues (for example, abortion is prohibited unless the mother faces grave danger or unbearable difficulty continuing the pregnancy). But he has also weighed in at crucial times since the U.S. occupation of Iraq (he spent years effectively under house arrest during the rule of Saddam Hussein).

Here's some background on the man and the role Al Sistani has played.

Al Sistani , who's 84 years old, according to his official biography, is Iranian born. But he does not adhere to the view of top clerics in Iran that clergy should also be political figures. Al Sistani's more traditional "Quietist" strain encourages distance between the clergy and government. But he has spoken out when national unity was threatened or when it looked like long-persecuted Shiites were on the verge of a communal setback.

In 2003, Al Sistani's call for quick elections forced U.S. officials to scrap plans for a long period of rule by leadership in effect appointed by the U.S. It was a major change of course that gave Iraqis — primarily the Shiite majority — a voice at the ballot. Al Sistani also urged people to vote.

Iraqi officials made frequent pilgrimages to his home in Najaf to consult on everything, from whether he would object to their candidacy for office to helping urge Iraqis to conserve electricity. As the Iraqi Shiite leadership became increasingly plagued by complaints of corruption and abuse, their popularity dropped and Al Sistani took more of a back seat. Some speculated that he felt

burned by his association with the leaders. He also made at least one trip to London for extended medical treatment.

But he used his authority and representatives to, at times, settle rivalries between Shiite militias that often turned bloody and threatened to spiral.

A Call For Unity

Now, his statements concerning the new Sunni uprising highlight the country's desperate situation, one that surely distresses the elderly cleric.

"The father should urge his son, the mother urge her son, and the wife urge her husband to be brave in saving this country and its people," he ordered in the June 13 statement.

Then, possibly because that was seen as too sectarian, Al Sistani had more to say Friday. "Our call last Friday was for all Iraqi citizens, not for a particular sect," the edit stated.

Then Al Sistani appeared to focus on the Shiite leadership, widely criticized for marginalizing the minority Sunnis. He called for the leaders to adhere to the schedule required in forming a new government after the April parliamentary elections. This government, he wrote, should "avoid past mistakes and open new horizons toward a better future for all Iraqis (Kaplow, 2014)."

Ayatollah Al Sistani lends a quiet guiding voice to Iraq

(Morris, 2010)

In the winding back streets of Najaf lives a man who with one utterance could make or break any candidate in tomorrow's Iraqi elections. Millions of loyal followers in Iraq, and Shiites across the world, look to Grand Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani as a marja, or reference, for guidance in every aspect of their lives. Frail and nearing 80, he rarely leaves his villa and never speaks to the press or in public, but Al Sistani remains arguably the most influential figure in Iraq.

His announcements and fatwas have dictated the shape of Iraq's democratic system since the 2003 invasion, and are closely followed by most of Iraq's 15 million Shiites, who make up about 60 per cent of the population. He has forced Iraq's American occupiers to abruptly change course and has forced Iraq's warring forces into finding compromises. However, he has steadfastly refused to give any backing to any candidate or party, despite many desperate attempts by Iraqi politicians to appear connected to him in any way. Instead, Ayatollah Al Sistani has served as something of a national conscience, urging Iraqis to cast their ballots, calling it their duty, saying that to not do so "will give others a chance to realise their illegitimate goals".

There are four marjas in Najaf, but Al Sistani is the most directly involved in politics. His edicts, however, tend to cover the wider process rather than the policy of any particular party. "Sayed Al Sistani has encouraged the political process and elections since the first day after regime change, but he also respects the views and will of the Iraqi people," said Sheikh Faed Noon, president of the Najaf provincial council.

All Shiites adopt a marja al taqlid, which translates to "object of emulation", a senior religious cleric whose rulings they follow. Grand Ayatollah Al Sistani has

the largest following of any marja in Iraq or the world. The power of his words was demonstrated when he successfully negotiated an end to the bloody clashes between supporters of the militant Shiite cleric Muqtada al Sadr's Mahdi Army and US forces in Najaf in 2004.

However, to give an endorsement to one political party would mean the cleric "would be considered to belong to them, and would contradict his role as a marja for everyone", said Sheikh Noon. He said Ayatollah Al Sistani's political statements always have the concerns of the Iraqi people at heart. When calling on citizens to vote, the cleric said Iraqis should pick "the best and the most concerned with Iraq's interests at present and in the future".

It is discreet, indirect, political action born of the most significant ideological split among Shiites. Najaf scholars prefer the "quietist" view, that clerics should be removed from the day-to-day political scene, and rather work as observers, to keep responsible officials in check. This school of thought is in stark contrast to the theory of Waliyat al Faqih, or the guardianship of the jurisprudent, which has been the basis of the regime in neighbouring Iran.

"Those that follow Waliyat al Faqih believe that a marja can take a different role, a direct role in the nitty-gritty of politics," said Hojjat al Islam Mohammed Hussein, the son and spokesman for Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Sayed Hakeem, another of Najaf's senior religious leaders. "For us that's not acceptable." Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was the primary proponent of Wilayat al Faqih, arguing that clerics must have a direct political role in the running of government.

The idea has divided the Shiite scholars of Najaf and Qom, the centre for Shia religion in Iran. Yet despite his more removed role, Ayatollah Al Sistani has made his voice heard during any disputes with US policy in Iraq, and without him the post-invasion political history of the country would look very different. In the summer of 2003, Paul Bremer was planning for the Iraqi Constitution to be penned by US appointees, but Ayatollah Al Sistani issued a fatwa saying only an elected body could write the constitution, and America bent to accommodate his views.

When in 2003 the US pushed for a political system based on regional caucuses, the cleric issued a statement saying elections would be the best way for a transitional government to be formed. Most recently, as parliament wrangled over the new election law, Ayatollah Al Sistani came out in favour of an open list system, where voters can cast their ballots for an individual rather than a closed party list, the system under which tomorrow's elections will be held.

The pictures of the wispy bearded, black turbaned ayatollah that adorn the streets of Najaf show the extent of the people's reverence. At Babil University, 30km north of Najaf, where all political posters are banned, a huge banner with Ayatollah Al Sistani's call to vote still takes up a prominent space on campus. "It's our duty to vote, Sayed Al Sistani's words will change the minds of any who doubt it," said Ibrahim Ali, a Shiite geography student.

4.4   SUMMARY

This chapter has summarised the findings of this research based on interview data and has also presented data collected from media reports. Of course, due to the large amount of data uncovered in both forms of collection there is only room for a summary in this chapter. The

following chapters contain analyses based on all the data gathered during the interviews (of which the contents of this chapter is a summary), as well as more detailed textual analyses.

Chapter 5: The first post war election after the regime and Al Sistani's fatwa

5.1   INTRODUCTION

In analysing data related to the first research question, this chapter explores and discusses the 2005 election where Al Sistani intervened and pronounced his well-known fatwa, telling Iraqis to accept this election and to vote. The question raised is – what was the reaction of the Iraqi people?

This, the first of the analysis chapters, focuses on the first research question: To what extent do Iraqi people accept Al Sistani's role as a cleric with political influence? (Do they approve of his approach to political intervention?). The analysis is based on the findings from interviews conducted with the participants, and analysis of written data stemming either directly from Al Sistani, or through his organisations.

5.1.1   Chapter content

This chapter provides an overview of the situation in Iraq at the time. In doing so it offers more background on the Sunni Iraqis, their beliefs regarding the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. The purpose is to shed light on the perceptions of both the Sunnis and the Shia. Further background material in this chapter also provides information on the impact on Iraq's neighbours of the elections. Importantly I begin with an examination of the Sunni boycott of the election, providing insight on their views of Al Sistani and his actions.

The chapter then explores and analyses Al Sistani's motivations in discussing if the Shia were his only interest. The research also turns to the diaspora's response to Al Sistani's actions – in other words the views of the research participants.

Before a discussion which brings the whole chapter together, Al Sistani's own official reason for the fatwa is explained. The chapter concludes with a detailed summary in preparation for the following chapter, which further explores findings relevant to the first research question. Please note, the analysis for each section includes a textual analysis where relevant.

5.1.2   The link between this chapter and the research questions

This chapter explores the following research question:

Q 1: To what extent do Iraqi people accept Al Sistani's role as a cleric with political influence? Do they approve of his approach to his own political influence?

The chapter discusses findings based on an analysis (where relevant) of interview questions including the following:

- Was Al Sistani right when he invited Iraqis to participate in the 2005 elections?
- Why did Al Sistani invite people to hold an election while Sunni provinces were being attacked by terrorists?
- Do the Sunnis think that Al Sistani's interventions in politics are an attempt by Al Sistani or Shia clerics to obtain more power?
- Does Al Sistani support democracy?
- What is the point of view of Shia clerics towards democracy?
- Why did Al Sistani not issue a fatwa against the US when they occupied Iraq while he did issue a fatwa against ISIS?
- Were Al Sistani's interventions in politics justified?

5.2   BACKGROUND: THE FIRST POST REGIME ELECTION OF 2005

On the thirtieth of January 2005, millions of Iraqi citizens went to the polls to participate in the first democratic legislative election taking place in Iraq after the political change in 2003. The elections were held in an country which was suffering from acts of terrorism such as bombings, particularly in Iraq's capital, Baghdad. These elections took place despite a Sunni boycott that was in place. The Iraqis – other than the Sunnis – considered these elections, which marked an important turning point in the history of Iraq, as showing the first democratic exercise in Iraq modern history. As mentioned in the literature review, Al Sistani was the first major influential Iraqi to invite the people of the nation to participate in an election. He made this invitation to the people of Iraq by introducing a fatwa which is considered an action of major significance to Muslims. It was Al Sistani's belief that having an election was the beginning of Iraqis making their own decisions rather than having an occupying force dictate their lives. Many questions are addressed in this chapter. These include;

- Why did the Sunni boycott the elections and not follow Al Sistani's fatwa?
- Is it because of ideological differences between the Sunni and Shia sects, or because of the security situation?

- Did the security situation in the Sunni majority areas in Iraq make it too dangerous for the Sunni to participate in the elections?
- Were the Sunni people ready to partake in the elections after they lost their power during the 2003 Ba'ath regime fall?
- Was the Fatwa by Al Sistani an attempt for the Shia to gain power or some other kind of control over Iraq as there are more Shia in the population than Sunnis?
- Why did Iraqis living outside of Iraq follow Al Sistani's fatwa as some of them have been outside the nation for decades?
- Did the governments of Iraq's neighbouring countries pay much attention to this election, particularly in regard to which sect would win and take political power?
- Did this election affect neighbouring countries? Did the neighbouring countries raise any concerns that if the Shia won the election, they would form an alliance with Shia dominated countries particularly in Syria and Iran?

5.2.1   Who are the Sunni Iraqis?

This section purposefully discusses the background and beliefs of the Sunni as details about Shia beliefs and attitudes are presented and come to light through discussions surrounding Al Sistani. Importantly, Al Sistani being Shia means that the Sunni are not automatically his followers

Sunni Arabs are the second largest religious sect in Iraq after the Shia. The Sunnis in Iraq were in power from 1921 to 2003, as a result of frequent wars and judgments, especially with the neighbouring countries of Iran and Kuwait. Civil and internal wars had a large part in the Sunni's dominance (Uloom, 2009). After the elections of 2005, the divisions between the Sunnis and the Shia (or Shiites) became greater and this led to disputes between Sunni leaders. Most of these growing divisions were ethnic, political and geographical and within the Sunni community only (Bengio & Litvak, 2014). Sunnis have variety political goals, with some secular, highly nationalistic ex-Baathists in favour of restoring a strong, centralized state (Ze'evi, 2007). Not all Sunni Arabs support a Sunni-led insurgency, but some are members of the insurgency and sympathetic to the insurgents' goals and their violent methods. Others are more religious, parochial, and motivated by tribal interests (Baram, 2010).

Most Sunni Arabs reside in central Iraq, including the so-called Sunni Triangle, an area that stretches northwest of Baghdad and encompasses insurgent strongholds like Tikrit (Saddam's hometown), Ramadi, Samarra, and Fallujah. At least half of Iraq's Sunni community live in cities such as Baghdad or Mosul, and form the backbone of Iraq's educated middle class, working as lawyers, doctors, and bureaucrats (Tripp, 2007). Because Saddam's Ba'ath Party emphasized a socialist, non-religious Iraq state, most Sunnis are

secular. Many of these Sunnis say the constitution offers too much authority to sharia, or Islamic law, which is favoured by Iraq's highly influential Shia clerics (Marr, 2009).

Politically, Arab Sunnis in Iraq suffered from a political vacuum post 2003. Most Sunni leaders belong to the Iraqi army and the Baath party which was dissolved by Paul Bremer (US civil administrator after 2003. Following this, 'Influential Sunni clerics branded Iraq's election as illegitimate' and the Sunni clerics issued a fatwa not to participate in the elections of 2005 (Shukla, 2005, p. 154). This predicament was the outcome of rivalries between local communities (Tripp, 2007). Externally, the Sunni distrust the central government led by Shias and they do not believe that Baghdad represents their interests. This is why they boycotted the election. As well as this, the Sunni had no one significant leader to take them into the future, therefore their confusion became evident in the political arena (Allawi, 2008; Bremer, 2006; Mansour, 2016).

One participant in this study, 1MSuJ, is an Iraqi Sunni citizen who witnessed the 2005 elections and took part in the vote. He said that, 'We were in Mosul. We did not know most of the Iraqi politicians who were running for office after the 2003 fall of the Ba'ath regime, so it was hard for us to elect someone we had no knowledge about.' Another participant, 7FSuSt, stated that, 'As women we could not take part in this election because we did not know the political history of those running for office so it was difficult to trust the political process run by people we did not know.'

After 2003 the Sunni Ulama's (Sunni clerics) legal role was subsumed by the state and jurists became judges by political appointment (al-Kifaee, 2010). The Sunni jurist's authority was derived from the state and owed little to his actual credentials as a scholar. Religion and politics were integrated and the line separating them blurred. It was different with the Shia. Their Ulama's stood apart from a Sunni-dominated state. As a persecuted majority, the Shias had had no involvement in official politics and their system of jurisprudence was founded outside of politics. Now their existence became divided into two branches – the spiritual realm of their religion and the profane external environment of their daily lives (Schmidt, 2009a).

5.2.2 What are the Sunnis' main political sub-groups?

During and after Ottoman and British rule of Iraq, the Sunnis who dominant. The same was true after Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath party took power in a military coup in 1968 (Allawi, 2008). After the 2003 overthrowing of the Saddam regime the Sunni leadership became fractured (Times, 2005). Until the Sunni's clerics were instructed to boycott the parliamentary

elections, which only hurt their political influence even further (Ze'evi, 2007). Some Sunni leaders had actually been looking ahead to the parliamentary elections to re-stake their claim in Iraqi politics.

Iraq's Sunni leadership comprises a number of parties, coalitions, and other political associations (Times, 2005). Among them were:

> The Iraqi Islamic Party: Loosely associated with Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, the Iraqi Islamic Party was the sole Sunni group that briefly participated in the interim parliamentary elections.

> The Muslims Clerics Association: Formed after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, this hard-line, influential group of Islamic clerics is composed of both Sunni Arabs and Sunni Kurds. The association, which was neither pro-insurgency nor pro-United States, has good relations with Shia clerical leaders, including Muqtada al-Sadr.

> The Iraqi Council of National Dialogue: A powerful bloc of Sunni parties, the Iraqi Council of National Dialogue boycotted January's parliamentary elections.

> The Conference of the People of Iraq: Formerly called the General conference for Sunnis in Iraq, this coalition of political parties is led by Adnan Dulaimi, a powerful Sunni leader who criticized the elections and called to boycott it.

5.2.3   Why the US invaded Iraq

The United States invaded Iraq in March 2003, quickly defeated the Iraqi Army, and removed Saddam Hussein from power. The United States had three primary objectives for invading Iraq. First, the administration of President George W. Bush stated they were certain that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, and aimed to destroy these weapons (Record, 2003). Second, the dissolution of Hussein's regime would eliminate their threat to the United States and weaken Iraq's ties to terrorism (Sapiro, 2003). And removal of the Hussein regime would enable the United States to positively influence selection of the subsequent Iraqi leadership.

The third objective is perhaps the most pertinent, it is that the US wanted to turn Iraq into a democratic country (Allawi, 2008). Shukla argues that 'the real reason for the invasion of Iraq was not WMD [weapons of mass destruction], nor war against terror, nor getting rid of Saddam, nor grafting democracy, but about the 'hegemony of dollar' (Shukla, 2005, p. 148). Some commentators state that the introduction of democracy into Iraq would not only improve that nation, but spread a positive (and democratic) influence throughout the Middle

East. President Bush spoke passionately on this subject when he announced that, 'Iraqi democracy will succeed and that success will send forth the news, from Damascus to Teheran, that freedom can be the future of every nation. The establishment of a free Iraq at the heart of the Middle East will be a watershed event in the global democratic revolution' (Bush, 2004).

Some of these possible objectives have since been discredited, of course. Weapons of mass destruction were never found, although the United States continued with their objective of removing Saddam from power and holding free and democratic elections to choose the new leadership of Iraq (Allawi, 2008). One supporter was Al Sistani who by his Fatwa invited people to participate in these elections while the opponents were the Sunni people. The conflict between the two led to the destabilizing of the security and stability of Iraq.

5.2.4 How these elections affected Iraq's neighbours

The Iraqi elections were important for all the Arab countries especially Iraq's neighbours. Prior to 2005 the Arab leaders in various countries controlled elections and won 100 per cent of the votes. Mohler (2005) mentions that Iraq held elections in 1995 and 2002, and Saddam Hussein won 100 per cent of the vote there.

The Arab states observed the Iraqi elections of 2005 and were afraid of the results. (Makiya, 2010) suggests that even just the possibility of elections in Iraq was the first real opening for participatory democracy in the Arab Middle East. The Arab states knew that if the Iraqi elections succeeded this would create reactions throughout the Middle East because most Arab leaders force their people to live in tyranny and despair (Khalilzad, 2010). Therefore, some of these leaders supported the terrorists to destroy the Iraqi elections. Gause (2005) argues that US President Bush was absolutely clear that the promotion of democracy in the Muslim world was consistent with American values. In an address he said,

> Our strategy to keep the peace in the longer term is to help change the conditions that give rise to extremism and terror, especially in the broader Middle East. Parts of that region have been caught for generations in the cycle of tyranny and despair and radicalism. When a dictatorship controls the political life of a country, responsible opposition cannot develop and dissent is driven underground and toward the extreme (p.3).

Many of Iraq's neighbours watched the elections with fear, wondering what kind of government would be formed in Iraq, especially as the US announced that any permanent government would have a right to establish conventions (Rubin, 2006). And then, when the

government was formed in Iraq after the December 15 elections, the US slowly began to withdraw forces from Iraq, completing the withdrawal at the end of 2011. The agreement between the US and Iraq made Iraq's neighbours concerned (Jawad, 2013). Countries such as Jordan, Syria, and Saudi Arabia were curious as to how the political vacuum would be filled once the U.S. withdrew after nearly a decade of occupation.

Jordan

Jordan is an Arab state comprised mostly of Sunnis. It is home to the second largest population of marginalised Iraqi refugees (after Syria). Refugees International notes that these Iraqi refugees live in extremely vulnerable circumstances and most have not been granted legal status (Sassoon, 2008). Human Rights First – a non-profit, non-partisan human rights organisation – estimates that Jordan hosted 500,000 to 700,000 Iraqi refugees in spite of its small size and limited resources (Ferris, 2007).

It might be considered that the success of the 2005 election – with the Iraqis succeeding in organizing the elections and forming government – would help the refugees to come back to their country. However, Jordan's government feared that if the Shia-dominated party gained power in Iraq the country would be severely vulnerable to a dangerous Iranian influence. In addition, if the Shia majority government assumed power, the political conflict between Baghdad and Amman (the capital of Jordan) would likely grow (Guttieri, 2005) .

Iraqi antipathy toward Jordan was already high because of a widespread belief that the Jordanian government colluded with Saddam Hussein's regime in order to receive discounted oil (Rubin, 2006). Therefore, if the Shia took over power in Iraq through elections and allied with Iran, it was thought by the Jordanians that this would change the political map of the region. It was the Jordanian king who coined the term " Shia crescent", referring to Iraq, Iran, Syria, and parts of Lebanon as all one day being dominated by Shia (Valbjørn & Bank, 2007).

Syria

Syria might have been affected positively or negatively by the new stability in Iraq but it was be in a better position than Jordan. Syria agreed with the Iraqi government politically that Iran was a link between these governments because it had a good relationship with both. As a country with hostile relations with the US, Syria, considered the election from the perspective of it being the beginning of an American withdrawal schedule. Therefore,

politically Syria supported Iraq in wanting to remove the US from the region (Rubin, 2006) and wanted the occupation to end as quickly as possible.

Negatively, the government in Syria had been in power for more than 40 years and felt that Syrians – if they saw the Iraqi elections produce a high level of transparency – might be inspired to follow in Iraq's footsteps and push for their rights (Gause III, 2014). For example, the Kurds in Iraq had played an active part in the elections and have had a role in the formation of the Iraqi government after the fall of Saddam. But in Syria the Kurds still do not have Syrian nationality. Thus, like Jordan, Syria feared the consequences of the outcome of the elections.

Turkey

Turkey was the focal point throughout the 1990s in the process of containment of the United States in Iraq under the rule of Saddam Hussein. Turkey led a group of unexpected events that launched Operation Iraqi Freedom which gave rise to some fear and concern among Turkish policymakers.

There were many concerns that Turkey would face if the Iraqi elections succeeded. Firstly, Turkey was concerned to prevent the division of Iraq on the basis of sectarian or ethnic lines leading to the emergence of an independent Kurdish state or confederation (the capital city of the Kurdish state is Kirkuk, which is oil-rich), which   would promote aspirations to an entity similar to the Kurdish population of whom there were many in Turkey (Davutoğlu, 2008).

The second concern was to protect the Turkmen minority who speak a Turkic language and live mainly in northern Iraq (Tank, 2005). Thirdly, Turkey was concerned about the probable liquidation of the Party Karkerani Kurdistan PKK, a Turkish Kurdish rebel movement, which turned to the north of Iraq after its defeat in 1999, as Turkey wished to prevent the emergence of a fundamentalist and anti-democratic Iraqi state (Ertem, 2011).

Turkey and the United States shared fundamental objectives in Iraq. Both would prefer to keep Iraq together and not let it disintegrate into ethnic or sectarian or state-based pockets. Both would like a strong central government able to restore political and economic stability, as well as a sufficient degree of force in the future to balance the power of Iran(Güney, 2005). The US and Turkey did not wish to see the emergence of any form of fundamentalist religious state in Iraq. This could not be achieved only through free elections representing all Iraqis, but needed the support of Iraq's neighbouring countries too (Alessandri, 2010).

Kuwait

Kuwait is an important neighbour of Iraq. Barakat (2005) mentioned that Kuwait has always supported the security and stability of Iraq, and that it supported the electoral process and hoped it would produce a free, united Iraq. However, it demanded that that Iraq take its orders from patriots who are concerned with its best interests, and pull away from foreign and sectarian interference. The Kuwaiti government felt that national unity would be the victor in the Iraqi election, and that the new government would manufacture a new political identity and a new and unified Iraq (Lynch, 2006).

It was considered in Kuwait that the elections would bring about a fundamental shift, stemming from the Iraqi people for the first time in 35 years being eligible to vote freely (instead of falling victim to the oppression and tyranny of an authoritarian regime) (Feldman & Martinez, 2006). It was also felt that Iraq would be a good neighbour and respect the sovereignty of neighbouring countries, particularly Kuwait, after it had been freed from suffering suffered from Saddam's regime. Therefore Kuwait wanted to support Iraq in their elections and ensure a unified and democratic Iraq (Rubin, 2006).

Saudi Arabia

After Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, Iraq became a country that threatened the security of the Arab Gulf. This resulted in the relationship between Iraq and Saudi Arabia becoming strained (McMillan, 2006b). Due to Saudi Arabia's significant role with the Americans, after Saddam's regime being removed in 2003, Saudi Arabia started looking forward to playing a large part in preserving regional balance (Nasr, 2006). McMillan (2006b) indicates that,

> Riyadh's policy toward Baghdad over the next several years will probably be dominated by four key concerns about the future of Iraq: domestic stability, foreign meddling, oil production policy, and Iraq's political evolution (especially the role of the Shia). Of these, far away the most important to Riyadh is stability (p.1).

The Iraqi elections produced an Iraqi government run by Shias. This government was rejected by Saudi Arabia because the Saudi government felt that the Iraqi government would ally itself with Iran and form a large force in the region (Jones, 2005). It was believed by some Shia leaders in Iraq that Saudi Arabia viewed the Shia-led government in Iraq as a tool for Iran and that Saudi Arabia wanted to overthrow this new Iraqi government (Fürtig, 2007).

Due to the closure of a large part of the land border between Saudi Arabia and Iraq, the Saudis sent out fighter planes to Iraq, and buses through Syria after 2003 to negatively influence the stability of Iraq (Rubin, 2006). Saudi Arabia considered itself as a loser in the Iraqi elections because the new Iraqi government became the first Middle Eastern partner of the US, and it had a good relationship with Iran (Nasr, 2006).

Also, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the primary country for oil production in the region. If Iraq could form a strong government and become stable, it would be the only competitor with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in oil production in the region. This was unacceptable to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia which had sought to make the issue of the Iraqi government after the elections commensurate with the policy in the region (Fawn & Hinnebusch, 2006).

The Saudi view was that when and if the internal situation in Iraq returned to something approaching normalcy there would then be a cold war between Iraq and Saudi Arabia. This would happen because Iraq would then take a strong position in OPEC – the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. In this strong position, based on its power as an oil producer, Iraq would then be tempted to push up the oil prices in order to grow its political influence in the region. And this is something the Saudi government did not want (McMillan, 2006a).

Politically, Saudi Arabia's government feared that democratisation of Iraq may affect its own people and encourage them to demand greater freedoms. This freedom could affect many areas of society including the freedom to hold elections, or to uphold the rights of minorities, and to redefine the role of women, even in governance.

Saudi Arabian King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz mentioned that democracy was not appropriate for the Islamic world. Hogan (2005) quotes the king as saying:

> The democratic system that is predominant in the world is not a suitable system for the peoples of our region. Our peoples' makeup and unique qualities are different from those of the rest of the world. In my view, Western democracies may be suitable in their own countries but they do not suit other countries (p.236).

In the past, Iraqi elections led to peaceful transfers of power. The Saudis knew this and were wary that they (Saudi Arabia) would lose power once more (Cooper, 2012). Hayajneh (2004) supports this by saying that if they want to stay in power most Arab regimes believe that democracy is not in their best interests. However, the Saudi Arabs also believe that they cannot survive without US support.

Iran

The alleged Iranian role in Iraqi politics varies from one commentator to another. But a common theme is that there is Iranian influence and interest, and it has both negative and sometimes positive consequences on Iraq, and Iran. Negatively, Iran has a lot of problems with the international community, especially America, because of doubts about Iran's possession of weapons of mass destruction as well as Iran's role in the process of destabilizing the Iraqi security situation (Ehteshami, 2003). Iran took advantage of the U.S. presence in Iraq and tried to subvert the reforms that America began in Iraq in 2003, including elections (Taremi, 2005). Iran's government made Iraq its first line of defence, while at the same time it was trying to bargain and negotiate with the Americans about the security situation in Iraq (Ehteshami, 2003).

On a positive note, Takeyh (2008) mentions that after the formation of the first Iraqi (2005) government run by the Shia, Iranian rhetoric changed. Iran considered the empowerment of a more friendly Shia regime to be an essential objective (Raphaeli, 2005). Raphael states:

> Iraqis took part in a general election for the first time in 50 years. The election was held in a healthy atmosphere, despite threats by terrorists to prevent it. The percentage of voters was much higher than predicted. It is evident that Iraq is not a totally safe place now, but it is also obvious that the rule of a minority over the majority in that country has ended.

Many Iraqi politicians had been living in Iran more than 30 years, so they already had loyalty to Iran (Taremi, 2005). After the elections in Iraq, Iran has had a significant role in forming any Iraqi government. Iran has also sometimes sought to resolve problems between political parties (Cordesman & Burke, 2010).

5.3   THE INTERVIEWS: WHY THE SUNNIS BOYCOTTED THE FIRST ELECTION

5.3.1   The Sunni boycott of the first election

A range of answers were given to the question of why the Sunnis boycotted the 2005 election. Both Sunni and Shia participants in this study were asked questions such as whether the Sunni areas were safe in order for Sunni people to participate in the election.

Sunni viewpoints varied. 1MSuJ stated that 'the election took place so that America can justify their failure to find weapons of mass destruction, and the elections were planned by

the Shia, USA and Al Sistani. 7FSuSt supported this point and she added that there were many Sunni areas that were not secure so it was a mistake to hold elections as the Sunni votes could not be trusted and the country was under occupation and the results were known to favour the Shia. 10MShP argued that Al Sistani's invitation for the Iraqis to host an election was a reaction against the USA after they wanted to impose a new constitution without an election, and also at that time the Sunni areas were secure.

6MSuSt stated that the elections included the Sunnis but not all Sunnis took part in them because their areas were under occupational authority. This meant militants were in power, which led to most of the Sunnis boycotting the elections. 9FSuH/W stated that she did not agree with Al Sistani's invitation to the elections because his invitation was intended so that the Shia people would gain power. She said nothing would change because the Shias of Iraq planned with Al Sistani's help to run Iraq after 2003 with the help of their alliance with Iran to marginalize the role of the Sunnis in Iraq. She said it was because of this that the Sunnis boycotted the elections. 5MKuP mentioned that the short time taken to hold the elections was by US request, as the parties wanted distribution of positions of power on a legal basis, thus Al Sistani's invitation was not the main reason to boycott the elections by Sunni.

The Shia view

The Shia participants in this research have a different opinion regarding why the Sunnis boycotted the elections. 11MShCl mentioned that in the beginning of 2004 the security situation was good but the Sunni people felt that if they took part in this election the truth will finally appear that Iraq had a larger population of Shia than Sunnis, so the Sunnis decided to boycott it. Moreover, 11MShCl added that,

> Al Sistani did not nominate a candidate for election neither did anyone from his family because he is Iranian, so he insisted that the USA let the Iraqi people choose the candidates to write the constitution and help form the new government after Saddam's regime.

8FShSt indicated that Al Sistani by his fatwa wanted to make Iraqis self-governing, and that he wanted the occupation forces to depart as soon as possible. This participant also believed that the election would provide global legitimacy for the Shias to obtain power. 3MShP mentioned that the Sunnis did not acknowledge the new government from the beginning, therefore the Sunnis boycotted the election. 12MShCl mentioned that:

Shia areas were also unstable and on the day of the election there was a threat on the headquarters of the election by a car suicide bomb, so not only were the Sunni areas insecure but also Shia areas and many more areas in Iraq [were insecure].

4MShCl said that:

> I agree that the security situation was not good but the Sunnis did not support the new political process from the beginning and they considered this a threat to their power in Iraq so they did not follow [Al Sistani 's] Fatwa.

14MShP suggested that there were two reasons why the Sunnis boycotted the elections. Firstly, many Sunnis knew that the Shia would win so they refused to lose their power and allow the Shia to run the new Iraqi government. Second, since establishing the Iraqi state in 1921, Iraq had joined with the Sunni countries (in the Arab Gulf and elsewhere). Now, if the Shia were to win, Iraq would align with a different set of countries which are predominantly Shia, countries such as Iran, Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

As demonstrated in the paragraphs above, the reasons for boycotting the election were numerous. The following section explains this more fully.
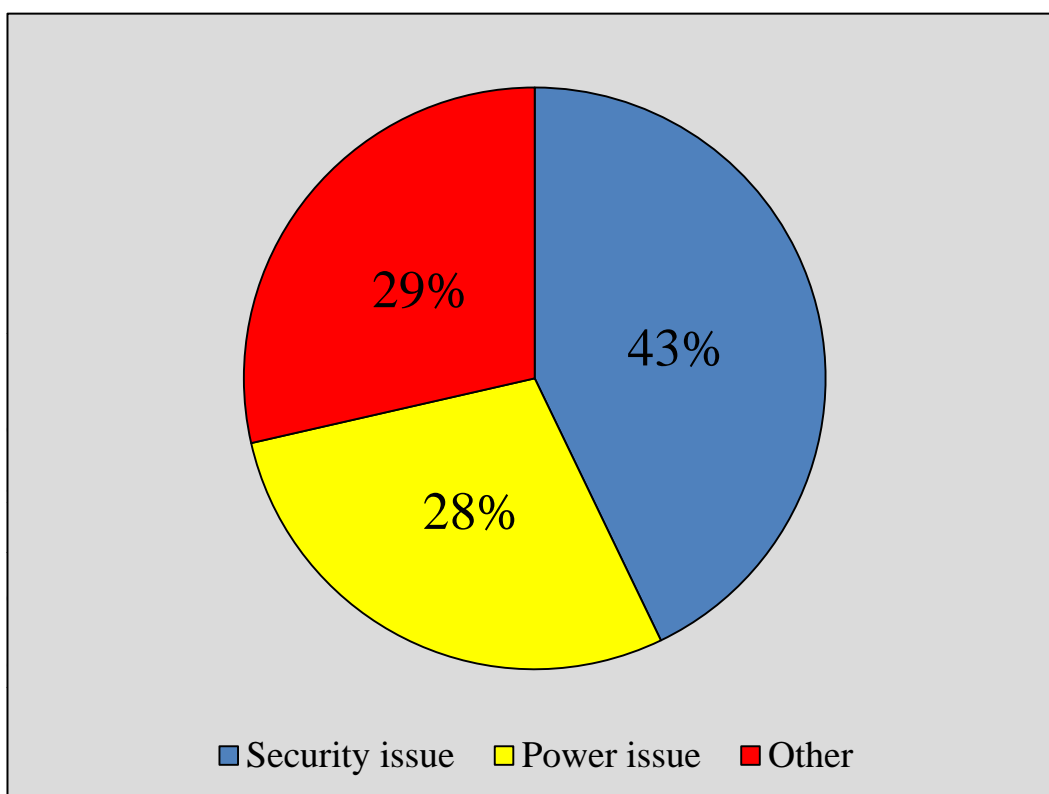
Figure 0-1: Why the Sunni boycotted the first Iraqi election

Observed from Figure 5.1, 43% of the participants in the interviews mentioned that the reason the Sunni boycotted the Iraqi election was the security issue, such as fear from the spread of insurgents in Sunni areas. And 28% of the participants said the reason was that the Shia wanted to gain more power through holding the elections. Another group of participants (29%) mentioned other reasons, such as the Sunni did not have leaders at that time, or they should not participate in election under occupation forces.

5.3.2 Why the Sunnis boycotted the first election: An analysis

The data from interviews revealed that most of Sunni participants in this research approved of boycotting the elections. Figure 4.1 shows that the dominating factor was the security issue, with 43% of participants stating that the security situation was the main reasons for the Sunni to boycott the election, and that the reason for the lack of security was the emergence of insurgents in Sunni areas. The insurgents claimed they would "blow up polling stations". Shukla (2005) supports this with:

> There were no major surprises in the much heralded Iraqi elections, because the absence of Sunni leaders after 2003 led to the fact that the Sunni community did not have a clear vision in the new Iraq. Moreover, most of these leaders were working with Saddam's regime. As predicted, the Shia-dominated south and the Kurd dominated northern areas of the country witnessed heavy polling, while the resistance forces and four Sunni dominated provinces in central Iraq,

with around half the country's population, were wracked by insurgency (p.150).

The interviews results indicated in Figure 4.1 indicated that 28% of participants believed the election was a good opportunity for Shia to prove they are the majority population in Iraq according. And in doing this they hoped to get more 'rights' than they had previously, particularly the right to run Iraq. Shukla (2005) supports this, stating that:

> The election results showed that the Shia constitute about 60 per cent of the country's population, the Alliance got only about 48 per cent of the vote, but the elections have led to the first Shia government in an Arab state in more than 1,000 years (p.150).

The Sunni people felt that participation in the elections was meant to prove that the Shia is the majority population in Iraq, and that proving this could change the equation in the region and in the Middle East due to the emergence of new alliances, therefore they thought it was essential for them to boycott it.

In addition, 29% of participants, as shown in Figure 4.1, assume that the elections under the occupation was a matter of concern for the Sunni people – for safety/security reasons – so they refused to participate in the elections supervised by the occupying forces in Iraq. Whether this was a valid reason or not is unclear. Since that time there have been three further elections – at the end of 2005, in 2010 and in 2014. Tables 1, 2 3 and 4 in Appendix B show the results of these elections. These results show us that the Sunni participation in the elections grew after the 2005 election – perhaps the Sunnis had realised they had made a mistake at that first election?

According to the data in this research, the Shia participants believed there was multiple evidence (including post 2005) indicating that the idea of security issues in Sunni areas was a valid assertion. Even at the time of this research Sunni areas are still not secure, despite the fact they gained important positions in the forming of the Iraqi government post 2005 (Mamouri, 2014d).

However, further to this, most terrorists who were killed in Iraq were found in Sunni areas. Since 2003 there has been a political struggle between the Shia and the Sunni and this problem still persists. There is a population difference between the Sunni and the Shia. It seems, from the observations and comments of the interview participants, that perhaps the reason for the Sunni boycotting the elections was not because of the USA occupation, but because of the fear that the Shia would gain more control (Jawad, 2013).

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5.3.3 Analysis: The Sunni boycott

As mentioned in the literature review, the Shia sect boycott of the election of 1922 led to the Sunnis running the Iraqi government (Bengio, 2011). When they did this, it has been claimed that Iraq was characterised by oppression, marginalization, displacement and executions of Shia. This time it seemed clear that the Sunnis were concerned that if the Shia won the election, this would lead to the formation of an international coalition consisting of Iraq, Iran, Syria and parts of Lebanon, which would make the Sunnis a victim. This was their fear, but Al Sistani's fatwa and other statements might suggest that it was an unnecessary fear – Al Sistani said that "no certain sect can govern Iraq without participation of other sects" (al-Khafaf, 2015).

Al Sistani's view was that the Iraqi people should choose their government in accordance with elections that are free from the control of any country (al-Khafaf, 2015). The other side to the debate is that Al Sistani called the election for reasons that were only good for the country – and for all sects in the country. For example, Al Sistani might have promoted the election as the beginning of the establishment of a government that has the right to conclude agreements and negotiate for demanding the rights of all Iraqis. He might have called for the election to accelerate the departure of the occupying forces, or to simply form a government representing all the religions, sects and nationalities of Iraqi (Uloom, 2009).

5.4 THE INTERVIEWS: WERE THE SHIA AL SISTANI'S ONLY INTEREST?

5.4.1 Were the Shia Al Sistani's only interest?

After the capture of Saddam Hussein, the CPA (the Coalition Provisional Authority) affirmed its stated 'message of reconciliation and hope' by meeting the demands of Iraqis for direct national elections. Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani insisted that the political process respected the dignity of Iraq's Shias and ensured their rights to proportional political representation. If Ayatollah Al Sistani's demands were not met, the United States risked spoiling new-found goodwill and inciting a destabilizing conflict with Iraq's most respected spiritual leader (Allawi, 2008). Al Sistani's election fatwa was interpreted by Sunnis as a call to Shia to get power over and above the Sunni people. A further suggestion was that it was to obtain an Iraqi alliance with their neighbouring country Iran so that Iraq becomes a new force in the region. And so Iran may have helped Al Sistani so that it would benefit from a new Shia government in Iraq that would serve Iran's interest.

After the 2003 fall of the Ba'ath party, according to some of the findings from the participants, the Shia of Iraq saw an opportunity to gain the leadership of Iraq via legitimate means and not through a coup or assassination. On the other hand, the Sunni community in Iraq and in the wider region considered Iraq to have become prey to Iran through the intervention of Al Sistani in politics and his issuing of the election fatwa which was considered to be the beginning of Shia rule in Iraq (Davis, 2008).

Sunni participants in this research such as 7FSuSt said that clerics should not interfere in politics, but that Al Sistani's fatwa appeared to be agreement between Syria and Iran to let the Shia control the government in Iraq. 2MSuSt supported the suggestion that Iran considered it an opportunity to intervene in Iraq's affairs by using Al Sistani, a man of Iran in Iraq. And 9FSuH/W argued that the election of 2005 was planned in advance so that the Shia of Iraq could gain control and govern Iraq. 1MSuJ mentioned that the Sunnis felt that when the Shia gained control of the government, they would be an ally for Iran to meet Iran's special interests. Most of Shia politicians had been exiled to Iran during Saddam's rule so when the Shia gained control it meant Iran gained control 1MSuJ added that:

> The Sunni sect reject [the Shia Iraqi government] because Iraq had a war with Iran from 1980 to 1988, and they disagree with them even with religious ideas so we cannot accept a Shia state allied with Iran and leading Iraq.

This was the Sunni participants' thoughts on this topic. The Shia participants argued against these thoughts. 10MShP mentioned that it should be said that Iran and Iraq had common interests in getting rid of Saddam. He added that if the Shia of Iraq are forming around 60 percent of Iraq's population then what is the problem if they get power. 10MShP added that:

> After the result of elections, Sunnis obtained positions in the new Iraqi government as well as the Shia so it is valid and possible to say Al Sistani does not represent any sect but instead he defends all Iraqis' interests without discrimination. In addition, there was no real representative for the Sunni at that time because most of them where with the Ba'ath party or joined with insurgents so they want to impose them on the new political process in Iraq.

13MShP says that throughout history the Shia clerics of Iraq did not insist on a Shia president. They did not indicate they were after power or control so they did not argue when the king of Iraq, Faisal I, gained power from 1921 to 1933, even though although he was Sunni. The Shia accepted anyone to govern without objection to their religion, sect or party,

and only insisted that he should be a fair man (Tripp, 2007). This is a historical point which suggests that the Shia do not need to organize with anyone to get power. 12MShCl is in support of this point and says that when Abdul Salam Arif, the President of Iraq from 1963 to 1966, was forming his government he awarded the Shia two ministries out of 22. Shia clerics did not object at that time, suggesting that the problem was that the Sunnis did not want Shia to be their partners in the homeland as they did not believe that Shia were able to manage the country (Uluum, 2009). Therefore, the Sunnis stood out in opposition to any chance that allowed Shia to gain power. 4MShCl mentioned that Al Sistani did not call his followers to control the government by force, but by democratic means, and that the fatwa was a true expression of a Shia cleric wanting to practice democracy.

5.5   THE INTERVIEWS: THE DIASPORA'S RESPONSE TO AL SISTANI'S FATWA

5.5.1   Further background: the Diaspora's response to Al Sistani's Fatwa

Political developments in Iraq influenced the political situation in the region. Saddam Hussain's regime from 1979-2003 was classified as a dictatorship and considered as dangerous to the stability of the Middle East (Allawi, 2008). As a dictatorial regime, the regime of Saddam Hussain did not give the liberty for the opposition to work inside Iraq. Many members of the various political parties that opposed the regime were executed or jailed for a long time (Aimami, 2011). Due to this situation, members of the Iraqi opposition felt that it was not easy to live under a tyrannical regime. That situation forced large numbers of the population to leave Iraq and to live in exile. The reason for leaving the country varies from person to person as does the period of exile. Some opponents may have left because of being a direct target inside the country, others for feeling oppressed (Uloom, 2009).

Before 2003, there were no elections for the Iraqi diaspora because Saddam Hussain considered everyone that left Iraq to be traitors so they were not allowed to participate in elections (Ono, 2005). Inside Iraq the elections were run by Saddam's government and ultimately Saddam was the winner by 99% (Segura, 2014). Post 2003 the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI) allowed all Iraqis over 18 years to participate in the elections. In this section we will discuss why the diaspora followed Al Sistani's Fatwa while they lived out of Iraq for decades. And were they following Al Sistani's Fatwa or was their national patriotic feeling make them partake in Iraq's elections.

The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) Order no. 92 established an electoral commission – the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq – to be the exclusive electoral authority for Iraq (Bremer, 2006). The commission was structured in such a way as to ensure its independence (Farag, 2007). The electoral system for the National Assembly elections, of which Iraq is a single electoral district (with proportional representation), made it possible to use a single ballot paper for the out-of-country voters (Pogonyi, 2014). The suggested threshold for the numbers of potential voters in the diaspora of one country was 10,000. However, of the 14 countries the IECI named to host the out-of-country voting OCV program, most had over 15,000 potential voters (Long, 2010).

The importance of a diaspora presence in an election can also serve to re-establish ties between them and citizens in-country, which can be very beneficial for the reconstruction process (Farag, 2007) . Diaspora populations have often developed financial resources and professional qualifications in exile that can be useful during rebuilding (Vanderbush, 2014). Engaging them in the political process makes more likely their return and active participation in reconstruction.

5.5.2   The Diaspora's response to Al Sistani's Fatwa

When I asked the Sunni diaspora participants why they participated in the election, 1MSuJ said, 'I took part in the Iraqi election just one time and then left it because I felt there is plan for Iraq [drawn up] by the Shia and the US to let Shia control the power in Iraq so I went to election once because I have a national patriotic feeling towards my country'.

2MSuSt said, 'I participated in Iraqi elections here in Australia, because I believe there is no chance for Iraqis to rebuild their country just in one election, so I do not need to follow any one because the elections were a national feeling towards my country which was destroyed by wars'. 5MKuP argued that he did not take part in any election in Australia because, 'I think the election was just a formality and politicians wanted to legitimize quotas'. 7FSuSt said that the elections were happening to give the Iraqis a national feeling of stabilization and the modernization of Iraq; this led the diaspora of Iraq to feel proud of Iraq becoming advanced like the country I am currently in, Australia. 9FSuH/W said that we as a diaspora thought our participation in the elections would be a good chance to elect a new government for us to be able to entice us to come back to our country. However, the truth was different.

It seems from the data that the Shia were keen to participate in the elections because they were allowed to have access to power for the first time in a legal way, so they

collectively had a different opitualnion. 10MShP said that if we look to modern countries everyone has a chance to vote and at the end they accept the result no matter what.

Al Sistani's role was in encouraging people to go to the elections to get their rights through peaceful means. 11MShCl said that the diaspora went to the elections because they considered it the best solution for Iraq, especially because America wanted to spread democracy in Iraq. According to some of the participants Al Sistani thought that the elections would bring controversy, but in the end they would establish a stable country instead of a country of chaos and fighting.

Many people in Britain went to the elections because of Al Sistani's influence and because of their adoption of the taqleed principle of following or conforming to the teachings of another. (With Muslims who follow the principle of taqleed being termed 'muqallid'. The term refers to whether someone accepts another as an authority and therefore accepts that person's judgements, rather than making their own judgement.

13MShP said that the young generation here in Britain felt a sense of duty to follow the taqleed principle – the principle of following a charismatic leader and trusting their decisions. Because of this the young people carried out what Al Sistani asked for. 8FShSt argued that, "I participated in the elections not as a response to Al Sistani's call, but [because of] the mere exercise of democracy in the new Iraq." 4MShCl mentioned that without Al Sistani's Fatwa no one would have convinced the Shia to take part in the election with such large numbers.

I, the researcher, was a member of the IECI (Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq) in 2005 in Iraq, and living in Australia for the election which was conducted in 2010. In 2010 I had the role of Deputy Manager of the Iraqi Election Centre in Brisbane, Australia. This role included explaining in an unbiased way to the diaspora the role of the election in the future of Iraq, and how this election might help rebuild Iraq. My Master's research subject was "Between Reality and Ambition: The Significance and Implications of Iraqi Elections and 'Democratic Change', 2003-2010".

In this research I shed light on the elections staged in 2003 and 2010 and how these elections impacted on Iraqis, and I discussed with Iraqis the benefits of interacting in Iraq's elections. The impression I received was that there was a great desire within Iraqis who were living in Australia to participate in the elections. The Shia considered it a religious duty because of Al Sistani's Fatwa, but they also wanted to feel that their country of origin has a democratic election no different from Australia's, for example.

A noticeable event occurred when a person came to vote who was born in Australia but with Iraqi heritage and citizenship, and his wife was Australian and he had to present three

documents in order to be able to participate in the election, but he had only two. I asked him why he insisted on voting and he answered, "I want to prove to my wife that my country of origin also has a democratic election and I can chose anyone I like to elect because I have been granted full freedom to so such, just like here in Australia." Many people were driven by national sentiment to participate in the elections in Iraq because Iraq had experienced decades of persecution. The expatriates felt that the elections might 'pave the way' for them returning to their home country and participating in rebuilding a new Iraq. On the other hand, most of the Sunnis did not participate in the election because they considered them to be a pretext for installing a legitimate Shia rule.

5.5.3 Al Sistani's reason for the fatwa

In 2004 Al Sistani did an interview with Der Spiegel, a German news magazine, and the journalist asked Al Sistani why he wanted a general election while the occupation forces wanted to delay it and call the Transitional Council (TC) 'unelected' to run the country . He was also asked if the election would lead to control of Iraq by the Shia (al-Khafaf, 2007).

Al Sistani's answer was (translated from the Arabic):

> Elections are the best way to enable the Iraqi people to form a government that will promote their interests. In a country such as Iraq, diverse ethnic communities cannot overcome the ethnic and sectarian quotas in the formation of any government unless by carrying out elections. There must be a resolution of the UN Security Council to hold elections to reassure the Iraqi people that the elections not be delayed once again by the occupying forces. In the case of management of the country's non-elected government, it should not enter into agreements and important decisions concerning the future policy of the country in any areas. The new Iraqi government must not be concerned with the topic of a numerical majority having power. There should be representation for all, because Iraq contains different sects (Sunni, Shia, Kurds and others. With regard to Iraq's neighbouring countries, we must always prevent any other country from intervening with Iraq's issues, and Iraqis must rebuild their country by themselves.

5.6   ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The information and data contained in this chapter relates to the first research question: To what extent do Iraqi people accept Al Sistani's role as a cleric with political influence? (Do they approve of his approach to his own political influence?).

The overwhelming theme that has emerged is a simple one. It is not what I wanted to find, but it is not unexpected. What has emerged from the data is that one variable separates the findings – and this is whether or not they come from a Sunni participant or a Shia one.

The Sunni interviewees were not always in agreement with each other, but they generally were: they did not approve of Al Sistani , his actions, his thoughts and what they perceived as a coalition with Iran (or even the US) and a quest for power.

Not all Sunni agreed on every question. They seemed to think for themselves and hold pride in their opinions. There was no question of 'taqleed' – the conformity of one person to the teaching of another. Yet their opinions differed. Part of this may have been because of reasons to do with history.

Until the 2003 occupation of Iraq by the US and allied forces, the Sunni were in charge. They had been the force in Iraqi government for many years. Then all that changed. The Shia (whose numbers were greater than those of the Sunni) were threatening to take power. Many Sunnis said, 'The Shia are going to be in power. Let's stop them (Uloom, 2009). The Sunnis were used to being the powerful force in Iraq, and they struggled to see past the change that seemed to be coming.

What was missing in the findings was mention of whether or not a change of power was a good or fair or reasonable outcome. Only one participant clearly questioned this in asking why it would be wrong if Shia now had the majority in government.

Instead of the Shia arguing against the Sunni claim that Al Sistani was after power (either in association with the Iraqis or the Americans) perhaps they need to focus more on whether this would be a good or fair thing. In some ways this is what was coming out of the words of the interviewees in London.

The Shia, as opposed to the Sunni, accepted Al Sistani's fatwa. Were they muqallid following the principle of taqleed? If they were (and still are, of course) is that a good thing, or not.

One of the questions in this thesis is whether or not the Iraqi people accept Al Sistani's role as a cleric with political influence. It is clear that the Sunni do not. The Shia, however, according to those interviewed in this thesis, do. As with the Sunni, by all this researcher learned in the interviews, the Shia also think for themselves. Perhaps they do hold a great deal of respect for Al Sistani, but those interviewed in Australia especially do not seem to be muqallid.

5.7   SUMMARY

The Iraqi elections took place in 2005 and most Iraqi sects participated in this democratic practice. The lack of Sunni leaders, the existence of occupation forces and the deteriorating security reality led to the Sunnis boycotting these elections. The Shia were more willing to go to election to prove they existed after years of oppression and marginalization. And there was the role of religion, with Al Sistani stimulating people to go to the elections by the use of a fatwa.

Al Sistani's Fatwa had great impact in encouraging Iraqi Shia people and sects other than, the Sunni to vote.

Although this chapter provides much relevant background material, it has primarily detailed data about:

- Al Sistani's 2004 fatwa calling all Iraqis to vote in the 2005 elections.

- The Sunni boycott of that election.

- The question of whether Al Sistani was favouring the Shia.

- And the diaspora's response to Al Sistani's fatwa.

In this chapter these topics have been described in relation to findings gathered from analysis of Al Sistani's words, in previous chapters and from the answers given to interview questions by 14 Iraqi expatriates interviewed in Australia (6 men and 3 women) and in London (5 men).

Following are four more analysis chapters, each tackling further data relevant to the research. The next chapter is about Al Sistani and democracy.

Chapter 6: Al Sistani invites Iraqis to become a democratic nation

6.1   INTRODUCTION

Does Al Sistani support democracy? Can an Islamic nation be a democratic nation? Are the Iraqi people ready to become a democratic nation?

These are the questions dealt with in this chapter explores and discusses the relationship between Al Sistani and democracy. This, the second of the analysis chapters, relates to the second research question: Do Iraqis see Al Sistani as holding special hope for Iraq in regard to the nation's problems, and to how Iraq is viewed by the rest of the world?

This analysis is based on the findings from interviews conducted with the participants, and textual analysis of written data stemming either directly from Al Sistani, or through his organisations.

6.1.1   Chapter content

Al Sistani has helped in moving Iraq into becoming a democracy. This is a huge move for an Islamic nation. But is it what the people want? Can Iraq survive happily as an Islamic nation? If it is what the people want, then what is their attitude toward Al Sistani? Do they see Al Sistani as 'holding special hope for Iraq in regard to the nation's problems?'

These are important questions as they relate to whether the people of Iraq are behind Al Sistani, and it relates to how important they see him and his interventions.

This chapter first provides a background to the connection between Islamic theology and the concept and practice of democracy. It then analyses the findings in relation to the following topics: Al Sistani's attitude to democracy, the barriers to democracy, and whether or not democracy is being undermined in Iraq.

After this, Al Sistani's own viewpoints are given, and this leads into an analysis and discussion of the contents of the chapter in relation to the second research question. Please note, the analysis for each section includes a textual analysis where relevant.

6.1.2   The link between this chapter and the research questions

Why democracy? Democracy is the term we give to the system of governance of most Western countries, including of course Iraq. Democracy, however, is not associated with

Islamic countries who typically have their own form of governance. In 2003 when the US occupied Iraq it was a democratic government that the US wanted for the country. The US was prepared to put in place a governing body of its own choosing, and it was only when Al Sistani intervened that they agreed to an open election. The result of that election (of 2005) was a democratic government, of course.

This all seemed to happen with Al Sistani's consent. It certainly happened with his co-operation. So the questions that arise include: Is the new democratic government what Al Sistani wanted? Or did he just believe that co-operating with the US was the best option for Iraq?

At the least, Al Sistani co-operated with the concept of a democracy for Iraq. In doing so he achieved a unity and a stability which many people thought was not possible. In some quarters, particularly among the Shi's, but also among the rulers and people of other nations, he gained much respect.

Therefore the question arises (and this is the second research question): do Iraqis see Al Sistani as holding special hope for Iraq in regard to the nation's problems, and to how Iraq is viewed by the rest of the world?

This chapter explores the second research question with an analysis of findings based on textual analysis (where relevant) and the findings from research questions asked of the interviewees including the following:

- Does Al Sistani support democracy?
- What is the point of view of Shia clerics towards democracy?
- Are the Iraqi people ready to become a democratic country?
- How satisfied are the different sects (overall) with Al Sistani?

After Al Sistani issued his Fatwa to encourage people to participate in the elections, doubts were expressed about Al Sistani. Did he want to build a democratic system in Iraq, some wondered, or was it the Shia the majority that led him to issue the Fatwa in order to get more power within the country? The relationship between Islam and democracy was not clear so the question arose as to how Al Sistani could prove that Islam could be a democratic religion. The emergence, after 2003, of a Muslim cleric such as Al Sistani calling for the establishment of a democratic state was a milestone in the history of Iraq, but it does raise many questions.

The focus of this chapter is very much about democracy, and particularly in understandings if democracy can legitimately emerge from Islamic theology and from Al

Sistani's writings. Iraq is a multi-sectarian and religious country so the question arises as to whether Al Sistani as a Shia cleric is committed to the democratic government in Iraq.

6.2   **Background: Can Islamic theology be interpreted in a way that aligns it with democracy?**

(Esposito & Voll, 1996) define democracy as:

> "… a social and political system which assesses the relationship between members of the community and the state in accordance with the principles of equality of all citizens and free participation in the making of legislation regulating public life. Democracy spread out to be the dominating norm of political rule into some parts of the world of today …" (p.17).

Elman (1997, p. 313) provides another definition in defining democracy as "government by the people in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system".

The relationship between Islam and democracy is controversial among adherents of the Islamic religion and external commentators, and some reject the possibility that any relationship at all can be established between them (Esposito & Voll, 1996). Muslims take their religious instructions from the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad but in a democracy, people refer to a human mechanism to regulate governance.Tessler (2002) gives another idea in mentioning that the Islamists claim that parliamentary democracy and representative elections are not only compatible with Islamic law, but that Islam actually encourages democracy. At the same time, others such as Fattah (2006) argue that the relationship between Islam and democracy is based on the ability of Islam to accommodate contemporary methods of governance and politics, with religious texts able to be interpreted to support this claim.

Some Muslims among those interviewed clearly did not support any valid connection between Islam and democracy in this project. As such, 1MSuJ pointed to the Quran (33:36) as stating, 'It is not fitting for a believer, man or woman, when a matter has been decided by God and His Messenger to have any option about their decision' (translation of the Quran by Ali, 1975). This means all legislation must be supported by the teachings of Islam and the Quran. 9FSuH/w supported this with another verse from the Quran (5:44) 'Whosoever does not judge by what God has revealed is among the disbelievers' (translation of Quran by (Ali, 2011). This means that a Muslim should depend on the Quran to organise his or her life a not a secular democratic government.

2MSuSt mentioned that in the Quran (63:8) 'might [power] belongs to Allah and to his messenger and to the believers' (translation of the Quran by Ali, 2011). Another verse mentioned by 5MKuP from the Quran (9:3) states that 'Allah and his messenger are free from obligation to the unbelievers' (translation of the Quran by Ali, 1975). Muhammad used this "revelation" to dissolve a standing treaty and chase non-Muslims from their homes if they would not accept Islam (Bukhari, 1987). This practice would be incompatible with democratic rule, in which freedom of choice and freedom of expression are seen as necessary.

There are several hadiths (or accounts) which tell Muslims how to deal with someone who is not Muslim (19:4294). For example:

> 'When you meet your enemies who are polytheists invite them to three courses of action. If they respond to any one of these, you also accept it and withhold yourself from doing them any harm. Invite them to (accept) Islam; if they respond to you, accept it from them and desist from fighting against them. If they refuse to accept Islam, demand from them the Jizya (Islamic fine). If they agree to pay, accept it from them and hold off your hands. If they refuse to pay the tax, seek Allah's help and fight them. Non-Muslims are intended to be subordinate to Muslims' (translation of the Quran by Siddiqui, 2008).

This Hadith is not compatible with one of the commonest democratic values: which is freedom of religion. So according to the interpretation of Sunni participants in this study, some verses in the Quran show that democracy is not compatible with Islam.

Other Muslims interviewed in this project have a different view, however. They believe that Islam is compatible with democratic values via the principle of 'shura', which basically upholds all the principles of democracy about political decision-making processes. De Hart, Dekker, and Halman (2013, p. 276) explain that 'Shura constitutes one of the four cardinal principles in the Islamic perspective on socio-political organization'. The other three are justice, equality, and human dignity (Al-Hibri, 1992). Some Muslims believe there is significant compatibility between these principles and democracy. Rahman (1984) mentions that Shura and democracy are two common words used frequently to describe Muslim and western political systems. The Quran urges Muslims to use the principle of Shura to lead and administer governance in order to avoid the use of an autocratic system.

In this research project 4MShCl mentioned that the Quran in (38:42) referred to those 'who (conduct) their affairs by mutual consultation' (translation by Ali, 2011). This verse means the Muslims should consult between themselves on important matters, both public and private.

10MShP also mentioned a particular verse in the Quran: supports that choice of this textual evidence when mentioning that the Quran said in (59:4):

> Believers, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. Should you dispute about anything refer it to Allah and the Messenger, if you believe in Allah and the Last Day. That is better and the best interpretation (translation by Ali, 2011).

"Those in authority" can now be taken to mean presidents or leaders in the country. So the Quran calls people to respect the 'people's' choice. That is what the democratic systems also adopt so here there are correlations between the Quran and democratic values. Following this possibility, 3MShP mentioned that in the Quran (38:42) it is stated: '.. and those who have responded to their lord and established prayer and whose affair is [determined by] consultation among themselves, and from what we have provided them, they spend' translation of Quran by (Ali, 1975). The Quran invites the Muslim to consult instead of fight (Bukhari, 1987) so these verses are an explicit call for Muslims to consult among themselves. Also, the purpose of these verses is to arrive at an agreed or accepted decision by the people. So they require the freedom and conviction of dialogue. Everyone who has an opinion can present it and submit their arguments and evidence, and has the right to discuss or oppose. This free dialogue leads to convergence between the different views, so that the Quran focusses on dialogue and rapprochement, not power and competition.

6.3   THE INTERVIEWS: DOES AL SISTANI BELIEVE IN DEMOCRACY?

This section looks more directly at the participants' viewpoints on whether Al Sistani supports democracy. And if so, what sort of democracy?

Al Sistani's election Fatwa was a shock to the U.S government because they did not think that there was a Muslim cleric who believed in democratic values (Allawi, 2008). The definition of democracy means "rule by the people" and Al Sistani was able to impose this definition on the U.S when their occupying forces wanted to impose a new constitution after 2003, as he issued his elections fatwa (Allawi, 2008). Al Sistani has played a role in the formation of the simple roots of democracy in Iraq since 2003 (Rahimi, 2007). He demanded direct elections for Iraq as a whole, rejecting the idea of popular local conferences and he wanted the writing of the constitution by an elected constituent Assembly. He therefore presented a model of an Islamic state consistent with the modern age (Noorbaksh, 2008).

The Sunni participants in this study were not convinced that Al Sistani wanted to establish a democratic system in Iraq. 1MSuJ believed that Al Sistani did not promote democracy in Iraq but that his role after 2003 allowed Militias to run the government so Iraq's fate was unpredictable. This participant sought to criticize the role of government in running the country. 7FSuSt supports this view with, 'Al Sistani and the most of Iraqi people do not believe in democracy, because democracy is not just elections so there are some questions such as does Al Sistani believe in freedom of food, clothing and drinking? Of course not.'

2MSuSt also upholds the view that Al Sistani does not believe in democratic freedom as a whole, but merely for elections, and that his call for elections was to let the Iraqi people bear the responsibility if any government should fail. In addition, he believes that not all the Iraqi people are ready for democracy because of hunger, deprivation and siege during Saddam's rule. 6MSuSt pointed out that Al Sistani as a cleric could not advise people to do something against Islamic law, thus he might believe in democracy generally, but not all democratic values.

Some of participants saw links between Al Sistani as cleric with authority derived from the holy Quran - that rule is derived from God so 5MKuP mentioned that the clerics have a theory which is the rule by God so Al Sistani as a cleric believes in it. He states, "Does Al Sistani grant the right of minorities like the Kurds when they call for secession from Iraq? Does Al Sistani give them this right? Of course not! He believes in democracy where it is in the Shia interests to let them govern Iraq after decades of marginalization and exclusion". 9FSuH/W states that she does not think that Al Sistani believes in democracy because the term democracy includes freedom of religion. He added: "Does Al Sistani allow that there are people in Iraq who do not worship God? I do not think so. I think the purpose of faith in democracy is only for elections." And 8FShSt mentioned that:

> 'It is possible to consider Iraq as a democratic country when the clerics stay far away from politics, but that will not happen. When we find Islamic parties out of government and the country is managed by secular government it possible to say Iraq could now become a democratic country'.

Most of the Sunni participants do not believe that Al Sistani supports a democratic system in Iraq. The Shia who support Al Sistani's ideas believe that Al Sistani wished to establish a wholly democratic state in Iraq (Feldman, 2005). The Iraqi Shia Muslims, because of the taqleed principle, always adopted Al Sistani's edicts.. Al Sistani , as a cleric, was able to change the prevailing belief that many Muslims clerics do not just believe in God's

teachings but they are ready to interact with the requirements of the modern age (Abd al-Jabbar, 2003).

10MShP confirmed that according to what Al Sistani believes from the Quran and hadiths (reports) of the Prophet as well as imams through history, he cannot impose anything on the people because he is not a Wilayat al-faqih, as in Iran, so he left the people to choose what they want.

> The doctrine of Wilayat al-Faqih forms the central axis of contemporary Shia political thought in Iran now. It advocates a guardianship-based political system, which relies upon a just and capable jurist (faqih) to assume the leadership of the government in the absence of an infallible imam (Amanat, 2003).

However, the guardianship of a high ranking religious scholar is quietists amongst all Shia theories of governance. Some Iraqis connect this theory with Al Sistani's role in Iraq so most of the Sunnis consider Al Sistani's intervention in politics as a part of Wilayat al-faqih (Rahimi, 2007), meaning he is not representing Iraqis as a theological authority, but as a charismatic leader. This is something they are not willing to accept.

10MShP who was one of the committee writing the new Iraqi constitution mentioned that, "We were to have direct contact with Al Sistani's office to get approval of many of the freedoms of belief, and personal freedoms that Al Sistani had agreed on that to show up the constitution to a referendum by all Iraqi society".

The Shia of course hold different perspectives. 10MShP added that Al Sistani's ideological stance on this issue, together with the unique Iraqi context, makes it possible for democracy to emerge and flourish. Hawazi (2008) also supports the view that the chances of democracy succeeding in Iraq are strong.

11MShCl also supports this when he mentioned that Al Sistani will apply the instructions which come from the Quran, and the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad and the Imams throughout history, because most of these instructions are compatible with recent democratic values such as elections, freedom of expression and respect for people's choices.

13MShP, on the other hand, mentioned that some of the clerics think that democracy is 'kfor' (against God's will), and they do not believe all its values fit with Islamic teachings, even though Al Sistani found there is not much difference between Islamic teachings and democracy.

3MShP mentioned that Al Sistani believes in democracy but there are some issues that Al Sistani does not have a right to impose on the people. Matters such as freedom to eat,

drink and what clothing to wear are personal choices, which Al Sistani could not intervene in. This participant suggests that Al Sistani believed in a democracy and his approval in holding the constitutional elections was evidence that he respected the choice of the people, which then led to the formation of a government as well as his commitment to the referendum on the constitution by the Iraqi people. 4MShCl refers to Al Sistani's belief in democracy as a solution to the problems of Iraq and the wish of Al Sistani was to establish an Islamic state. However, because Iraq is a multi-religious state with diverse ethnic communities he said Al Sistani resorted to a democratic option. 4MShCl added that Al Sistani does not believe in Western democracy because some of it conflicts with the teachings of Islam but Al Sistani , in his opinion, found it is possible to take advantage of democracy to solve some political problems in Iraq. This participant tries to clarify that Al Sistani does not believe in all democratic values.

According to the interviews conducted with the participants in this research it is possible to say that participants interviewed for this project believe that Al Sistani himself believes in democracy, which gives the people freedom to choose their political representatives. But at the same time Al Sistani did not comment on personal freedoms as he did not want to incite problems, as Iraq has a lot of religions, nationalities and sects.
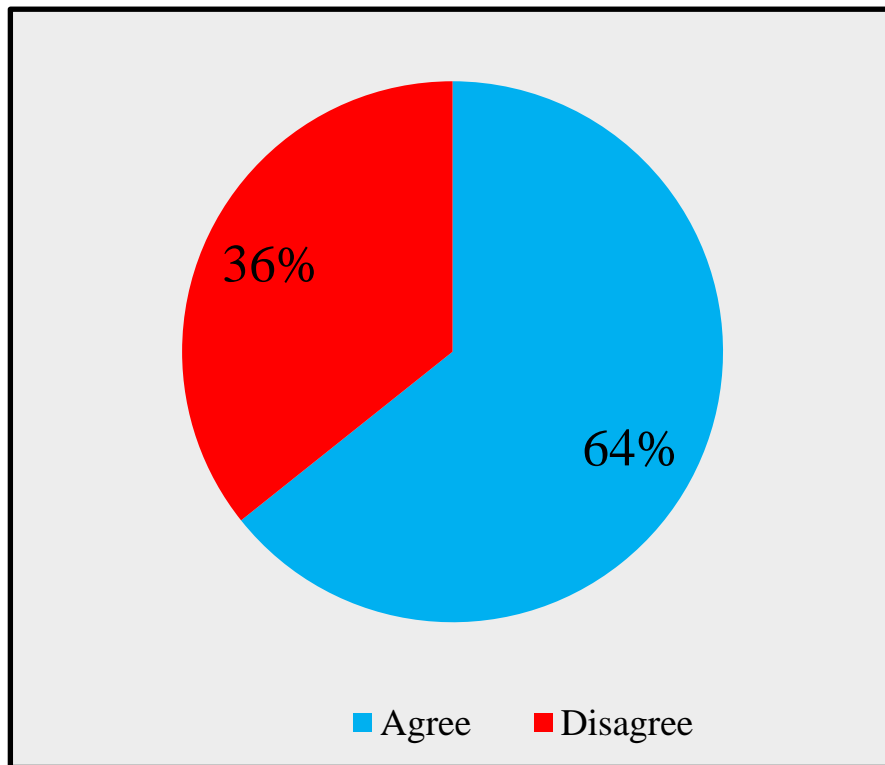
Figure 0-1 Does Al Sistani believe in democracy

As can be noticed in Figure 6.1, 64% of participants think that Al Sistani believes in democracy. The motive behind this belief is based on Al Sistani's invitations to elections, his encouragement for Iraqis to choose their government freely, his role in seeking to secure the rights of minorities (religions and other non-Shiite sects), and his emphasis on the constitution and its role in solving cases of disagreements. While 36% of the participants tend to emphasise that Al Sistani do not believe in all democratic values. More details are provided in the next section.

6.4   THE INTERVIEWS: WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO DEMOCRACY IN IRAQ?

Iraq currently has a democratic government. But not all Iraqis approve of that government, or believe that the current democratic government will continue to meet the long-term needs of the country. Iraq has been a democratic nation for only a dozen years and is still young in this area. There is no doubt that much has been gained by this step, but is it enough? This section of the thesis explores the participants' views on the barriers to democracy in Iraq.

Since 2005 Iraq has had three elections and one referendum on the constitution but doubts have begun to emerge as to whether Iraq is now a democratic country or not (Jawad, 2013). As mentioned before, in Iraqi history since the establishment of the Iraqi state in 1921 there is no mention of any peaceful exchange of power. But there were assassinations and military coups and most recently the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein brought 24 years of

oppression and injustice. This has led to a society that is divided into sects and parties. This means Iraq has not had any democratic experience in the modern age – so can the Iraqi people look on their country as a democracy or not.

Sunni participants such as 1MSuJ argued that there is no democracy in Iraq, but that Iraq is controlled by the Shia. He believes this because when Al Sistani called the Shia to elect a United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) and to write the constitution, this led other sects to elect their cadres, and then Iraq became a series of conflicting sects. 7FSuSt said:

> Iraq is not qualified to be a democratic country because it needs time to install democracy. The Islamist party of Iraq (Da'wa) still manages the government. Al Sistani has control of the reins of government I do not think Iraq is a democratic country.

5MKuP stated that the Iraqi people are not ready to become a democratic country for several reasons. First, the impact of the economic blockade was not strong enough to make Iraq a democratic country and second, because of the negative impact on Iraqi society of Saddam's rule which divided the people into private communities.

Other participants, such as 9FSuH/W, also attempted to link the administrative chaos and lack of a coherent political system to being unable to be a democracy. 6MSuSt supported this point of view saying, "I do not think that Iraq will become a democratic country despite holding three elections and the peaceful rotation of power. The presence of Islamist parties in government and a divided Iraqi society does not lead to real democracy."

Most of the Shia participants, however, believed that Al Sistani could make Iraq a democratic country because they have faith in him and they believe in the compatibility of Islam with democracy. 10MShP mentioned that Al Sistani wanted to delay democratic elections in Iraq until they could be carried out by the Iraqi people, and that Al Sistani's intervention was in a difficult time when Iraq was occupied and there were many conflicting religious sects. He wanted democracy to be the nucleus of democratic state-building, 'as happened in Europe after long conflicts and wars so as a first stage it was good.'

11MShCl mentioned that since 2003 the Iraqi state became one of the most important democratic countries in the region because there was a peaceful transfer of power. There was complete freedom of the media, in addition to the involvement of many of the components of Iraqi society in public life, so it is possible to say that Iraq was at the beginning of the road to forming a democratic country.

13MShP raised a different perspective; he said that the strongest evidence that Iraq has become a democratic country is the participation of Sunni politicians in governance. All Saddam's actions had been against Shia's, from killing, to displacement and persecution. But despite this many of the Shia have accepted the Sunnis to be a partner in the country and in the democratic direction it was heading in. 12MShCl mentioned that what was planned for Iraq from the very beginning of 2003 was good, especially after Al Sistani's demand to hold elections had boosted the chances that Iraq would become a democratic country. But ambitious politicians and conflicts between communities and the bloc parties made it difficult for Iraq to achieve this.

14MShP mentioned that Iraq became democratic in the event of a change in the ruling elite because these people were now leading Iraq into the unknown. He said there were no qualified ruling parties running the country and the security situation was deteriorating. 14MShP added that there are some achievements on the level of building democracy, but they do not meet with our hopes. 8FShSt added that the Iraq state should establish new institutions (instead of clergy) to help people to understand the meaning of democracy. 3MShP indicated that the Iraqi community needed someone to guide them because the community was still suffering from ignorance and backward thinking, thus the cleric's role as a guide to consolidate democracy in Iraq was very useful in building the new democratic country. 2MSuSt mentioned that the clerics are trying to help people to make Iraq democratic, and that providing guidance and issuing fatwas is part of a step by step process for doing this.

After 2003 when President George W. Bush declared that 'all Iraqis must have a voice in the new government, and all citizens must have their rights protected' (Haass, 2003, p. 141) some Iraqi politicians exploited Iraq's transfer to democracy. This led to conflict among the politicians. Some commentators such as Khalaji suggested that the Iraqi politicians want to win enough votes to control the government long term because they wanted power for their own party or sect, but that this would not happen because Iraq contains too many different sects so no one would be able to do that (Khalaji, 2006).

After 2003 the nature of Iraqi society emerged as a problem in achieving democracy. Because the society is divided along ethnic and religious lines, some believe that if any one group achieves a majority by being the largest ethnic group they may never lose power if an election is held (1MSuJ). 'The biggest problem is the numerically larger group's use of elections and other legitimate democratic forms to ensure its dominance, a tyranny of the majority, particularly a government run by an Islamic party like the Daw'a Party' 9FSuH/W.

6MSuSt – a Sunni – stated that when the Shia politicians encouraged their people to vote for them this allowed them to be the largest ethnic group and because of this they might never lose power, because ethnic group members usually vote for their own. He said the Sunni and Kurds will be victims of the new democracy in Iraq (6MSuSt).

5MKuP supported this way of thinking and extended on it in mentioning that the democracy in Iraq is at risk of being a tyranny of the majority. He said Iraq's Shia community, which comprises more than 60 percent of the total population, might use 'free' elections to transform its current exclusion from power to one of total dominance over Sunni Arabs, and perhaps Iraqi Kurds. He said, 'The Sunni and Kurdish fears from Shia Islam reflect similar Shia doubts about Sunnis and Kurds. While Shia's voted for Shia groups in the 2005 elections, Sunnis voted for Sunni groups and Kurds voted for Kurdish groups' (2MSuSt).

 The only difference that makes the Shia case more significant is the weight that the Shia have in Iraq. With about 60 percent of the Iraqi population, Iraqi Sunnis and Kurds think the Shia ability to drag the country back toward an Islamic state is strong (Conetta, 2005). Many Shia believe that because they are the majority in Iraq, they therefore have a right to manage the state the way that they want.

However there is another side to this "tyranny of the majority" claim. Exemplifying this view 10MShP said 'what is wrong if Shia run the government in Iraq, because they are the majority. They distributed the positions … for all. The president of Iraq is Kurdish, and the president of the parliament is Sunni, so how can it be said the Shia have total dominance [over] the government.' Similarly, 13MShP mentioned that since 1921 the Sunni people managed the Iraqi government so it is hard for them to cope with the Shia having power, so their claim that the Shia want to dominate is because they feel they are out of power in Iraq, and they want to return to power at any cost.

3MShP agrees that the Shia do not have an absolute majority in parliament and many of the decisions cannot be passed except by agreement with the other sects (particularly the Sunnis and Kurds) so there is no dominance of the Shia, and this constitutes a real democracy.

4MShCl says that the Shia have been subjected to persecution by Sunni governments since 1921 so there is not a lot of confidence among other Iraqi sects in their fairness, but that Al Sistani's new guardian position as a guarantee for the new democracy could boost trust between these sects. 11MShCl mentioned that Al Sistani did not endorse or support any Shia

list in the elections, but he invited all Iraqi people to take part in the writing of the constitution. This was a remarkable happening in Iraq.

That all Iraqi sects shared in the writing of the constitution and referendum is evidence that the Shias did not dominate the Iraqi decisions after 2003 (Deeks & Burton, 2007). 8FShSt felt that it was possible for the Shia to ally with a minority in Iraq to form a parliamentary majority to run the country, but felt that this parliament should include all communities in the management of the country. He said that would truly make Iraq a strong country in the region and free of conflicts.

6.5   AL SISTANI'S WORDS

Extremist Muslims such as ISIS groups, as mentioned before, do not believe in democracy, and did not support Al Sistani in leading the Iraqis in choosing their government through the electoral process. The moderate view is that Al Sistani guided Iraqis to choose their government according to democratic means (Conetta, 2005). In addition Al Sistani believes that because Iraq contains many sects and religions therefore an Islamic government is not suitable for this country (Feldman, 2005). Al Sistani was asked by a journalist from Associated Press about what type of government he wanted in Iraq after Saddam's regime. Al Sistani answered:

> The Iraqi people are the ones who determine the form of government through elections and we do not call for the establishment of a religious government in Iraq, but will respect the religious constants for Iraqis based on pluralism, equality and justice (al-Khafaf, 2007).

The Polish press asked Al Sistani if he sought a system of a democracy for Iraq, or something different. He answered, 'I prefer any system which depends on [the] Shura principle. Pluralism and respect for the rights of all Iraqi citizens' (al-Khafaf, 2007).

6.6   ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The question of whether Islam and democracy are compatible is a difficult one. To some, even raising this question may come as a shock as they may believe there is a huge difference between a democratic nation and one where religion appears as a state religion.

As seen in the sections above, there are differences of opinion about whether the Quran and hadiths (other documents or reports) allow a compatibility with democratic values.

Some Sunni Muslims I interviewed viewed democracy as dissimilar to Islam and people from various sects seemed to interpret Islamic verses from the Quran as they wanted to understand them. At the same time, it is important to note there are verses in the Quran which seem to promote democratic values (as detailed earlier in this chapter). Also, the cultural background of the community reflected on the Muslims' way of thinking, as explained by Huntington (2000). According to the answers the Sunni participants gave, it was observed that some of them refuse any connection between Islam and democracy, based on verses from the Quran. But others do connect democracy and the worship of God but at the same time consider that western democracy may encourage moral deviation among Muslims.

Many verses in the Quran are interpretable, meaning it is possible to see them as applicable in different cases and context and at different times. Moreover, some verses have been updated in the Quran (Jansen, 1980). This means more information has been added to some verses to make them more relevant to today, particularly in areas like relating to non-Muslims or believing in some democratic values (Esposito & Voll, 2001) therefore the use of verses from the Quran becomes even more complicated, particularly when referring to any connection between Islam and democracy.

Thus 36% of participants in this study shown indicated that Al Sistani does not really believe in democracy. They disregard the evolution of life in the existence of political systems that depend on democracy in the management of its affairs. It is apparent that there is a segment of society that may rely on verses that would cause the international isolation of these communities. The importance of this study clarifies how some Muslims use the texts of the Quran to either accept others, or to refute them.

Byman (2003) claims that some Islamists believe that democracy is a foreign concept that has been imposed by Westerners and secular reformers upon Muslim societies. He added 'some of these Islamists often argue that the concept of popular sovereignty denies the fundamental Islamic affirmation of the sovereignty of God and is, therefore, a form of idolatry' (p.68).

In the Quran there are many human values like justice, equality, human dignity, respect for the views of others, and following the principle of Shura in the management of the state (Kamali, 1991). All of these values are compatible with democracy, and similar to the values that democracy promotes. Esposito and Voll (2001) mention that:

> … if by democracy is meant the liberal model of government prevailing in the west, a system under which the people freely choose their representatives and leaders, in which there is an alternation of power, as well as all freedoms and

human rights for the people, then Muslims will find nothing in their religion to oppose democracy (p.74).

The Islamic tradition contains a number of key concepts that are presented by Muslims as the key to "Islamic democracy"; these concepts are taken from the Quran, thus the Quran does not reject current democracy, even though some Muslims refuse it for political reasons (Esposito & Voll, 2001). Iran's President Mohammad Khatami announced that:

> The existing democracies do not necessarily follow one formula or aspect. It is possible that a democracy may lead to a liberal system. It is possible that democracy may lead to a socialist system. Or it may be a democracy with the inclusion of religious norms in the government. We have accepted the third option (Esposito & Voll, 1996).

Nearly 60% of the participants in this research believed that Al Sistani supported the establishment of a democratic regime in Iraq, and that he himself believed in democracy. Many of the participants argued that Al Sistani wanted to send a message to the world that not all clerics reject democratic values. Currently some clerics consider that democracy is kofr (against the will of God) and is not mentioned in the Quran. In addition they consider it an invitation to moral decay and immorality. This accounts for why some extremist groups have threatened to kill anyone who goes to elections in Iraq. Although the Shia Muslims constitute 60% of the Iraqi population, Al Sistani called to all Iraqi people to take part in the new political system. Doing this was a landmark in the history of Muslims and it attracted the world to a new clerical stance modelled by Al Sistani.

According to the research data, questions were raised about whether or not Al Sistani believed in all democratic values, or just in the 2005 elections. The participants wondered also if Al Sistani would go on to prevent personal freedoms.

When questioned by a journalist from the Associated Press Al Sistani said he did not want to impose Islamic government on Iraqis, and that he believed it is not his business to prevent these things. And Al Sistani did not issue a Fatwa regarding personal issues because he knows that Iraq contains different sects and religions. He did not force women to wear the veil; therefore he gained their respect.

However the Sunni did not believe in Al Sistani's apparent adoption of democracy. One reason for this was the belief that Iraq being ruled by would create a negative effect on Arab Gulf countries, because leaders of other states would ally with Iran and Syria.

The Shia who follow the teachings of Imam Ali as well as the teachings of the Quran are more liberal in general in areas of governance. Perhaps they are more open to democratic governance in political arenas, and Islamic governance in the religious lives of the Muslims of Iraq. The Sunni, on the other hand, are more likely to be strict in adhering to old ways and less likely to embrace new ones, such as a democratic Iraqi government.

When it comes to interpreting verses in the Quran, perhaps it is fair to say that interpretations are just that. In applying any verse to a setting it was not originally referring to in detail leaves room for interpretation. It is understandable that different Muslims make different interpretations of Quranic teachings in relation to democracy. Perhaps there will never be agreement in these areas.

What is important is that Iraq currently has a democratic government and is managing relatively peacefully on the surface. This might be evidence that it the Islamic population as a whole is able to embrace democracy, and that it is ready to and able to remain a democratic nation.

6.7   CHAPTER SUMMARY

Regarding the questions asked at the beginning of this chapter, yes, Al Sistani clearly supports democracy – as evidenced by his support of the US plans for the country from 2005. However, how much Al Sistani believes in democracy is contentious, as he clearly prefers to keep these beliefs to himself. By his comments, he esteems Islam as a rule for Muslims, but obviously to some extent sees compatibility between Islam and democracy when it comes to government.

Can an Islamic nation be a democratic nation? The evidence is there for us – it has happened in Iraq and does not look like changing. Are the Iraqi people ready to fully become a democratic nation? Of course not if this means forsaking Islamic beliefs. But in reference to government only, from the results of the interviews in this research it seems that Iraqis may be behind Al Sistani and what he has done, and this probably means most Iraqi people are ready to embrace democracy in government.

A belief in democracy seems to depend on cultural background – primarily whether one is Shia or Sunni. This background also seems to affect one's interpretation of verses in the Quran. In this age there are many Muslims extremists who consider democracy is Kofr. But Al Sistani during his role since 2003 has sought to prove that not all Muslim clerics consider that democracy is kofr.

There is no evidence that Al Sistani ever influenced voting for any particular candidates, but he let the Iraqi people choose freely. Al Sistani tried to apply the principle of the peaceful transfer of power by urging Iraqi society to adopt the practice of democracy as an alternative option to the dictatorship that had prevailed in Iraq for years.

This chapter has provided much analysis – both from texts and the participant interviews – about the relationship between democracy and Al Sistani, as well as in regard to the readiness of Iraqis to embrace democracy. The following chapters will continue the analysis of the data, and the discussion of its relevance to the research questions.

Chapter 7: Intervention in politics

7.1   INTRODUCTION

In analysing data related to the first research question, this chapter explores and discusses the concept of intervention in politics by Shia clerics. Al Sistani, of course, as a Shi's cleric, has intervened in politics, particularly when he pronounced his well-known fatwa, telling Iraqis to accept the 2005 election and to vote. The question raised is – what was the reaction of the Iraqi people? This echoes the first research question in this thesis:

To what extent do Iraqi people accept Al Sistani's role as a cleric with political influence? (Do they approve of his approach to political intervention?)

This analysis is based on the findings from interviews conducted with the participants, and textual analysis of written data stemming either directly from Al Sistani or through his organisations.

7.1.1   Chapter content

This chapter provides an overview of theories of political intervention by Shia clerics, and then a discussion related to these theories based on the opinions of the interview participants as well as the opinions and words of Al Sistani himself.

The content of this chapter will analyse the approach taken by Al Sistani in political intervention, and then explore the extent to which Iraqi people accept Al Sistani's role as a cleric with political influence?

7.1.2   The link between this chapter and the research questions

This chapter explores the following research question:

Q 1: To what extent do Iraqi people accept Al Sistani's role as a cleric with political influence? Do they approve of his approach to his own political influence?

This question is explored with an analysis of findings based on textual analysis (where relevant) and from interview questions including the following:

- What is the difference between Al Sistani's interventions and the doctrine of Wilayat al Faqih [the guardianship of the jurist, as proposed by Ayatollah Khomeini]?
- What is the point of view of Shia clerics towards democracy?
- Were Al Sistani's interventions in politics justified?

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Al Sistani's interventions in the politics of Iraq were not a normal thing for a Muslim cleric. The following section provides content on Iraqi attitudes to such intervention.

7.2 BACKGROUND: SHIA THEORIES REGARDING POLITICAL INTERVENTION BY CLERICS

After 2003 dispute arose about Shia theories on intervention in politics. The Iraqi Shia clerics had not had this opportunity to have a role in politics before, at least not since the establishment of the modern Iraqi state in 1921. There had been no real participation of Shia clerics in politics, so that by 2005 the subject of Shia clergy in politics was unclear.

This section explores different ideas about the intervention of Iraqi clerics such as Al Sistani in politics. Two such ideas are presented, including the Wilayat al-faqih system, which currently applies in Iran, and then a third, is introduced – a way of intervention in Iraqi politics which is perhaps unique to Al Sistani.

This chapter will attempt to clarify the Shia cleric's theories regarding their role in politics and will shed light on the Iraqis opinion on this role, and whether they consider it as part of a desirable peace process, or as something more complex.

There are many definitions of 'politics'. Forty years ago E. M. Wood (1978) recalled Socrates' definition of politics as being 'the art of governance, and the politician is one who knows political statecraft'. Barker (2012) pointed out that Plato defined it as "the art of the rule of individuals in a common collective life, the affairs of people or the art of the rule of consenting individuals care, and the politician is one who knows this art'. Pocock (2009) mentions that Machiavelli defined politics as 'the art of retaining power, and standardization in the grip of the ruling, regardless of the means to achieve this' (p. 44).

An Islamic definition of politics by Ayubi (2003) follows:

> [Politics is] humans living according to the rules of ethics based on the foundations of Islamic law, whether relating to public affairs or a special focus on the spiritual aspect as the most important aspect of the Islamic religion, considering that the rules of Islam are orders from God followed by reward and punishment (p.95).

After 1917 when the British invaded Baghdad the Shia's clerics felt the need to review their theories regarding their role in politics. As mentioned before the clerics in Najaf (the main city where Imams live and study) since that date have faced neglect, persecution and

forced deportation because of their political views. It is in response to this that felt the need to create a theory to assist them in dealing with these political issues (Abd al-Jabbar, 2003).

7.2.2   Theory One: the clerics should have a role in politics

Stemming from the above, some believe that clerics should have a role in politics in order to defend the rights of the people. This was a particularly strong viewpoint when Iraq faced the invading British forces in 1914 (Halm & Brown, 1997). At that time, however, liberal politicians argued that the clerics had only a spiritual status so they should not be profaned by policy. They were also accused of being ignorant as well as inexperienced when it came to policy (Abd al-Jabbar, 2003).

The first Iraqi government was formed without a Shia representative (Aimami, 2011). After 1921 the Shia lost all participation in the establishment of the first Iraqi government in the modern age. This began a new era of conflict between politicians (all Sunni at this time and the Shia clergy (Vinogradov, 1972). As stated, the Shia clerics did believe they should (or could) have a role in politics to care for the rights of the people. So they began to incite the people to resist the occupying forces (the British). As a result of their endeavours, the Sunni politicians persecuted the Shia clerics and kept them away from politics under the pretext that their role ended after the formation of the first Iraqi government (Aimami, 2011).

The Shia clerics began to advise the people to stand against this policy which was marginalizing the role of Shia clerics. Aimami (2011) mentioned that the first Iraqi government banished some clerics such as Abu al-Hasan Isfahani, Hussein Naini and Ziauddin al Iraqi to Iran because they were becoming involved in politics. This was after the government tried to pry the clerics away from politics and limit their role to that of religious scholars where all they could do was offer religious advice and guidance (F. R. A. al-Kifaee, 2010). However, while this was the role they were being pushed into, the Shia clerics, on the other hand, adopted the idea that their role should not be to just explaining the teachings of the Islamic religion, but they also needed to advise and guide the people of Iraq regarding issues and events in Iraq and the region – even if this led to their detention, forced displacement, and even exile.

Most Shia are fundamentalists (from the Usuli school of thought) and adhere to the basic principles of Islam, with a reliance on 'taqleed' in doctrinal matters (Walbridge, 2001). With taqleed, the sources of teaching and authority in religious matters are fourfold: The Quran, the Sunnah (verbally transmitted teachings), consensus, and the mind. Most

important, however, is their dependence on the Quran and their stories about the history of the Imams that convey historical events (Dekmejian, 1995).

The Shia clerics adhere to the principle of 'taqleed' as mentioned in the literature review, and promote this principle. Thus Shia accepts the authority of the taqleed. The clerics, in promoting the taqleed, lead the people, and place them in a position of trust and of providing guidance. If there was to be any political conflict with the clerics, this would automatically mean conflict with their millions of followers. So it is that among the Shia the clerics maintain authority and control through the fatwas or instructions by them to the people. All of these of course are based on the taqleed. Contrary to this, the Sunni clerics do not promote or have this principle of taqleed, so this explains why the Shia clerics have been and more active in politics after 2003 than Sunni clerics.

7.2.3 Theory Two: Wilayat al Faqih

Not all Shia support this interventionist view of Shia clerics in politics. In fact most do not. There is, however, a second view.

Wilayat al-Faqih is the name given to a second theory of political intervention for Shia clerics (as explained in Chapter Six). This theory currently forms a central part of contemporary Shia political thought in Iran, and advocates a "guardianship-based political system". This is the system which relies upon "a just and capable jurist (faqih) to assume the leadership of the government in the absence of an infallible Imam" (Amanat, 2003).

An 'infallible Imam' is a rare person. The prophet Muhammed is one, and perhaps a descendant of his would be another. Muslims have been waiting for an infallible Imam for a long, long time (Maynard, 2005). It would be an infallible Imam who would have supreme authority and be able to be involved in politics, as well as every other aspect of Islamic life and culture, as well as religious beliefs. The infallible Imam is perhaps similar to the Christian concept of a 'saviour'.

In the absence of an infallible Imam only a faqih can assume political leadership. Wilayat al-Faqih is basically a belief system which allows Shia clergy to hold political power – but only a faqih – who is equivalent to being the religious leader of the nation.

Most Sunnis see Al Sistani's intervention in politics as a part of Wilayat al-Faqih (Rahimi, 2007). Al Sistani, on the other hand, disapproves of the use of Wilayat al-Faqih (Blanchard, 2005). Following is an outline of the participants views on whether Al Sistani used political power as part of his role as a Wilayat al-Faqih.

7.3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE PARTICIPANTS' VIEWS

One of those interviewed, a Sunni, said: that1MSuJ mentioned that:

> Al Sistani believes in the theory of Wilayat al-Faqih but not openly. If we investigate all Al Sistani's interventions from 2003 till now we will find that he has a major and important role in politics therefore, it is possible to say Wilayat al-Faqih [applies to him] (1MSuJ).

Another, a Shia, argues that:

> The separation of religion from politics is worthwhile and prevents the clergy from intervening. This is important because Iraq contains several sects and this may cause some sensitivity among these communities. History does not suggest that Iraq could be governed by clerics. Al Sistani is Iranian yet he interfered in Iraqi issues. He did not have sufficient authority to do that (8FShSt).

7FSuSt states that the weakness of the state led to the clergy intervening in politics and Al Sistani wants to use Wilayat al-Faqih in Iraq to form a new force in the region. She added that because Iraq is a country with a Shia majority, Shia there have the faith that the policy of Wilayat al-Faqih will succeed, and believe all Al Sistani's interventions are proof of that.

2MSuSt (also a Sunni) also supports this comment, stating that since Al Sistani has millions of followers and could change the political equation in Iraq, it means he practiced Wilayat al-Faqih. This participant believes that all Al Sistani's interventions in Iraq were a type of clerical rule, and that most politicians knew that if they opposed Al Sistani views they would be removed from the political process.

6MsuSt mentioned that there is a large consensus in political attitudes between Al Sistani's and Iran's, and so it is possible to say that Al Sistani wanted to clone the Iranian experience in Iraq which is the Wilayat al-Faqih but he did not declare that.

5MKuP argued that Al Sistani does not believe in Wilayat al-Faqih because he did not want to officially have the same position in Iraq that Ali Khamenei Al Wali al Faqih has in Iran. Moreover, Al Sistani knows that Iraq have different sects, not just Shia, thus it is hard for Iraq to be the same as Iran, which is almost all Shia, and apply the Wilayat al-Faqih principle. 9FSuH/W supported this in saying 'it is hard to apply the principle of Wilayat al-Faqih in Iraq because of the sectarian, ethnic and religious diversity in Iraq, so I do not think Al Sistani believes in the Wilayat al-Faqih'.

The Shia participants in this research did not support the idea that Al Sistani practiced Wilayat al-Faqih in Iraq. 10MShP mentioned that it is wrong to draw a link between the Wilayat al-Faqih in Iran and the role of Al Sistani in Iraq because any government in Iran should have the approval of Ali Khamenei Al Wali al Faqih (the Iranian leader under their Wilayat al Faqih system) and he has a right to support any candidate as part of his duty to control the political system in the country. Moreover, Ali Khamenei Al Wali al Faqih has the army (Revolutionary Guards) under his authority and he has the final word in all political matters and crucial decisions, but the same is not true of Al Sistani in Iraq. 11MShCl mentioned that everything that comes from the Ali Khamenei Al Wali al Faqih in Iran must be applied to all, while this cannot be so in Iraq because Iraq is a 'multi-confessional' country (Sunna, Shia, and Kurds) so Wilayat al- Faqih cannot be applied.

Most of the decisions issued by Al Sistani have been in agreement with the other leaders of all the Iraqi communities, and so that is why some Iraqis interpreted it as the Wilayat al-Faqih. 3MShP also argues that the principle of Wilayat al Faqih in Iran is a religious and political authority in one, while Al Sistani depends on the Iraqi people when he wants to issue any Fatwa. He knows how people have responded previously as the Shia believe in the traditional principles of (taqleed). So we can say Al Sistani does not have any type of authority except from the Iraqi people. 12MShCl supported that when he mentioned that Ali Khamenei Al Wali must be acquainted with political matters if he is to impose his opinion and his authority over the people of Iran as all the state is linked to him. Al Sistani believes in "Wlait aluma al Nfseha" which means the people have the right to decide by themselves, such as in elections, who is to represent them and also in crucial issues, whether they are political or social matters to ask the cleric to intervene. Therefore, Al Sistani derives his strength from the people, not from the authority of the state.
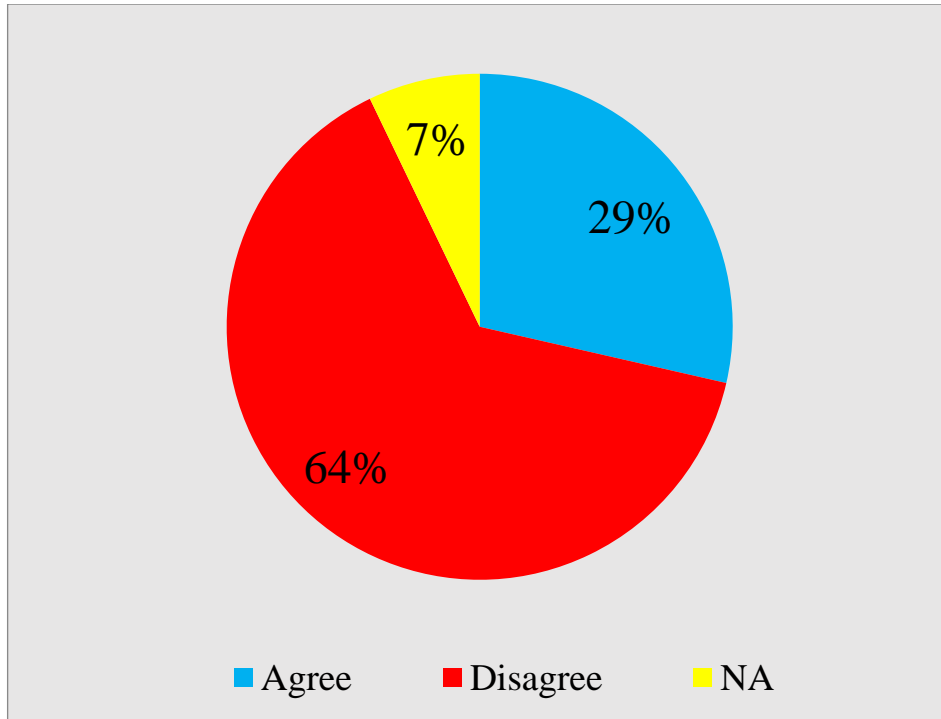
Figure 0-1 Does Al Sistani believe in the Wilayat al Faqih principle?

As can be seen in Figure 7.1, 64% of participants support the view that Al Sistani does not practicing Wilayat al Faqih theory in Iraq. They think that Al Sistani does not have the official position or the strength of the army to do so, and that he believes that people must decide their fate through elections. The figure also shows that 29% of participants considered Al Sistani's interventions in politics to be a part of Wilayat al Faqih theory in Iraq, particularly his role in removing Al-Maliki from being Prime Minister (Al Maliki).

The following section provides further insight into Al Sistani's views.

7.4 THE THIRD THEORY OF POLITICAL INTERVENTION – AL SISTANI'S MODEL

The third theory, which Al Sistani seems to have adopted, is that the role of clerics is to explain the teaching of Islam and explain what God wants from believers and Islam itself. This in turn urges people to follow verses of the Quran, and leaves the politics to the politicians (S. V. R. Nasr, 2007). In this model, the clergy try to influence the political nature of their country, but from outside of politics.

1MSuJ mentioned that when clerics intervene in politics the matter is seen as 'holy', therefore most of the people would be thinking that any opposition to the proposals of the cleric will be regarded as opposing God. Thus the clerics should leave politics to the politicians, to ensure that they do not unduly influence the people.

6MSuSt believes that if a cleric dabbles in politics and support a party in the political process, the cleric cannot be asked by his opponents, for example, not to critique a political speech, which covers the religious character – therefore those clerics who work in politics and preach for and against political parties and raise religious texts cannot be immune to criticism by their opponents.

5MKuP supports the view that the clergy should not enter politics because some clerics confuse their political programs with their religion. 9FSuH/W mentioned that what we are witnessing today in the Arab world of exclusion and making wars in the name of religion is because the clergy engage in politics. The clerics have portrayed people who disagree with them on political issues as infidels and secular and following a western agenda.

7FSuSt mentioned that involving religion in politics has led to further fragmentation and division on religious grounds. Doctrine perpetrated in the name of religion claims to represent true Islam so it is a better idea to keep religion out of politics.

8FShSt mentioned that no one has a right to use religious discourse to influence an audience of people in political life by supporting any individual or party or organization. Political participation is the duty of politicians and it is the duty of every citizen to see that the minority does not impose on the silent majority. 2MSuSt mentioned that the religious speech which has been used by clerics is used to override the freedom and rights of the people and is recognized by others, accusing them of blasphemy. Equal opportunity is lacking among the contenders in the political field, as long as one of them has a religious monopoly. If he claims divine support this is a lie, because God Almighty did not come down and salute support of a particular person or entity to govern the people.

In this research the lack of support from the participants regarding the intervention of the clergy in politics was very clear. Was the role of the clergy who were interfering in politics closer to the Wilayat al-Faqih. Many participants agreed that Al Sistani did not support the principle of Wilayat al-Faqih and he has a different idea regarding interventions in politics. Al Sistani's model was closer to the secular. 10MShP mentioned:

> I noticed all the interventions when Al Sistani appeared to take a civil role in state institutions and not the role of a cleric. The Iranian government has tried several times to make Al Sistani follow it politically. He is an Iranian national but each time he has proved independent and leaves the choice for the Iraqi people.

11MShCl argues that Al Sistani differs to the other clerics with regard to interference in politics. Al Sistani was interested in the timing of intervention because Iraq was often

suffering from the oppression of the rulers. When he decided to intervene he was recognizing Iraqi reality and taking into account all the communities. He was not emotional in his decisions therefore he was different to other clerics. 13MShP states that he has met with western officials who said "Despite all that happened to the [Shia] Al Sistani showed statesmanship." For example, during the bombing of Samara he had not issue any order in reaction to the incidents of violence. He is a man of peace and was not dragged into hasty reactions.

14MShP agrees that Al Sistani is a cleric who believes in the separation of powers, democracy and public freedoms, and that he should have the role of advice and guidance, not direct intervention, therefore he is different from the other clerics.

3MShP believes that Al Sistani proved to the world that Islam is a religion of love and peace and that he does not believe in violence: that the events in Syria and other countries are due to the wrong understanding of Islam; and that Al Sistani has lead by example in every area.

The Americans occupying Iraq looked with great respect on Al Sistani because they knew he represented a new model of religious scholars who believe in dialogue and wisdom and patience in dealing with problems (A. Allawi, 2008). All of Al Sistani's statements issued since 2003 are in the interest of the Iraqi people and in most cases leave the option for Iraqi people to make their own choice, especially in sensitive matters. Al Sistani believes that the people should make the decision (Braam et al., 2010).

7.5 AL SISTANI'S OPINION ON POLITICAL INTERVENTION

Al Sistani knows that Iraqi society is different from other countries in the region, primarily because of the multiplicity of sects and religions (Uloom, 2009). And he did not impose a theory but left the choice to the Iraqi people through the elections to choose the form of government they wanted

Many interviews have been conducted with Al Sistani after 2003 to ask him about government. Al Sistani's once answered:

> The formation of a government on the basis of the idea of Wilayat al-Faqih is out of the question, but presumably the new governance respects the Islamic religion, which is the religion of the majority of the Iraqi people and would not legislate any laws that contradict the teachings of Islam (al-Khafaf, 2007).

Al Sistani's has also been questioned regarding the political role of the Shia clergy in Iraq (al-Khafaf, 2007). He responded:

> The Shia wants nothing different from what I want. The Iraqi people, just need to fulfil their rights, so regarding the form of a new government it should be determined by the Iraqi people through free elections involving all Iraqi sects and religions (al-Khafaf, 2007).

Regarding the rights of minorities Al Sistani was asked about the principles on which Iraq's future must be based (al-Khafaf, 2007). Al Sistani's answer was:

> The principle of justice and equality is strong among Iraqis. They value pluralism and the peaceful transfer of power. The Muslims will certainly choose a system that respects the Islamic principles while protecting the rights of religious minorities (al-Khafaf, 2007).

Al Sistani believes in "Wlait Aluma al Nfseha" which means the people have the right to decide in elections who is to represent them and also in crucial issues, whether they are political or social matters. Therefore, Al Sistani derives his strength from the people, not from the authority of the state (al-Khafaf, 2007).

7.6 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The question driving this chapter is to what extent do Iraqi people accept Al Sistani's role as a cleric with political influence? (Do they approve of his approach to political intervention?)

Three Shia theories regarding political intervention have been presented. These theories are:

1. Clerics should have a role in politics.
2. Only a faqih (the religious leader of a nation) can assume political leadership. (Wilayat al Faqih.)
3. A religious leader (and clerics in general) can offer Islamic thought and teaching in regard to politics – but they cannot step into politics and be actively involved by taking positions in a government.

The different participants had different views, with the Sunni leaning toward Al Sistani being a religious leader assuming the political role of Wilayat al Faqih. However, as explained in the preceding pages, this role is only assumed when the religious leader is a political leader (as in Iran) not in Al Sistani's case where he advised and made requests from the role of a cleric.

In regard to whether or not Iraqi people accept Al Sistani's role as a cleric with political influence – they generally do, particularly the Shia. The reasons for the Sunni often rejecting

the concept of Al Sistani having political influence vary, but are much the same as presented in previous chapters. Basically the Sunni are wary of Shia dominance in politics and suspect that the Shia (through Al Sistani) might abuse this dominance.

Al Sistani did not want to place the spotlight on himself. He is happy to offer advice and guidance, but not give orders. He has the moral authority. He sees his role as "directive" (Milani, 2010). The approach taken by Al Sistani is moderation, which naturally does not interfere in political conflicts, and he does not like himself intervening in politics, thus his example is able to change the idea that all clerics are extremist or inclined to violence or to direct intervention (J. R. Cole, 2006).

In the past, most Shia clerics considered that there were no a links between politics and the teachings of Islam (Kadhim, 2012) that religion is the spiritual link between God and people, while politics involves only the interests of people Vaezi, 2014. Therefore, the role of Shia clerics in the founding of the Iraqi state was ineffective was ineffective as their concern was not the political system of the state. They pushed for armed resistance when the British occupied Iraq in 1914, however, because they were unsure, and lacked the knowledge of how to deal with the new events. Historically, these interventions occurred as an act of standing up for the rights of the people. The people were urged to resist but the clerics did not have a group of representatives who could negotiate with the invading forces to obtain their rights. This explains why the first Iraqi governments were formed by the Sunnis of Iraq as Shia clerics did not have a clear theory of intervention in politics, and they did not know what they wanted.

The principle of "taqleed" which was founded by Shaykh Murtada Al Ansari (1214 AH-1281 AH) was intended to deal with legal and political provisions (Al'Alwani, 1991). Shia clerics began to organize themselves by depending on this principle. At the beginning the purpose of it was religious but then it began to be exploited by clerics to bring people closer to them and then some clerics began to raise political ideas (Abd al-Jabbar, 2003). This explains how after 2003 the Shia were more organized than the Sunni and explains how the Shia were able to govern after Al Sistani recommended the Shia to participate actively in the elections.

Regarding Al Sistani's role in politics, because the majority of the Iraqi people are Muslims he confirmed Iraq has an Islamic identity. But he also indicated that Islam respects other groups and believes in providing rights for minority groups also (al-Khafaf, 2015). Therefore he asked those who wrote the constitution to emphasize that, and not to contradict

any provision of the constitution with the teachings of Islam and at the same time to respect the right of minorities (McGarry & O'Leary, 2007).

64% of participants in this study (Figure 6.1) believed that Al Sistani during the period from 2003 till now did not intervene in politics except when it was strictly necessary, with no other solution in sight.

Some examples have been mentioned in this thesis which confirm this: his message to choose a Prime Minister after Iraq was without a government for eight months, and his Fatwa for jihad when the Iraqi army collapsed, are examples of times when his directives (after there was no other solution) contributed to saving Iraq. By convincing the Iraqi people to choose the option of democracy and to depend on elections to choose and to form a government, he dealt wisely with all events after 2003 and earned the respect of all. Thus it is possible to say his interventions in Iraq were for Iraq's interests overall (Uloom, 2009) and not because of self-interest or the interests of Shia or clerics.

29% of the participants in this study considered that Al Sistani applied the principle of Wilayat al-Faqih in Iraq through his interventions in politics. If compared to the authority of Wali al faqih in Iran. It can be said that Al Sistani had lived in Iraq for a long time and he knew the composition of the Iraqi people of different races and sects. However Al Sistani did not (and does not) have any authority over the Iraqi army or the appointment of the judiciary and he has no official position. But the Iraqi people granted Al Sistani confidence to express his opinion because they felt that he was the best one for defending their rights.

So Al Sistani gave his directives, or views, or guidance – whatever some may call it – and in all the years of his presence in Iraq he kept away from any relationship with Iran's successive governments, thus confirming he was not applying the principle of Wilayat al-Faqih.

7.7   SUMMARY

4MShCl mentioned that the role of Al Sistani is as an advisor, not a ruler. This has been defended by all Iraqi communities. One can say that Al Sistani does not have formal powers, while Wilayat al-Faqih in Iran is different. In Iran Ali Khamenei Al Wali has the powers of the Head of State. Therefore it seems inappropriate to say that Al Sistani has practiced Wilayat al-Faqih in Iraq.

The Shia theories regarding intervention in politics was very clear after 2003 because of Al Sistani. He was able to present a new model of intervention to attract the world's attention.

All his interventions came in time to maintain the cohesion and unity of Iraq and assist the nation in avoiding civil war.

Al Sistani did not adopt the Wilayat al-faqih because the authority and functions of the Wilayat al faqih in Iran is quite different from the role of Al Sistani in Iraq. Al Sistani does not have any official position in Iraq and instead derives his strength and influence from the Iraqi people. Most of his interventions were critical, and may influence the Iraqi's into believing that he is a man of wisdom whose presence in Iraq is very important.

The following two chapters provide further analysis of the interview participants' opinions in relation to the research questions.

Chapter 8: Intervention in choosing a Prime Minister – the 2014 elections

8.1   INTRODUCTION

In analysing data related to the first research question, this chapter explores and discusses the 2014 election where Al Sistani intervened in the choosing of the next Iraqi prime Minister.

The question is asked yet again: To what extent do Iraqi people accept Al Sistani's role as a cleric with political influence? (Do they approve of his approach to political intervention?)

This analysis is based on the findings from interviews conducted with the participants, and textual analysis of written data stemming either directly from Al Sistani, or through his organisations.

8.1.1   Chapter content

This chapter provides an overview of the background of the 2014 elections, including the parties and the attitudes of international communities. It details message which influenced Al-Maliki's withdrawal from the elections, and then explores the research participants' views on the matter before analysing then summarising Al Sistani's role as a cleric with political influence in regard to the elections?

8.1.2   The link between this chapter and the research questions

This chapter explores the following research question:

To what extent do Iraqi people accept Al Sistani's role as a cleric with political influence? (Do they approve of his approach to political intervention?)

Do Iraqis see Al Sistani as holding special hope for Iraq in regard to the nation's problems, and to how Iraq is viewed by the rest of the world?

How does Al Sistani himself see his role?

It includes an analysis of findings based on textual analysis (where relevant) and from interview questions including the following:

- Did Al Sistani contribute to the ousting of al-Maliki from power?
- Were Al Sistani's interventions in politics justified?

8.2 BACKGROUND

8.2.1 Introduction

In the April 2014 elections Al-Maliki received 105 of a possible 328 votes which made him the winner and entitled him to form a coalition government. However Al Maliki continued in vain for five months to try to form this government. He faced objections from other parties to get what would have been a third term as prime Minister. During this time the deteriorating security situation and the entry of ISIS fighters to some Iraqi provinces brought Iraq to the edge of civil war. International attitudes varied as the USA's position was to dismiss al-Maliki's mandate for a third term. This was in spite of the Iranians being in favour of Al Maliki being prime minister for a third term.

This chapter will shed light on what Al Sistani's role was in forming the Iraqi government in 2014 and will also illustrate the extent to which Al Sistani intervened in politics at the time, based upon his actions during and after this election. This chapter will discuss the extent to which Al Sistani contributed to Al Maliki stepping down in 2014 when Iraq was in a sensitive situation and there was international conflict about Al Maliki remaining in his position.

The chapter also will focus on the reasons behind Al Sistani refusing Al Maliki a third term, and will examine how members of the Iraqi sects (Sunni and Shia) interpreted this action. It is important to investigate whether they consider Al Sistani was biased in helping other parties to depose Al Maliki or if he was just doing what he felt was best for Iraq.

Through this process the text of Al Sistani's message for politicians and why they followed it will be considered, especially as some politicians left Al-Maliki's since some who left Al Maliki's list and followed Al Sistani's advice to prevent Al Maliki getting a third term.

8.2.2 The Iraqi parties and international community rejected Al Maliki

Most Iraqi parties, and even some politicians on Al Maliki's list, did not want Al Maliki to get a third term as Prime Minister of Iraq, therefore most of them argued among themselves because of his refusal to form a coalition (Kenneth Katzman et al., 2014).

The Sadrist, an Iraqi party headed by Muqtada al-Sadr, had entered into army conflicts with Al Maliki's government during his first and second terms as prime minister because of differing political views toward some issues (Al-Qarawee, 2014). So, because Al Maliki had

many Sadrist prisoners and refused to release them, the Sadrists in general were opposed to him having a third term (Plebani, 2014).

The Kurdish parties considered Kirkuk a Kurdish city while the Arabs rejected this idea. When Al Maliki was the Prime Minister he did not acknowledge Kirkuk as a Kurdish city, and because of his attitudes the Kurdish parties rejected al-Maliki as Prime Minister for a third time (Kenneth Katzman et al., 2014).

The Supreme Islamic Council, one of the Shia parties; explicitly refused to give al-Maliki a third term because they thought it would create a new dictatorship in Iraq, instead of turning the nation into a modern democratic state, so they too refused the third term to him (Al-Qarawee, 2014).

The Sunni parties demanded a Prime Minister acceptable to the other blocs and the development of a program to resolve the crisis which was not limited to security aspects, but which also addressed its sectarian dimensions (Mansour, 2016). The Sunnis also considered that Al Maliki was a dictator so they refused him as Prime Minister (Benraad, 2014a).

The State of Law list which belonged to Al Maliki's party argued that if al Maliki got the number of votes required, then this would qualify him for a third term in office (Kenneth Katzman et al., 2014). To ignore this and 'change of commander' in the midst of the battle would have serious consequences which could lead to the collapse of the Iraqi army. Al Maliki was a commander of the armed forces and the next difficult stage needed a leader like him.

International observers and the leaders of other states had a range of views on the election outcome. Kenneth Katzman et al (2014) mentioned that, "President Obama and other U.S. officials attributed the June Iraqi Security Forces ISF collapse largely to the failure of Iraqi leaders, particularly Al Maliki, to build an inclusive government that could hold the allegiance of Sunni citizens or Sunni ISF personnel" (p.4). It is also Obama's administration which disagreed with Al Maliki having a third term because he would not sign the Status of Forces Agreement in 2011. As well as this, his refusal to grant immunity to the tens of thousands of troops the administration wanted to leave in Iraq following the formal withdrawal angered Washington (Whitney, 2014).

Iran had played a key role in Al Maliki's rise to power in 2006, and senior Iranian officials had defended his rule, so the Iranian government supported Al Maliki for a third term. Kenneth Katzman et al. (2014) mentioned that Iran's government was, however, concerned about support Al Maliki for a third term, worrying that this lead to losing Al Sistani's support, when in fact they wanted the opposite. Benrad (2014b) states that, 'Al

Sistani had noticeably distanced himself from the political process, essentially in reaction to what he deemed poor government performance and political corruption'.

Al Sistani did not intervene when the Iraqi parties failed to choose a new Prime Minister for Iraq and this situation remained the same for eight months without a solution in sight.

8.3   AL SISTANI'S MESSAGE

Some of the members of the State of Law lists which belonged to Al Maliki's party suggested sending a message to Al Sistani to get his advice with regard to the crisis because the situation had reached an impasse. Part of this letter stated, 'We look forward to your guidance and promise you that we are under your command. We trust your honesty, vision and the depth of your awareness in all issues' (al-Khafaf, 2015).

They asked Al Sistani's advice on how to solve the crisis of not being able to agree on a new Prime Minister. The message was not published in the media. Members of the State of Law list did not want to create problems within their party so they the message secret (Morris, 2014).

Al Sistani had remained neutral in the recent parliamentary elections and had said he would not support any party at the expense of another, and that it was up to the will of the citizens to choose those they wanted from the candidates on the electoral lists (Hadad, 2016).

After delivering this message Al Sistani gave his opinion as to who was the top Shia cleric in Iraq. Al Sistani's answer was:

> I see the need to speed up the selection of a new Prime Minister acceptable to the majority and able to work together with the political leaders of the rest with the ability to save the country from the dangers of terrorism, sectarian war and division (al-Khafaf, 2015).

According to this message new alliances were created and Al-Malaki stepped down, knowing he did not have Al Sistani's support, and Haider al-Abadi was chosen in 2014 as the New Prime Minister of Iraq.

8.4   WHY DID AL-MALAKI STEP DOWN? (THE PARTICIPANTS' VIEWS)

The Sunnis and Shia interviewed in this research had opposing opinions about the situation of Al-Malaki stepping down. 1MSuJ mentioned that it was his belief that the change of Prime

Minister was under orders from the US and Al Sistani was a tool used by the United States to implement its agenda in Iraq. I asked this participant if he had any evidence for his opinion, and he could not provide any.

7FSuSt argued that there were orders from Iran to depose Al-Maliki and she questioned the benefit of elections if, as she believed, Al Sistani was the one who removed and appointed the Iraqi Prime Minister. Here this participant was thinking that there were orders from Iran or the USA for Al Sistani to issue his to not vote for Al-Malaki. The importance of this comment is that it makes a connection between Al Sistani and Iran, a connection made quite possibly just because Al Sistani is originally from Iranian, but also because of the permanent conflict in the Middle East region, especially between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and how this reflects on Iraqi sects.

2MSuSt believed that the message from Al Sistani was correct (meaning it was a sensible message to Iraqi's) but he questioned why Al Sistani did not to intervene sooner when he already knew that Al-Maliki had committed crimes and his past performance had been inadequate.

2MSuSt believes that Al Sistani's did not have an independent opinion, and that he may even have feared for his life. According to him, Al-Maliki had committed crimes. I suggested to him that there was not enough evidence presented by participants to prove that, and again he raised the question regarding the speed of Al Sistani's intervention in solving the problems. 5MKuP stated that Al Sistani feared that Al-Maliki would become a dictator in the new Iraq. He said this is why most parties did not support Al-Maliki for a third term, and this is why Al Sistani advised them to choose a new Prime Minister. This comment shows us that some Sunnis participants had a different view of Al Sistani than others. Some understood that his role took into consideration their interests, and not the opposite. Al-Maliki is also known to be Shia, but Al Sistani's advice was to replace him because he felt his continuation meant more problems and divisions and this indicates that Al Sistani was not sectarian in his view.

9FSuH/W agreed with Al Sistani's message to remove al-Maliki because it led to the rescue of the Sunnis from the influence of al-Maliki. This comment was again possible evidence that Al Sistani's advice to change Al Maliki may be in the interests of all sects of the Iraqi people, not just Shia.

110MShP mentioned that Al-Maliki was rejected by most of the Shia parties so Al Sistani was in harmony with these parties when he supported the removal of Al-Maliki, and that not all Sunnis agreed with this action but some of them supported it because they considered it as a good solution at a sensitive time.

6MSuSt mentioned that Al Sistani had been a supporter of the views and ideas of most of the Iraqi parties which were involved in the formation of the Iraqi government. Therefore 6MSuSt considers that Al Sistani's opinion was compatible with most of the Iraqi parties. Secondly 6MSuSt indicated that the timing of the intervention of Al Sistani in the political process was very good, and that it is important that the Sunnis know that the intervention of Al Sistani is not every time, but only in the case of extreme necessity.

Some Shia people took Al Sistani's message of a new Prime Minister as an important action in helping Iraqis to form a new government. 10MShP mentioned that most Iraqi sects (Sunni, Shia and Kurds in particular) did not support Al Maliki for a third term. 10MShP also said that it was some members from Al Maliki's list who agreed to send a message to Al Sistani to know his opinion. And of course it was Al Sistani's duty as a cleric to answer all political and non-political questions, so he gave them his opinion and they were free to follow it or not.

11MShCl mentioned that the Dawa party failed in the management of the country during the eight-year rule of Al-Maliki and therefore contributed to the spread of administrative and economic corruption. 11MShCl added that:

> Maliki believed himself to be the only one capable of running the country but he had failed in that Al Sistani , as a cleric, has a well-established right to express his opinion in politics and give advice on what he sees as Iraq and the Iraqis interests and to maintain the unity of the country and avoid civil war.

He said that was particularly important since most of the political parties did not want to extend Al Maliki for a third term.

13MShP mentioned that one of duties of a cleric is to give his opinion, especially in sensitive times, therefore when Al Maliki insisted on a third term and most of the Iraqi parties disagreed, Al Sistani's message helped to avoid civil war and maintained the unity of Iraq.

8FShSt also suggests that the intervention of Al Sistani was intended to resolve the problem and avoid new disasters. Moreover, in view of 8FShSt Al Sistani's message as the main Shia cleric was to save Iraq from domestic war. 8FShSt added that:

> Al Sistani was a good observer of events in Iraq and the region, so his advice was close to reality in avoiding international conflicts especially as Al Maliki staying in office was rejected by many countries.

The significance of this comment is that some of the Sunni participants realised that Al Sistani was looking to events not just in Iraq but he was also considering the problems

throughout the region. It is interesting to note that most of the research participants saw this and agreed with his opinions.

3MShP stated that Al Sistani did not intervene in politics without good reason, and stressed yet again that in the case of Al-Malaki it was the politicians who had asked him his opinion about Al Maliki. He said that Al Sistani was following the political situation in the region more carefully than the politicians were. Therefore his intervention was appropriate when he saw that Al-Maliki was being rejected by so many. 2MShP said Al-Maliki wanted to establish close relations with Iran, and that tensions in the region between the United States and Saudi Arabia on the one hand, and with Iran on the other, led to his advice to the politicians to no longer accept Al-Malaki as prime Minister.

4MShCl argued that Al Sistani was biased against Al-Maliki, and that the change that happened was a partial change of a person (Al Maliki) and not all the members of the Al-Maliki government so the change did not include corrupt politicians who remained in office.

14MShP mentioned that during the reign of al-Maliki, Iranian influence over Iraq had increased dramatically so Al Sistani wanted to stop this influence by replacing Al Maliki with a new Prime Minister acceptable to Iraqis and the international community.

Overall, most of the participants in this research agreed that Al Sistani did something good for Iraq and the region when advising some members of the State of Law to choose a new prime minister instead of al Maliki. As mentioned in the literature review, some Iraqis suspect there is an Iranian political influence in Iraqi political processes, and Al-Malaki is 'friends' with Iran. Therefore this comment suggests that while Al Sistani is Iranian he is not following Iran's interest in Iraq and instead advocating for removing Al-Maliki. At the end, Maliki was left with only one major backer: Al-Qarawee (2016) mention that

> Despite Iran's backing, however, the party could not ignore Al Sistani's will. Al Sistani's position and the United States' desire to see a new prime minister put enough pressure on Iran so that it withdrew its support for Maliki (p.3).

The Iranian government tried to help Al Maliki get a third term in office as Prime Minister, but in the end, when they found strong opposition from Al Sistani they agree with his replacement.
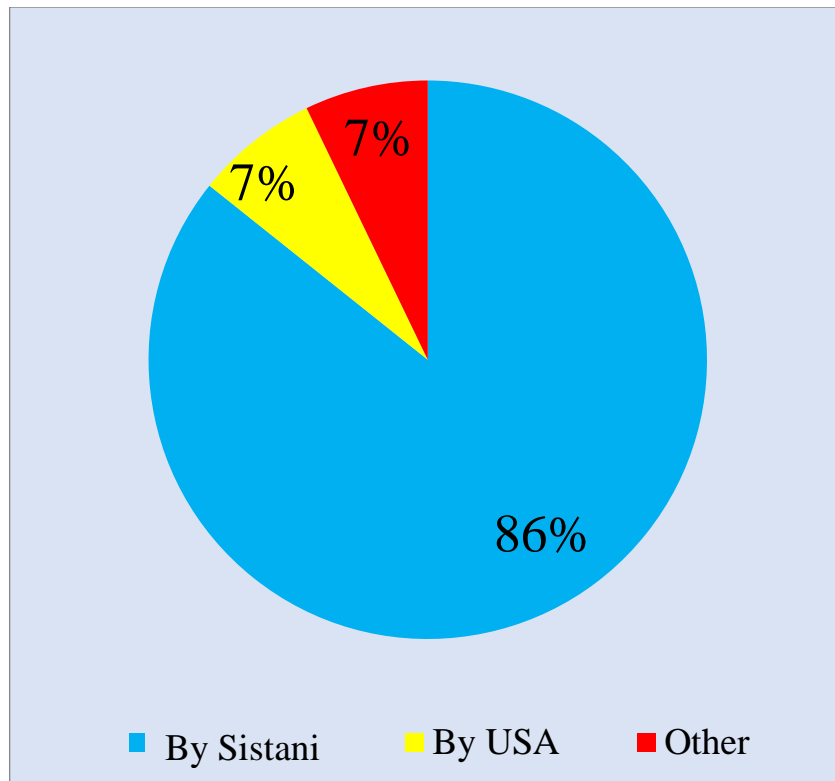
Figure 0-1 Why a new Iraqi Prime Minister was chosen?

Figure 8.1 indicates that 86% of the research participants believed that it is Al Sistani's message that has replaced the Prime Minister, not the USA. Only 7% of participants think that the USA was behind the removal of Al Maliki in its role as a significant player in Middle East politics.

8.5   ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The research participants thought there were valid reasons behind Al Sistani's issuing of his message to not vote for Al-Malaki. These reasons included what seemed to be an international consensus for rejection of Maliki's stay in office, a national rejection by most of the Iraqi parties, and Maliki's failure to effectively manage the nation to the satisfaction of most Iraqis. In support of Al Sistani, overall (as seen in Figure 8.1) 86% of the participants of this research (representing the two main Iraqi sects – the Sunni and the Shia) supported Al Sistani's action (his message).

As recorded in the data, 7% of participants in this study believe that the USA removed Al Maliki from his position as prime minister. It is difficult to find evidence for this. There is no sign of any agreement between Al Sistani and the USA to depose Al Maliki, or for any reason, and it seems evident that at least from 2003 Al Sistani had no relations with the USA and did not meet with any of USA government officials. The USA attempted to influence his opinion on many subjects but they could not. Many times Paul Bremer complained to the US

administration about Al Sistani's objections to him when he was US Ambassador in Iraq (Bremer, 2006).

It is possible to say that both of them (Al Sistani, and USA) had interest in changing Al Maliki, and because of that some Sunni participants felt there was an agreement between Al Sistani and the US. This suggestion of there being agreement between Al Sistani and USA to remove Al-Maliki was usually the belief of the Sunni in this research. (A further reason for suspecting a link between the US and Al Sistani is that Al Sistani did not issue a Jihad Fatwa against the USA when invaded Iraq at 2003. However, as explained in previous chapters, there are other reasons for this).

Iran's government may have wished for Al Maliki to stay for a third term because they shared the same political agenda, and it was not in Iran's interest to remove Al-Maliki because there were matching ideas between Iran and Al-Maliki in all regional issues, such as the USA-Russian-Iranian conflict in Syria, and the Iranian-Saudi Arabia conflict (al-Qarawee, 2017).

According to Figure 8.1 86% of the participants believed that it was Al Sistani's message that led to the choosing of a new prime minister. Yet Al Sistani waited and waited. He allowed time for the politicians to try to resolve the matter (although some turn this against him and say he was slow to intervene).

From the data gathered from the research participants it seems apparent to me that there was nothing that could sway or bias Al Sistani's opinion that his actions were only in the best interests of the Iraqi people as a whole.

Some of Al Maliki's behaviours led Al Sistani to frankly express his opinion towards him. According to Al Sistani, Al Maliki's government was not serious in the fight against unprecedented rampant corruption at the highest levels in the various state departments. He was a major obstacle in any real progress being made in important areas such as security, services and economic development. In this study, some Shia participants attributed the responsibility for flaws in the management of the security portfolio and the economy to al-Maliki, flaws which led to Al Sistani's call for citizens to volunteer (Al Sistani's Fatwa) in the ranks of the armed forces in order to avoid a complete collapse. Maliki was responsible for the security portfolio, He only appointed leaders who were his relatives and who prevented officials from any role in it (Benraad, 2014) so he was responsible for the great failure in this portfolio, as al-Khafaf (2015) stated:.

> Al Sistani was convinced that the significant deterioration in Iraq's political life among the sons of one's homeland on the one hand and between Iraq and its Arab and Muslim allies on the other hand, made the need for change urgent (p.227).

A change in vision was necessary if the Iraqis wanted to ward off the dangers of terrorism, sectarian war and division that had intensified in the recent period, particularly after the fall of Mosul by ISIS (Hadad, 2016).

8.6 SUMMARY

Yes, Al Sistani did intervene in choosing a prime minister. He did so after waiting many months, and only after allowing time for matters to be resolved without his intervention. Al Sistani fits the profile of being a religious leader who will offer advice on all aspects of the lives and the world of his people – Iraqi's. If this means intervening in politics as an outsider with great influence, then he will do so. The Iraqis whom I have interviewed, both Sunni and Shia, who supported Al Sistani's action to change prime minister, believed that he is not interested in supporting any one group, therefore they believed that his intervention was only in Iraq best interests.

Al Sistani did not have any power to force others to carry out his advice but he expressed his opinion and left others to choose. (Although it seems obvious he knew his opinion held much weight).

In the political or any other arena Al Sistani did not ask for any position for himself or for any member of his family (Aimami, 2011). And he does not have the military power to force others to listen to his opinion. Yet he does have a following. Many politicians know that the Iraqi Shia community listens to Al Sistani's advice. Most of the people appear to believe that what he says is in the interest of the people.

In summary:

- Did Al Sistani contribute to the ousting of al-Maliki from power?
- Were Al Sistani's interventions in politics justified?

Chapter 9: Al Sistani's jihad Fatwa

9.1 INTRODUCTION

In this, the last of the analysis chapters, this research explores further questions which will shed insight on Al Sistani in regard to his political influence, and to whether the people of Iraq hold a great deal of hope in Al Sistani . It will be seen that the people of Iraq do hold much hope in Al Sistani. Among the Shia this is especially the case, but much less so among the Sunni.

9.1.1 Chapter content

This chapter provides background information in the form of an overview of the situation in which Al Sistani announced a jihad fatwa against ISIS. In this overview ISIS is explained, as well as what a jihad is, and the history of jihads in Iraq. Also explained is the concept of a jihad kefaya, and detailed is the text of Al Sistani's fatwa.

Following this is discussion of the research participants' views in relation to:

- Did Al Sistani save Iraq in 2003 when he did not issue a fatwa against US forces?
- Was Al Sistani's 2014 fatwa against ISIS, or was it for sectarian purposes?
- Was Al Sistani's fatwa decided on in agreement with Iran?
- What was the impact of Al Sistani's 2014 fatwa on Iraqi communities?

At this point the chapter moves into an analysis and discussion of the data, and then a chapter summary.

9.1.2 The link between this chapter and the research questions

This chapter explores the following research questions:

Q 1: To what extent do Iraqi people accept Al Sistani's role as a cleric with political influence? Do they approve of his approach to his own political influence?

Q 2: Do Iraqis see Al Sistani as holding special hope for Iraq in regard to the nation's problems, and to how Iraq is viewed by the rest of the world?

It includes an analysis of findings based on textual analysis (where relevant) and from interview questions including the following:

- Why did Al Sistani not issue a fatwa against the US when they occupied Iraq while he did issue a fatwa against ISIS?
- Is this fatwa really against the Sunnis?
- Does this fatwa interfere in the political affairs of Iraq?
- Is this fatwa an agreement between Al Sistani and Iran?

9.2 BACKGROUND

'Jihad' and 'fatwa' are two words often seen together. A fatwa is a religious decision made by a high-ranking Islamic scholar that must be followed by the Muslims it is given to. A jihad is the means of following the decision.

On the 13th of June in 2014 Al Sistani issued a jihad fatwa against the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS) and the Levant group (ISIL) at a time when these groups occupied parts of Iraq. In his fatwa, Al Sistani called the volunteers to bear weapons and come and resist the enemy and fight for their country. The response was overwhelming.

(It should be noted here that ISIS and ISIL are much the same, and usually known under the banner of 'ISIS'. Technically, however, although these two co-ordinated groups fight for the same cause, they often fight in different areas).

In the views of some such as Jensen (2016) this fatwa contributed greatly to avoiding disaster in Iraq and the region in general, when it prevented the fall of Baghdad, the capital of Iraq. It was a time when ISIS had made rapid progress in the five northern, western and eastern provinces. While security authorities were still investigating to determine the circumstances of ISIL's advance, the army created by the fatwa stopped ISIL's progress on the outskirts of Baghdad.

Al Sistani's action was almost unprecedented. A religious leader in Iraq had not issued a fatwa for decades, but there was a quick response from the various central and southern provinces populated by Shia, in response to Al Sistani's fatwa which has experienced both criticism and praise by Iraqis.

The importance of this chapter is to discuss the impact of the fatwa on two major Iraqi sects, the Sunnis, and Shia, and the attitudes of these two sects to the fatwa. One important question in this chapter is why Al Sistani issued the fatwa against ISIS in 2014 but did not issue a fatwa against the USA in 2003, even though both forces occupied Iraq.

This chapter will also examine whether the fatwa was against or for the Sunni people in Iraq, because the fighting was in their areas. This chapter also clarifies the role of this fatwa in contributing to sectarian violence, as the Sunnis' clerics went as far as calling it a

declaration of war against the Sunnis (Linge, 2016) or if on the contrary the fatwa promoted national unity among Iraqis.

9.2.1 Who is ISIS?

ISIS refers to the 'Islamic State' of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). ISIS is often referred to as ISIL means the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) ('Levant' is a more historical name for Syria). There is another name that the group rejects, but which many officials use: this name is Daesh. 'Daesh' stems from an Arabic acronym that means the same thing as ISIL, but sounds like an Arabic word meaning "stomp on" (Gambhir, 2014).

ISIS sees itself as an Islamic caliphate, which is a state under the leadership of a caliph, someone seen as a successor to the prophet Muhammad and a leader of all Muslims. Although they call themselves 'Islamic State' no government in the world recognizes them as a state, and many Muslims are appalled by their definition of Islam (Phillips, 2014). Various commentators describe ISIS in different ways which are all similar. Laub and Masters define ISIS as "a predominantly Sunni jihadist group seeks to sow civil unrest in Iraq and the Levant with the aim of establishing a caliphate, a single, transnational Islamic state based on sharia" (Laub & Masters, 2014, p. 1).

The group became known as ISIS or ISIL in 2013 and then 'Islamic State' after it launched a major offensive in northern Iraq and claimed to have established a caliphate across Iraq and Syria in June 2014 (Zelin, 2014) when it captured Mosul. Al-Qaida is a predecessor of ISIS, otherwise its origins are mixed among various other groups.

The group claims to be the sole representative of true followers of Islam and has executed large numbers of Muslims whose understanding of the Quran differs from its own narrow interpretation (G. Wood, 2015). These groups refuse other opinions and other sects and their ideology is limited to establishing a "caliphate", a country ruled by one political and religious leader and according to Islamic law (Cockburn, 2014). Moreover, the members of ISIS are jihadists who belong to an extremist interpretation of Sunni Islam and consider themselves the only rightful believers and they say that the rest of the world is made up of infidels who are seeking to destroy Islam in order to justify attacks against other Muslims and non-Muslims (Al-Tamimi, 2014).

> Intentionally these teams or groups justify judgments of conviction and the criminalization and apostasy on the basis of the conduct of war and the use of armed force in the belief that what you are doing as close as possible to the

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jihad waged by the early Muslims in the era of the Islamic conquests (Pelham, 2015b).

They also believe they must kill every Muslim who believes in democracy – and this means killing tens of millions of Muslims (G. Wood, 2015). They believe democracy is leads to the non-application of the law of God (Gambhir, 2014).

> These groups depend financially on money from oil smuggling in Syria, racketeering and kidnappings, as well as donations from private jihadi networks in the Gulf. Later, it captured some of Syria and Iraq's most-lucrative oil fields (Wood, 2015).

Al Sistani obviously knew the dangers of ISIS so his fatwa was like a pre-emptive war against this ideology which wants to kill Muslims or anyone else who opposes them.

9.2.2   The Meaning of 'jihad'

The word "jihad" holds different meanings for Muslims and non-Muslims. Some non-Muslims understand a jihad as being like a "holy war". Knapp (2003) mentioned that the Arabic term jihad is usually translated into European languages as holy war, on the basis of the use of this word in the Islamic world where it often refers to 'holy war'. Yet it has a significantly different meaning in the Quran and Hadith, where it primarily means a "struggle" or "exertion". Basically, "Fatwa" is like the instruction while "jihad" is the order to carry out the instruction.

Heck (2004) mentions that the word jihad has appeared widely in the Western news media following the 11th of September 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, but the true meaning of this term in the Islamic world (it is sometimes called the "sixth pillar" of the faith) is still not well understood by non-Muslims.

In the Quran "jihad" is used in different ways and with different meanings (Knapp, 2003). Nasr also states that there are various elements to the meaning of "jihad" and that the first of these is that, 'It can refer to internal as well as external efforts to be a good Muslim or believer, as well as working to inform people about the faith of Islam' (Nasr, 1999, p. 3). Bukhari supports this in stating that 'jihad', 'means inner conflict between the human and his intention to refuse any evil actions from the whispers of Shaitan (satan) and to accept the good' (Bukhari, 1987, p. 115). This element of jihad is a clear invitation that Islam calls people to achieve internal peace and to forego hatred and anger (Heck, 2004), and that the focus of a jihad is not violence.

A second element is Jihad by the tongue, which means defending Islam by publishing teachings of Islam, participating in interviews, and generally just presenting Islam clearly and accurately (Khan, 1979). The third element of jihad is 'Jihad by "the pen/knowledge" which involves research, writing articles and assisting in the "defence of Islam and writ[ing] books which help to understand the real nature of Islam' (Bukhari, 1987).

There is more. A fourth type of jihad is "Jihad by the hand" which is a jihad of action rather than words, so it refers to when a Muslim is 'helping others by actions such as zakart (charity) and hajj (pilgrimage)' (Khan, 1979).

A fifth type is the "fard ayn" jihad which is jihad by prayer and ritual, by good habits and practices (Sahara, 2015) while a six jihad is jihad by the sword (known also as a jihad kefaya or jihad fard ayn) (Bukhari, 1987). 'Jihad by the sword could be simply a group of freedom fighters or an organised campaign of an army' (Khan, 1979), but usually it refers to the use of modern weapons in defending one's country (Litvak, 2010). It is not misuse of arms to create violence.

There are only two situations were Jihad by the sword is allowed to be undertaken (Ilesanmi, 2000). 'The first one is for self-defence when someone attacks you or when your nation has been attacked' (Khan, 1979). The second one is fighting against evil and injustice. It is also a sin if a Muslim sees injustice being done when he/she is capable of stopping it, yet does nothing about it. This can include wars on drugs, child labour, and on terror (Cook, 2015; Gerges, 2009; Mohammad, 1985).

9.2.3 Jihads in Iraqi history

Some clerics have insisted on trying to use force to sway people to do what they believe is right, but this has typically failed because there was no coordination between politicians and clerics (Hegghammer, 2006). The first Jihad Fatwa in Iraqi in modern times was issued in 1914 by the top Shia cleric Grand Ayatollah Kathem al-Yazdi at the time when British forces invaded the south of Iraq in Basra (Simon & Tejirian, 2004). Grand Ayatollah Kathem al-Yazdi ordered the Southern Iraqi tribespeople to defend Basra.

He spoke from the podium of the Imam Ali shrine, 'To defend the Islamic territories and mandating that those unable to participate in fighting should provide money to contribute financially to enable those who are physically able to participate' (Kadhim, 2012b; Vinogradov, 1972). Iraq was under Ottoman occupation at that time but the Shiatreated the Ottomans as though they were Muslims, even though the Ottoman treatment of the Shiawas harsh which led to deteriorating health and economic conditions of the Shia(Abd al-Jabbar,

2003). After three years, in 1917 British forces invaded Baghdad. This was after strong military resistance by the Iraqi tribes under the guidance of clerics in Najaf (Simon & Tejirian, 2004). Aimami (2011) mentions that the relation between invasion forces and Shiaclerics was non-confrontational. The practices of the British forces and lack of understanding of Iraqi culture strained this relationship led to the revolution of 1920, which had the approval of clerics in Najaf (F. R. A. al-Kifaee, 2010; Kadhim, 2012b; Vinogradov, 1972).

One might say that the role of the clergy helped to preserve the unity of Iraq, which is necessary in preserving the rights of all Iraqis (al-Khafaf, 2015).

There have only been two jihad fatwas in Iraqi history, in 1914 and in 2014.

9.2.4 Al Sistani's Fatwa for a jihad kefaya

The 9th of June in 2014 was one of the saddest days in Iraq's history. On this day ISIS invaded the three Iraqi provinces of Mosul, Tikrit and Ramadi, as well as parts of Karkuk (Lewis, 2014).

The conventional viewpoint of the Iraqi authorities was that Iraq had two options to guarantee security when faced with challenges above the capacity of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF): Iraq could call for help from the United States, or it could call for help from Iran (Laub & Masters, 2015). At that time, however, President Obama and the US administration was reluctant to support the Al-Maliki government, thus leaving the door open for Iranian military intervention (Laub & Masters, 2015). And while the US would not provide any help (not without political conditions involving Al-Maliki) Iran was waiting for a suitable time to offer assistance (G. Wood, 2015).

Al Sistani's intervention with his jihad fatwa came at a most suitable time. He issued a religious edict – a jihad kefaya fatwa – calling on Iraqi citizens 'to defend the country, its people, the honour of its citizens, and its sacred places' (quoted in Pelham, 2015a – on the web). A jihad kefaya fatwa (sometimes called a jihad kefaya farn fatwa) is not obligatory for every Muslim, but only a group of them (Al Libi, 2010), typically those who are more able. In 1914 when Kathem al-Yazdi issued a Fatwa where each one must take up arms to defend his country, that was called a jihad fard ayn fatwa (Vinogradov, 1972).

On the 13th of June during Friday prayers Sheikh Abdul Mahdi Karbalai, the official spokesman for Al Sistani, announced Al Sistani's jihad kefaya fatwa, calling for Muslims to fight on the behalf of others in the defence of their country as part of the new Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) (al-Khafaf, 2015).

9.2.5 The text of Al Sistani's fatwa

Following is a translation this researcher made of the Arabic original of Sheik Karbalai's announcement, as given to him by Al Sistani.

> The situation that Iraq is going through is a very dangerous one. All Iraqi citizens must be aware of our situation and our deep responsibility. This is a legitimate responsibility, and a patriotic one.
>
> Iraq and the people of Iraq are facing a great and dangerous challenge. The terrorists are not only targeting the control of some provinces such as Mosul and Salahuddin, but they have stated that they are targeting all provinces, including the cities of Baghdad and Karbala and Najaf. Understand that the terrorists are targeting all Iraqis in every area.
>
> The responsibility to address them and fight them is everyone's responsibility. We all need to respect each other regardless of party or sect. The challenge is a significant one for the Iraqi people, who are known for their courage and for assuming national responsibility and legitimacy in the most difficult of circumstances and challenges. Our responsibility at the moment is to save our country Iraq and its people from these attackers, and to make sacrifices for the sake of preserving the unity of our country and our dignity, and to protect our holy places.
>
> We want to all of Iraqi citizens to be patient, courageous and have fortitude in such circumstances as facing fear and an aggressive enemy. This war must be an incentive for us to further to keep our country, our people and our holy places safe.

The following day Al Sistani's website issued a clarification of this fatwa which explained how to apply it. He made three important points.

First, this fatwa was an invitation to all Iraqis, not just for the Shia, and the objective of this Fatwa is to prepare to fight groups of ISIS (al-Khafaf, 2015). These groups (ISIS) have openly declared they are targeting all the holy places of Muslims and Christians (Pelham, 2015b). ISIS is targeting everyone whose opinion is different to their own, whether they are Sunni or Shia, therefore all Iraqis should face this group (Laub & Masters, 2015).

This Fatwa was not a sectarian action. Throughout recent decades religious authorities have demonstrated even in the toughest of events that policies are far from sectarian practices, with no fatwa ever directed against any one of Iraq's communities (Laub & Masters, 2015).

Second, the clarification issued from Al Sistani's website stated that the fatwa was an invitation to volunteer fighters to join with the Iraqi army and other formal forces. The volunteering was meticulously governed to avoid chaos and illegal acts, such as granting militias a role. Al Sistani did not support any particular group or sect and called on the Iraqi government to organize the volunteer process (al-Khafaf, 2015). A lack of organization in the volunteer centres may lead to the occurrence of terrorist acts.

Third, the current situation should be seen as an opportunity for Iraqis to demonstrate greater solidarity. We must help all displaced persons and provide all necessary assistance to them. No food retailers are to increase prices in this difficult situation, nor are they to put away stock that is needed by the people of Iraq (al-Khafaf, 2015). Monopolising resources is contrary to the teachings of God.

Some claimed this clarification (above) paved the way for those who wanted to exploit this fatwa, to carry out agendas to disperse Iraqis and establish a base for sectarian war (Khosrokhavar, 2016). However, the fatwa was heeded by millions of Iraqis, who considered Grand Ayatollah Al Sistani to be a spiritual leader and above reproach (Pelham, 2015b).

Large numbers who committed themselves to the jihad were more than enough to turn the disastrous collapse of morale into a moment of unshaken confidence. There were already tens of thousands serving in the Iraqi military and police who often showed questionable commitment to the defence of their country because of their mixed ethnic and sectarian loyalties and poor preparation (G. Wood, 2015), but now Al Sistani made it possible to form a truly committed second army with a clearly defined doctrine (al-Khafaf, 2015). A significant question in this thesis, however, is why Al Sistani did not issue a Fatwa in 2003 against US forces.

9.3 DISCUSSION OF THE PARTICIPANTS' VIEWS (SUNNI AND SHIA)

9.3.1 Did Al Sistani save Iraq in 2003 when he did not issue a fatwa against US forces?

The Shia and the Sunni shared differing viewpoints about Al Sistani not issuing a fatwa against the US in 2003.

1MSuJ, a Sunni, mentioned that if Al Sistani had issued a jihad Fatwa in 2003 against the US and encouraged the formation of the PMF (Popular Mobilisation Forces) as he did in 2014, the US would not be able to stay in Iraq for even another six months. He said, however, that Al Sistani was sectarian when leaving just the Sunni people resisting the invasion forces. 7FSuSt, another Sunni, argued that he supported Al Sistani when he did not issue a Jihad in

2003 because if he did it will be like a suicide action because of the inequality of power between the US and Iraq.

2MSuSt, also a Sunni, argues that when US invaded Iraq their mission was to remove Saddam from power and it this was not a threat to the Shi, therefore Al Sistani did not issue a jihad Fatwa against them. 2MSuSt, thought the same. 5MKuP, a Kurd, said something similar in adding that Al Sistani did not have enough strength to face the Americans militarily and the Americans occupied Iraq to eliminate the system of government run by the Sunni therefore Al Sistani did not issue a Fatwa for jihad against the Americans. He also added that Al Sistani obviously approved of Saddam Hussein's Sunni-led regime.

9FSuH/W supported the argument that Al Sistani considered the occupation a good chance to get rid of Saddam's regime, which was tough on the Shia. She said the time was not appropriate for the jihad fatwa because the Iraqis had faced three devastating wars and had no possibility of resistance, and the Shia were waiting for a new role after the removal of Saddam.

Among the Shia interviewed, 6MSuSt mentioned that when US invaded Iraq they did not target Shia therefore Al Sistani did not issue a jihad fatwa. He added that there was an expectation among Shia that the state would be managed by them therefore Al Sistani did not issue a Jihad Fatwa.

All the Shia participants in this study who support Al Sistani's action have opinions about why Al Sistani did not issue any jihad fatwa in 2003. 10MShP said that Al Sistani did not issue a jihad fatwa because he did not want to support the Ba'ath party. 10MShP added:

> The Shia were not ready because they had been under the control of the Baath Party for decades and there was not sufficient strength for a jihad. At the same time although Al Sistani did not support the invasion of the Americans he encouraged everyone who worked with them to encourage them to leave as soon as possible.

11MShCl supported this when he mentioned that there was no suitable ground for this fatwa. The Iraqi people were unarmed, the US was far more powerful and the people were fatigued by the economic blockade. In addition, Saddam was a criminal so why would Al Sistani support him by issuing a jihad fatwa.

4MShCl believed that Iraq had been suffering from a repressive dictatorship so the Americans were entering as liberators, not conquerors. He said Al Sistani was looking at reality. If the people came out to resist the US the result would be a disaster because America had the military capability for massive destruction. While 14MShP stated that Al Sistani

could not issue a fatwa against the Americans because the Shia at that time were suffering from the rule of Saddam.

Overall, the participants indicated that Al Sistani did the right thing in not issuing the fatwa when the us took occupation of Iraq in 2003, as shown in the table below.
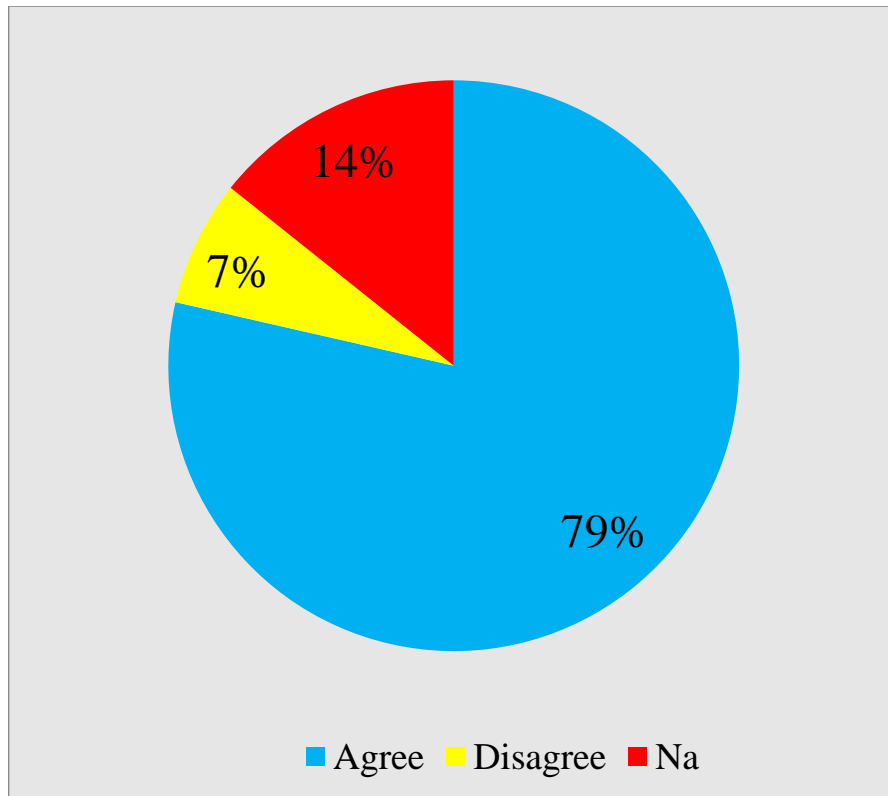

Figure 0-1 Did Al Sistani saves Iraq in 2003 when he did not issue a fatwa against US forces?

Figure 9.1 indicates that 79% of participants supported Al Sistani in not issuing a fatwa in 2003 against US forces. Perhaps the main reason for this is that the US removed the Saddam regime had led Iraq to two devastating wars and the persecution of the Iraqi people for more than 25 years.

9.3.2 Was Al Sistani's 2014 fatwa against ISIS, or was it for sectarian purposes?

1MSuJ mentioned that Al Sistani's Fatwa against ISIS was an explicit call to kill Sunnis who might have been supporting ISIS. 7FSuSt argued that Al Sistani's Fatwa against ISIS was only to rid the Sunni of ISIS, stating that Al Sistani asked people in Shia areas to shelter and protect Sunnis and give aid to them which was provided from his own office.

2MSuSt also argued:

> I did support the fatwa because it would lead to murders and to the formation of gangs. The solution should have been to engage people in the army, and to announce this to the public. Iran's intervention in Iraq was because of this fatwa

> … This Fatwa should have been controlled through the United Nations, not in this way …

5MKuP mentioned that the invasion of three Iraqi Sunni provinces by ISIS was a warning to Shia because ISIS could not to do that without help of Sunni people. However he said Al Sistani's fatwa was to protect Sunni areas as well as the Shia government. 9FSuH/W/W argued:

6MsuSt argued that Al Sistani's fatwa was issued to save Sunnis from ISIS, stating that many Sunni moved to Shia areas when ISIS attacked.

8FShSt argued:

> I do not endorse this fatwa because there were popular mobilization forces which offended the values of this fatwa and they took reprisals on civilians. The ISIS invasion of some Iraqi provinces was with Iran's cooperation because without this fatwa, Shia militia would have failed to reach the Sunni areas. Because of this fatwa they arrived and were given official status to enter these areas. The fatwa was to protect Shia more than Sunni because ISIS was close to Baghdad.

10MShP mentioned:

> 'I cannot consider this Fatwa as being against Sunni because there were many Sunni fighters who took part with the popular mobilization forces to defend their areas and considered this fatwa as a good chance to make Sunni and Shia fight together against one enemy which is ISIS. As for the presence of undisciplined soldiers, this is normal in every regular army, especially popular mobilization forces.'

11MShCl stated that the jihad Fatwa was against ISIS because they believe it is permissible to kill all who thought differently to them and also they declared openly that they wanted to demolish and destroy all the holy places in Iraq. 11MShCl added that:

> ISIS is not just against Shia, they also killed many Sunni people who did not agree with their ideas. ISIS' plans are not just for Iraq but their expansionist goals may reach to other countries, so I can say that Al Sistani's fatwa saved the whole world from the danger of ISIS.

13MShP, another Shia, agrees that Al Sistani's Fatwa was not to kill Sunni people but to protect them. If Al Sistani wanted to kill them there was a good chance in 2005 when some

Sunnis blew up the holy shrines in Samarra. However he dealt wisely with that event and prevented the country from a civil war which may have continued for years.

3MShP supported the above statement in mentioning that in 2005 the sectarian war in Iraq was beginning and there were many car bombs exploded in Baghdad in areas inhabited by the Shia. But Al Sistani did not exploit this issue by issuing a jihad fatwa against Sunnis, instead he always called for unity. 3MShP added that the purpose of the 2014 fatwa was to protect Sunni areas from ISIS so they would not then be able to reach the Shia areas.

4MShCl mentioned that the whole world saw how the popular mobilization forces helped the families who had been besieged. 14MShP states that ISIS came to Iraq to kill Shia while Americans did not came to Iraq to annihilate the Shia, Sunnis or Kurds, they came for the formation of a democratic system. 14MShP added that ISIS has the aim of genocide at a level considered the largest in Iraqi history, which is why Al Sistani issued a Jihad Fatwa.

Again, from the information provided by the participants, there was overwhelming support for Al Sistani's actions and very little criticism or suggestion that it may have been for political or sectarian purposes.
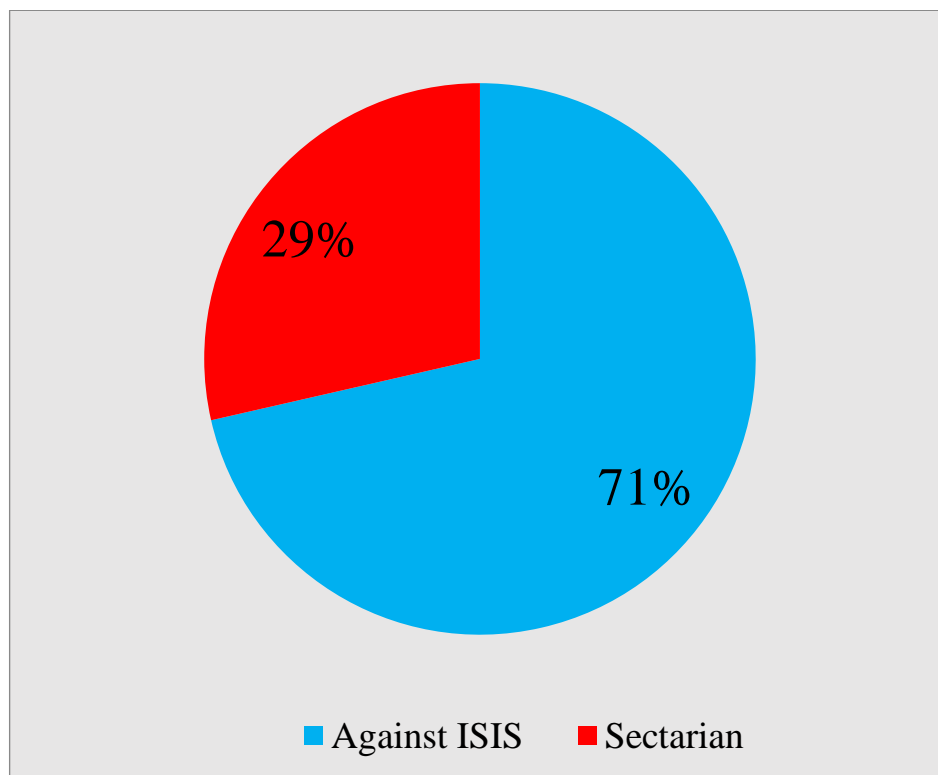

Figure 0-2 Was Al Sistani's 2014 fatwa against ISIS, or was it for sectarian purposes?

Figure 9.2 shows that 71% of participants support the concept that Al Sistani's fatwa in 2014 against ISIS was for genuine reasons for the benefit of all Iraqi's. 29% of participants believe this fatwa was given for sectarian purposes because of PMF reprisals that harmed Sunni people.

9.3.3 Was Al Sistani's fatwa decided on in agreement with Iran?

As previously said, as Al Sistani is an Iranian citizen there is a theory that because of the conflicts in the region between Iran and the US, some Sunnis think that there is an agreement between Al Sistani and Iran to stop ISIS at Iraq. This is because if ISIS became strong in Iraq, the US would bring many fighters to fight against Iran, as has happened recently in Syria (Esfandiary & Tabatabai, 2015). This fatwa prevented full-scale war in the region. At the same time it is possible to say that the jihad fatwa was to protect Iran and the Iraq. Some Sunnis argued that this was the purpose of this fatwa (Esfandiary & Tabatabai, 2015). The Sunni participants in this research supported this belief. 1MSuJ mentioned that "there is much evidence for this". 5MKuP argued, however, that he did not think that a person such as Al Sistani would make an agreement with Iran about this fatwa, but there might be some common interests between the two countries.

8FShSt supports this when he mentioned that the fatwa was issued by agreement with Iran because Iran wanted to stop ISIS at Iraq's border. 7FSuSt mentioned that all events after 2003 prove that Al Sistani was implementing Iran's interests in the region and that the Jihad fatwa was one of them. 2MSuSt mentioned that the political situation in the region was very dangerous and as ISIS occupied zones in Iraq it could quickly lead to a collapse in security in Iraq up to the borders of Iran, so it was a fatwa with pressure and interference from Iran. 9FSuH /W stated that Iran's presence in Iraq was under the pretext of the security situation in the region, and that without this fatwa the Iranians could not come to Iraq.

6MSuSt mentioned that the fatwa was with the complete agreement of Iran so no political decision in Iraq is issued without referring to Iran. He also said many of Al Sistani's decisions are received from Iran, and that Iran had a role in ISIS entering Iraq. However, 10ShP also believes that Al Sistani would not make any decision just because Iran wants it.

Many Shia participants in this research argue that they believe that there are common interests between Iran and Iraq in terms of security, but that the Fatwa was not part of these interests. 10MShP mentioned that, 'Yes, the first beneficiaries of the fatwa are Iran and Iraq because of the security conditions in the region'. 11MShCl, however, suggested that Al Sistani did not consult with Iran or anyone on the decision to issue of a Fatwa, but that the fatwa was "divine inspiration", that God granted Al Sistani wisdom, inspiration and knowledge, because he is a keen observer and reader of Arab and international political events. (13MShP agreed with this.)

3MShP also stated that that, "I do not agree that the fatwa was issued with Iranian cooperation but there were common interests between the two countries". 4MShCl stated that there was a high probability that the fatwa was agreement with Iran, especially since the development of the area was at risk and the risk was caused by ISIS. If it reached the border of Iran it would a disaster. He added that Al Sistani opened the gate to Iran's intervention.

12MShCl argued that Al Sistani's fatwa was issued without agreement with Iran because the events after 2003 proved that Al Sistani is an independent figure but might make decisions which also favour Iran, and that this is normal in politics.

In summary, there was a great deal of support among the participants that the influence Al Sistani has displayed in Iraqi politics – particularly in regard to the 2014 fatwa against ISIS – was in Iran's interests. However, it was also noted that this was because of common interests in the region. There was no mention that Al Sistani would favour Iran over Iraq.

9.3.4   The impact of the 2014 fatwa on Iraqi communities?

The fatwa which issued by Al Sistani was designed to protect Iraq's Shia from the extremist ISIS, but not just the Shia–all Iraqis. However, some of the participants in this study felt that the fatwa could have ignited a sectarian war in Iraq.

10MShP mentioned that after the fatwa and what followed, however, the sectarian war did not happen and Al Sistani stressed the need for the Iraqi government and the rest of the political leadership to unify their rhetoric and join efforts to face the terrorists and protect the citizens from their evil acts.

11MShCl stated that issued by Al Sistani's office was a statement asking:

> … all citizens, especially in the mixed areas where Sunnis and Shia exist together, to exercise the highest degree of restraint and work on strengthening the bonds of love between each other, and to avoid any kind of sectarian behaviour that may affect the unity of the Iraqi nation and to avoid all kinds of armed manifestations outside of the official Iraqi army.

13MShP mentioned that some of Al Sistani's actions were for the purpose of uniting Iraq, with Al Sistani's office officially asking the TV channels to remove his photo from their programs and to show the map and flag of Iraq in its place in order to remind people of the unity of Iraq.

3MShP believe that some Sunni clerics supported Al Sistani's fatwa because they felt that it would save Iraq from a sectarian war. Sunni cleric Sheikh Ahmed Kabisi issued a Fatwa on 10th of June in the same year calling for mobilization against all terrorist groups

taking control of a number of Iraqi regions, and granting the status of martyr to whomever dies confronting them. This was clearly support for Al Sistani's Fatwa. 12MShCl mentioned that Shia volunteers liberated some Sunni areas, while many Sunnis from Salahuddin province joined the popular mobilization forces, including tribes, mainly the Sunni al-Jabour tribe, indicating this fatwa was a good chance for Iraqis to unite.

6FShSt mentioned that Al Sistani ordered all its offices in Iraq to receive refugees from the liberated areas and provide housing and food for them as well as sending aid to areas affected by the war. This appears to be evidence that Al Sistani cared about all of Iraq's communities without discrimination.

14MShP mentioned that there were many battles in which the popular mobilization forces and Sunni troops participated together to free some of the areas dominated by ISIS. This strengthened the national unity between Sunnis and the Shia. 5MKuP mentioned that there were Christian forces also participating with the popular mobilization forces because their target was to protect Iraq from ISIS and preserve Iraq, united with all its religions and sects. All this happened only because of Al Sistani's Fatwa which made Iraqis unite under flag of Iraq.

9.4   ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The current study shown in figure 9.1 find out that 79% of participants in this study believe that Al Sistani did not issue any Fatwa in 2003 when Iraq was invaded by the US was save Iraq, and for this action Al Sistani has been criticized because when a comparison is made between jihad Fatwa in 1914 and why not issued in 2003 and issued against ISIS 2014 an analysis must be made as to what is different between the three eras of Iraqi history.

As mentioned in literature review, in 1914 Kathem al-Yazdi did not realise the military capabilities of the invading British forces. At that time the British force was one of the strongest armies in the world. Kathem al-Yazdi did not have a political vision at the time of the 1914 revolution, therefore when British forces wanted to negotiate with the rebels, Kathem al-Yazdi did not have the vision to negotiate to shape the results of the revolution to be in his favour. As a result, the revolution was lost and the British forces installed Faisal I King in Iraq.

The policies were not present at that time for religious scholars to show a path of resistance from the salvation of the occupying forces. So attempted failed because they lacked political knowledge (Kadhim, 2012). Vinogradov (1972) mentioned that after the

1920 revolution when British forces wanted to form a government for Iraq they met with the rebels to ask them what sort of government they wanted for Iraq. At that time they had different answers so they went to Kathem al-Yazdi to get advice on the same question. The answer was "I am a man, I do not know politics, but I know this is Halal and this is haram" halal means permitted as prescribed by Muslim law and the opposite of it is haram. The attendees were shocked by this answer, therefore a group of religious scholars were soon established ("the Islamic Renaissance Society in Najaf") to be the political forefront of Shi'ism (Simon & Tejirian, 2004).

According to opinion of the interviewees of this research, Al Sistani knew very well that the Iraqi people were not able to resist the US in 2003 because they had fought three devastating wars– the Iraq-Iran war, the first Gulf War and the economic war (economic blockade) – which severely affected Iraqi life. Therefore Al Sistani realized that the Iraqi people were not ready to take up arms to fight, and that the Shia especially would welcome any invasion forces that would help them to get rid of Saddam. The Sunni participants in this research thought that Saddam's government represented them and they wanted to stay forever in that position. Therefore, they wanted a Fatwa from Al Sistani, while some of them realistically knew that if Al Sistani issued the fatwa then a humanitarian disaster would follow.

Al Sistani chose political resistance to deal with the US which was more useful than military resistance. Events that since 2004 prove that Al Sistani's decisions were politically based, such as his insistence on holding elections and writing a constitution by Iraqi hands and the formation of a recognized Iraqi government. Additionally, he also negotiated a security agreement with the US which led to US troops being pulled out of Iraq. All these events prove that he refused occupation, but by peaceful means, not violence.

Regarding to Al Sistani's fatwa in 2014, some of participants in this study consider it against ISIS while others believe, it was a sectarian retaliation against the Sunnis. When Al Sistani issued this fatwa, Al Sistani used a jihad kefaya fatwa, not a jihad fard ayn fatwa for particular reasons. In the case of a jihad fard ayn fatwa there would be much more violence and loss of life – as this kind of a jihad requires everyone to carry weapons to defend themselves and their areas, with the penalty for disobedience being loss of money, resources and homeland (Kovács, 2015). Also, in the case of a jihad fard ayn every ShiaMuslim in other countries would come to Iraq to take part in response to Al Sistani's fatwa, and that will cause conflict in the Middle East between Shia and Sunni communities and countries. Some countries would have considered this fatwa as causing a sectarian war that would give them a

right to intervene in Iraqi issues. For example, Saudi Arabia might have sent an army with the excuse that there are Sunni people being persecuted. However, Al Sistani did not issue a jihad fard ayn, and so was able to contain the conflict in Iraq in order to avoid chaos in region.

Referring back to Al Sistani's recommendations, he made an inspiring speech to the People's Liberation Movement in reminding them of the words of the Prophet Muhammad to the Mujahedeen. He said, 'Don't be extreme don't be treacherous. Don't kill an old man, or a boy, or a woman. Don't cut a tree unless you have to' (al-Khafaf, 2015). Al Sistani's recommendations and inspiration had a major impact on the PMF in respect of human rights and non-reprisals, and reduce the sectarian tension among Iraqis.

The Shia Muslims think that the leading cleric in their age is the representative of the 'hidden Imam'. Therefore any orders coming from the leading cleric (Al Sistani) come from the hidden imam. Many Iraqi Shia saw Al Sistani as the leading cleric, which could explain why Shia Muslims responded so enthusiastically to his fatwa. So when Al Sistani's representative issued the fatwa at Imam Hussein shrine in Karbala he mentioned many verses and Hadiths of the prophet Mohammed to confirm this battle is sacred.

Al Sistani's jihad fatwa in 2014 was against ISIS. ISIS is a terrorist group which does not subject itself to authorities such as the United Nations or global organizations. ISIS announced it wanted to apply Islamic law in Iraq, but this cannot be applied because Iraq is a group of religions and sects and it is difficult to impose a particular religion on the people. ISIS also announced it came to kill Shia and Sunnis if they oppose, and that they would destroy holy shrines in Karbala, Najaf and Baghdad. Al Sistani realized the gravity of the situation and the need for the issuance of a fatwa. Murders, other crimes and horrific scenes which ISIS had already committed in Sunni areas had an important role in making Al Sistani issue this fatwa.

As well as this, the collapse of Iraq's fragile army, and the ineffective response from local police in Sunni-dominated areas of Iraq, led Al Sistani to take action to save Iraq from ISIS. The international refusal to recognize ISIS made the US acknowledge the effectiveness of the PMF as a key factor in facing ISIS. Thus the international community also backed Al Sistani's fatwa, as demonstrated during the visit of the United Nations' Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to Najaf. The fatwa was not considered sectarian because many of sects and tribal forces participated in it, including different Sunni and Christian groups.

Confusing similar interests with Iran as working together with Iran and putting their interests first.

Regarding the idea that there is an agreement between Al Sistani and Iran to issue the jihad fatwa on 2014, approximately half of the participants disagreed with this idea. From the participants' information and the researcher's own textual analysis, it appears apparent that no one could impose their will on Al Sistani regarding important actions such as the jihad fatwa. The USA representative in Iraq, Paul Bremer, tried many times from 2003 to 2006 to convince Al Sistani to be involved in direct dialogues, and his failure to do this reinforces the belief held by many that it was hard to impact decisions on Al Sistani .

However, almost half of the participants supported the idea that Al Sistani might have consulted Iran before issuing the fatwa, or that Iran was in agreement with Al Sistani in regard to the fatwa. Some people, although not the participants of this research, might think that being in agreement means consorting with Iran and accepting Iran's will. However, there was no indication that and participant in this research gave much consideration to this idea. Instead it must be said that half the participants believed that Al Sistani (representing Iraq) had similar interests to the interests of Iran.

9.5   SUMMARY

Finally, it is worth noting that Al Sistani has rejected many calls in February 2006 to issue a Fatwa for Jihad after the bombing of the Samara Holy Shrines, a sacred mausoleum of Shia Imams.

Muslim belief states that a fatwa is not about revenge or attack, but about the need to defend religious freedoms, sacred places, and people's lands from those who aim to remove peaceful Muslims' freedoms to believe in Islam as they currently do (Khosrokhavar, 2016). This aggressive ideology and behaviour of ISIS is unfortunately far too common in the Arab world now and far removed from what mainstream Islam believes and teaches (Wood, 2015).

From the research in this study Al Sistani's 2014 fatwa may have come from some consultation with other countries, and if so, that country appears to be Iran. But although there may have been consultation, or simply opinions passed, it seems clear that Al Sistani did not make any agreement with any other country, or any organisation.

The research participants believed that Al Sistani always refused intervention by any country in Iraqi, and if this wasn't the case there would be a backlash from other countries.

This chapter explored the following research question:

Q 1: To what extent do Iraqi people accept Al Sistani's role as a cleric with political influence? Do they approve of his approach to his own political influence?

Q 2: Do Iraqis see Al Sistani as holding special hope for Iraq in regard to the nation's problems, and to how Iraq is viewed by the rest of the world?

In regard to the first question, based on the participants interviewed, most Shia people accept Al Sistani's role as a cleric with political influence, and they do approve of his approach to his own political influence? Sunni generally disagree, although most seem to at least respect Al Sistani and his political influence, without any serious doubts about his motivations.

In regard to the second research question, yes, a significant number of Iraqi's do see in Al Sistani a special hope for Iraq in regard to the nation's problems, and to how Iraq is viewed by the rest of the world?

The following chapter provides conclusions to this research, as well as recommendations for future research.

Chapter 10: Conclusion and Recommendations

10.1 CHAPTER OUTLINE

In relating back to the research questions, the concluding chapter of this research summarises the major findings. This is done in relation to the three research questions outlined in Chapter One.

10.2 INTRODUCTION

The Sunnis did not follow Al Sistani's fatwa and did not participate in the elections held in 2005 for several reasons – the areas of Iraq in which they lived were not secure, and they were worried about a change in power. They refused the new political process which they saw as being run by the Shia in the hope of stopping the political process. They already know that the population of the Shia was greater than the Sunni, so if they participated in the elections it would provide legitimacy for the new 'Iraqi' government.

The Sunni were thinking that the political process would stop because of their boycott, but what happened turned out to be the opposite. The political process is still continuing. Iraq has become a democracy, and the Sunni have paid a high price in their lack of participation in forming the first government and writing the new constitute for Iraq.

This study clarifies the importance of the invitation which was issued from Al Sistani to the Shia and the Sunni to vote in the 2005 election. The invitation to the election by Al Sistani gave it a great importance of religious and social impact particularly after it is considered a religious duty. It appears to be inaccurate to say that Al Sistani had a personal interest in gaining power through the elections or in gaining inappropriate influence. Instead it has seemed – through the views of the research participants and the textual analysis of the literature – that Al Sistani was trying to assist in the forming of a new Iraq for everyone, that the elections were not an invitation from Al Sistani to for the Shia to dominate the political system, but they were an explicit call for the exercise of democracy through elections shared by everyone, without exception, and this included the Iraqi diaspora throughout the rest of the world.

10.3   THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on textual analyses and the responses of the research participants, the following are the responses to the research questions that have motivated this thesis.

The Shia and the Sunni are very much divided on the role of clerics in politics. The Shia believe that the Muslims clerics should follow Al Sistani's lead and have an important role in expanding awareness and advising Muslims that democratic principles can be applied in Muslim countries.

10.3.1 Research Question One: approval of Al Sistani

To what extent do Iraqi people accept Al Sistani's role as a cleric with political influence? Do they approve of his approach to his own political influence?

As detailed in Chapter Five, generally most Sunni appear not to accept Al Sistani's role as a cleric with political influence, although some do, or at least they express respect for him. The Shia, however, overwhelmingly accept his influence. There is much confusion about the relationship between clerics and politics, from the response Al Sistani's fatwas, Al Sistani is clearly in a very powerful position from the respect he has gained by his decisions, and by his 'fairness' to Shia, Sunni, and other sects and groups in Iraq.

It is also clear, as detailed in Chapter Seven, that Iraqis see Al Sistani more as an advisor, and not as a ruler. In Chapter Eight the analysis reveals that he made many wise decisions – in the case of Al Maliki, for example – and that when the reasoning of Al Sistani was understood is was accepted and appreciated, even by many Sunni.

10.3.2 Research Question Two

Do Iraqis see Al Sistani as holding special hope for Iraq in regard to the nation's problems, and to how Iraq is viewed by the rest of the world?

Chapter Six, and again the overwhelming positive response of the Iraqi people as a whole, indicates they do see Al Sistani as holding special hope for Iraq. But how Iraq is viewed by the rest of the world is a different question. Iraq is certainly viewed with respect, but further research could shed more insight on this question.

As detailed in Chapter Nine, yes, a significant number of Iraqi's do see in Al Sistani a special hope for Iraq in regard to the nation's problems, and to how Iraq is viewed by the rest of the world?

10.3.3 Research Question Three

How does Al Sistani see his role? This question was dealt with primarily through textual analysis. In reading and studying the words of Al Sistani in books, interviews, and on various publications on his website, Al Sistani either pretends very well to be a reasonable, wise, caring, and ethical and Godly (or Holy) person, cleric and advisor – or else he is not pretending and this is who he really is. Very little serious criticism of Al Sistani can be found anywhere.

Al Sistani takes his role seriously, of course, but the research opinions and the literature indicates he is reticent (slow to take action) but when he does it is always well thought out and as an advisor, although as an advisor who is very well respected and listened to. This is his way – not direct involvement in politics.

10.4 FURTHER THOUGHTS: ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY

This study sought and contained knowledge about the relationship between Islam and democracy. It found that Shia typically accepted that an Islamic country could be democratic, although matters of culture and religion should be left out of politics. This is a half-way measure that seems to be working now that the democratic government of 2014 is still working. But it raises problems. For example, can a democratic government allow or encourage the prevailing religion to dominate social customs? The Sunni, however, as indicate din the research of this thesis, were far less supportive of the concept of a democratic government.

The contentiousness of the issue of the compatibility between democracy and Islam lies in an understanding of the Quran. Some (predominantly the Shia) find that their interpretation of the Quran allows for a democratic government. The Sunni, however, interpret the Quran differently and find that there is no any compatibility between Islam and democracy. However, it has been noted that the Quran, in many verses, always motivates Muslims to consult each other in all issues any decisions instead of fighting.

10.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

But diasporic identities and activities tend to have differential implications for homelands and host countries. This is one area that may be of interest in further r research.

Even though they reside outside of their or their parents' home countries' borders, many people no longer living in Iraq regard themselves as legitimate members of its collective

identity and socio-political order. The diaspora was keen to participate in these elections. Even though they have been living outside of Iraq for decades they still considered this election to be a first step to returning to their homeland.

This research uncovered a significant amount of data, but the findings are not conclusive. Only fourteen people were interviewed, and none of these Iraqi's were living in Iraq at the time. Do these research participants represent Iraqi's as a whole? This is inconclusive but offers much for discussion and further reflection. Future research would certainly do well to interview Iraqi's living in Iraq. It may also be helpful to interview subjects from a wide geographical area.

There is much more that can be studied and researched. For example, this researcher recommends investigating what the role of the PMF will be after finishing the war with ISIS – will these forces be equal to the army? Who will have control over them? Will it be Al Sistani ? Is he able to control the PMF and is he able to disband it?

Further research could also deal solely with the opinions of Shia clerics in Iraq and Iran about Al Sistani's interventions in politics and to which extend they support this action. Further research focusing entirely on clerics as the subjects could perhaps also shed light on the ideological differences between the Qom and Najaf hawzas.

10.6   SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

The influence of neighbouring countries in Iraqi affairs was clear from the outset. Many of those interviewed – both Sunni and Shia– were apprehensive of the elections which took place in 2005 for many reasons, which included claims of Al Sistani working in co-operation with Iran. I believe the findings of this research indicate this need not be of concern.

Perhaps Al Sistani's role post 2003 was able to show a different face of Islam to the rest of the world. One cannot say this is the true face of Islam, but perhaps it is the prevailing face – and a face which indicates a good future for Iraq. For the findings of this study indicate Al invites people to do practice democracy instead of violence. He also encourages people to abide by the constitution and the law in solving problems. Al Sistani faced a lot of criticisms because of his attempt to enshrine democracy in Iraq but he clearly believed that there is no solution for Iraq except for democracy.

This study explains and clarifies a new theory of the involvement of clerics in politics. This researcher calls this 'Al Sistani's theory of political intervention by clerics'. In this theory clerics do not sit back and do nothing, say nothing. They do not become actively

involved in politics, such as through the concept of Wilayat al faqih. Instead they sit somewhere in between, where they do not become actively involved, but they voice their opinion in an authoritative way.

Al Sistani's interventions in Iraqi issues post 2003 were all crucial, therefore he has been considered as a main player in the new political process in Iraq. Al Sistani's role in influencing the Iraqi people is compatible with a model of government which allows a Muslim nation to have a democratic political system. Most of his interventions were critical, and may influence the Iraqi's into believing that he is a man of wisdom whose presence in Iraq is very important.

10.7   CHAPTER SUMMARY

This thesis is about Al Sistani. It may be unusual, perhaps, for a PhD thesis to investigate the influence of just one person, but this is an indication of the importance of this person. Al Sistani has had a major role in the shaping of Iraq after 2003, when Saddam Hussein and his regime were removed from the country.

From 2003 to 2014 Al Sistani's role involved influencing the country politically from his position as Grand Ayatollah. He convinced the US to hold elections and then choose a committee to write a constitution for the Iraqis (Allawi, 2008). In these 2005 elections he issued a fatwa for the Iraqis to vote and support the elections. Then ten years later in 2014 he issued a Jihad Kefaya Fatwa against ISIS and contributed to removing Al Maliki from the front running to be the new Iraqi Prime Minister. And the nation has in many ways been divided over Al Sistani. This has been particularly in regard to someone in his position as a member of the clergy having a political influence.

All these matters are important. Iraq has its place and its influence in Middle Eastern politics, and becoming a democratic nation as it did has set a precedent that the world has now been watching for more than a dozen years. In other words, what has happened in Iraqi is very significant in world affairs. It is also very significant for the country itself. Will it last? Can a Muslim country truly embrace democracy and pave the way for other Muslim countries to do the same? Will it remain a democratic nation?

Iraq is, of course, still struggling. There is much sectarian conflict and ISIS is still very active. And of course the Sunni and the Shia are lacking agreement in so many areas.

This thesis and its accompanying research rose in response to all these factors, and the results have been illuminating.

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Appendix 1

Table (1) shows the results of the first provisional elections for the assembly January 2005 (Anderson & Stansfield, 2005b).

Name of the electoral bloc	Seats won out of 275	Affiliation
United Iraqi Alliance	140	Shi'i alliance including SCIRI, Da'awa, Sadrists and Fadhila
Kurdistan Alliance	75	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP)
Iraqiyah	40	Secular alliance including Allawi's INA
others	20	Sunni tribal party, Independent Sadrist; Communist, Secular, Christian; Shi'i candidates

Table (2) shows the results of the first national elections in December 2005 (Aljabiri, 2015).

Name of the electoral bloc	Seats won out of 275	Affiliation
United Iraqi Alliance	128	Shi'i alliance including SCIRI, Da'awa, Sadrists and Fadhila
Kurdistan Alliance	53	KDP and PUK
Twafiq	44	Secular alliance including Allawi's INA
Iraqi National List	25	Secular list including INA
Hiwar	11	Sunni Arab list, ostensibly nonsectarian
Others	14	Kurdish Islamist; Independent Sadrist; Turkmen; and Christian

Table (3) shows the results of the second elections in March 2010
(Dawisha, 2010).

Name of the electoral bloc	Seats won out of 325	Affiliation
raqi National Movement (alIraqiyya)	91	A coalition of Shia, Sunni, secular and non-sectarian
State of Law Coalition	89	Predominantly Shia
National Iraqi Alliance	70	Shiite religious group that includes ISCI; Sadrists, breakaway Dawa party; the Islamic Virtue Party (Fadhilah), the ShiaTurkmen Movement, and other parties6
Kurdistan Alliance	43	Consisted of PUK and KDP
Others	32	

Table (4) shows the results of the third elections in April 2014 for 328 seats in Parliament
(O'Driscoll, 2014).

Name of the electoral bloc	Seats won out of 328	Affiliation
State of Law	92	Dawa Party led by the previous prime minster al-Maliki
Sadrist Movement	34	
Kurdish Parties	62 (combined)	KDP, PUK and Gorran
Al-Ahrar	28	Sadrist and other Shiagroups
Muwatin (Citizen Bloc)	29	ISCI list. including other Shiapoliticians
Mutahidoun Bloc	23	Sunni Arab Speaker of Parliament, Osama al-Nujaifi,
Wataniya list	21	Mixed list of secular and Sunni groups and individuals
Al-Arabiya list	9	Sunni groups and individuals
Fadilah Party	Unavailable	
Da'wa (Jaafari) (205)	Unavailable	