

# THE POLITICAL DISCOURSE OF THE SHIITE AUTHORITY TOWARD AMERICAN POLICY IN IRAQ AFTER 2003: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

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## Abstract:

The paper under consideration analyzes the discursive language used by the Shiite religious leader in Iraq since the year 2003 concerning the political change and US invasion as the powerful nation in Iraq. It stresses upon the place of religious authorities in forming the attitude of people and examines the character of religious and national discourse, which the authority spreads. The role of the authority in the political standpoints of the American presence is also a subject of the study, which is examined by analyzing their sermons and statements. The study attempts to conceptualize this conversation as an intellectual and political tool that impacted the thoughts of Iraqi people.

**Keywords:** Shiite authority, religious discourse, American policy, Iraq after 2003, political analysis.

## INTRODUCTION

The Shiite religious power in Iraq has been one of the most influential intellectual, religious and social powers. It is a powerful force that influences the mass opinion and forms the attitudes to the national and existential problems. The role of the religious authority was more pronounced after 2003 when Iraq passed another stage the major changes and openings to external influences, i.e., the American intervention. It changed the discussion to the more generalist context that touched on issues of the state, society, and sovereignty. This discussion appealed to the symbolic and historical significance of the highest religious authorities, who were operating under the vision which was sensitive to the new challenges and sought to maintain the integrity of the Iraqi society and the sovereignty of its political decision-making. The theme of this discourse was varied as it contained the religious spirit that was based on values and principles, a national dimension that articulated the identity of the Iraqi society and the right to self-determination, and political positions which evolved gradually in the environment of facing the foreign interventions. The examination of this discourse shows various levels where the religious authority as a supreme religious institution meets the domain of the public and provides the possibilities of studying its changing functions in a complicated phase of Iraq history, particularly when the functioning of this institution in relation to American policy and its relations with the local reality is considered.

### Significance of the Study:

The importance of this research stems from its examination of the role of the Shiite religious authority as an influential religious and political actor in the post-2003 period. It also sheds light on the nature of its discourse toward American policy and analyzes how this discourse has evolved within the context of national challenges. This analysis represents a scholarly contribution to understanding the overlap between the religious and the political in the contemporary Iraqi scene.

### Problem of the Study:

The study begins with the following main question: How did the Shiite religious authority in Iraq express its position toward American policy after 2003? Hence, several sub-questions arise from this main question:

1. Who are the most prominent Shiite authorities who shaped religious and political discourse after 2003?
2. What are the discursive features that characterized the discourse of the Shiite a religious authority in Iraq after 2003?
3. How did the political discourse of the religious authority toward American policy develop?

### Objectives of the Study:

The research focuses on the following objectives:

1. Identifying the most influential Shiite religious authorities active in Iraq after 2003 and their role in public affairs.
2. Analyzing the nature of the religious and national discourse issued by the Shiite authority in the post-occupation Iraqi context.
3. Interpreting the positions of the religious authority toward American policy by tracing and analyzing the content of its political and social discourse.

### Hypothesis of the Study:

The study proceeds from the hypothesis that the Shiite religious authority in Iraq after 2003 employed a religious and national discourse that reflected evolving positions toward American policy, ranging from calls for state-

building to criticism and resistance, shaped by influential authorities and by developments in the political landscape.

### **Methodology of the Study:**

The descriptive-analytical method will be used to understand the contexts of the religious authority's discourse after 2003 and interpret its religious and political dimensions. In addition, discourse analysis will be employed to uncover the content of the authority's discourse toward American policy and determine its direct and indirect meanings.

### **Structure of the Study:**

The study is divided into three main sections, in addition to the introduction, conclusion, and findings. The first section addresses the most important Shiite religious authorities in Iraq. The second examines the discursive nature of the Shiite religious authority. The third provides an analysis of the political discourse of the authority regarding American policy.

### **Section One: The Most Prominent Shiite Religious Authorities in Iraq**

The Shiite religious authorities are fundamental pillars in guiding Shiite communities religiously, politically, and socially. The Iraqi religious authority in Najaf stands as the oldest and most established Shiite authority, followed by the authorities in the holy city of Karbala. These religious authorities in Najaf and Karbala represent some of the most significant intellectual and religious centers in the Islamic world. The scholarly seminaries "hawzas" that emerged in these cities became hubs for personal judgment "ijtihad" and religious leadership. This section addresses them in detail, beginning with the religious authorities in Najaf, followed by those in Karbala, as follows:

#### **First Axis: The Shiite Religious Authorities in Najaf**

The religious authority in Najaf is the historical continuation of a long line of scholars and jurists who assumed the role of spiritual and religious leadership for the Shiite community. This historical legacy reached its contemporary prominence with Ali Al-Husseini Al-Sistani, who represents the highest religious authority for the Shiite, not only in Iraq but worldwide. (Supreme Religious Authority, 2012)

Ali Al-Husseini Al-Sistani was born on 9 Rabi' Al-Awwal 1349 AH / 1930 CE in the holy city of Mashhad in northeastern Iran. Al-Sistani grew up in a distinguished scholarly family that belongs to the noble Husseini lineage and is known for piety, learning, and religious devotion. His father, Muhammad Baqir Al-Sistani, was among the respected scholars and well-known religious figures in Mashhad. He had a notable role in religious and social activities within the local community. (Supreme Religious Authority, 2012)

Al-Sistani began his religious education in Mashhad while still a young boy. He studied the introductory and elementary sciences such as grammar, logic, jurisprudence, and legal theory or fundamentals (uṣūl). His teachers at the time were among the most prominent scholars in the city, including Shaikh Hashim Al-Qazwini, Muhammad Hujjat Al-Kuhkamari, and others. He demonstrated remarkable excellence in his studies, earning the admiration of his teachers and peers. During this early stage, his intellectual formation was not limited to jurisprudential study; he also began to engage with the broader Shiite scholarly heritage. He took interest in reading biographies, history, and doctrinal works, which helped him develop a comprehensive understanding of the school of thought. This early exposure cultivated within him a mature religious awareness that led him to perceive the seminary path not merely as a scholarly pursuit but as a profound religious and spiritual responsibility. (Al-Mu'min, 2009)

After completing the stages of introductions and foundations in the seminary, Ali al-Sistani began considering a move to Najaf in 1370 AH / 1951 CE. This transition marked a decisive turning point in his scholarly journey. Entering Najaf meant joining a dynamic intellectual environment filled with jurists and scholars from across the Islamic world. (Al-Rifai', 2013) In Najaf, he began attending non-textbooked lessons, the highest level of seminary study, where no fixed textbook is followed; instead, the instructor presents the views of various jurists and builds jurisprudential and legal-theoretical discussions based on his own opinion "ijtihad".

The most prominent teachers he studied under included Abu Al-Qasim Al-Khoei and Shaikh Hussein Al-Hilli. He also attended lessons for a period under Mohsen Al-Hakim and Shaikh Muftaba Al-Lankarani. Al-Sistani distinguished himself through rapid comprehension, strong analytical skills, and a high capacity for jurisprudential reasoning. He soon became recognized among seminary students as one of the brightest pupils of Abu Al-Qasim Al-Khoei. Even Al-Khoei himself expressed great admiration for him and granted him special scholarly attention, making him one of his closest students. Al-Sistani accompanied him in compiling some of his research during that period. (Al-Haidari, 2008). In addition to attending advanced lessons, Al-Sistani began teaching as well. He undertook the instruction of higher-level courses such as "benefits" "Al-Makāsib" and "the sufficiency" "Al-Kifāyah". (Al-Haidari, 2008)

By the late 1950s, Al-Sistani began writing his jurisprudential and legal-theoretical research. He produced precise commentaries on the major seminary texts and authored several practical treatises and scholarly studies, which clearly demonstrated his qualification for full personal judgment "ijtihad", a status confirmed by several leading scholars of the time. His move to Najaf was not merely an academic step; it was an entry into the heart of the

supreme Shiite religious authority and an early preparation for the role destiny had in store for him: assuming the leadership of the seminary and guiding the Shiite community during one of the most delicate periods in its history. (Al-Rifai', 2013)

The death of the supreme religious authority, Abu Al-Qasim Al-Khoei, in 1992 marked a major turning point in the trajectory of the religious authority in Najaf. His passing left a significant void in the religious and jurisprudential leadership of the Shiite community. (Al-Haidari, 2008) In this critical context, Ali Al-Husseini Al-Sistani emerged as one of Al-Khoei's most distinguished students, both scientifically and spiritually, the most qualified to assume the leadership of the seminary. He was already known for his close relationship with Al-Khoei, who had authorized him to issue legal opinions and permitted people to refer to him in jurisprudential matters even during his teacher's lifetime. (Al-Haidari, 2008)

Signs of Al-Sistani's religious authority began to appear gradually after the death of Al-Khoei. People increasingly turned to him with questions and began following him in matters of Islamic law. His representatives abroad also started distributing his practical treatise. This trend was further strengthened by the support of several of Al-Khoei's students and prominent scholars who attested to Al-Sistani's competence and personal judgment "ijtihad", most notably 'Abd Al-A'la Al-Sabzawari and Shaikh Bashir Al-Najafi, among others. (Al-Haidari, 2008)

Al-Sistani's assumption of the religious leadership was not merely a conventional transition; it occurred during an exceptionally complex political and social period. Iraq at the time was under the rule of the tyrant Saddam Hussein, suffering under severe economic sanctions, while the seminary "hawza" faced intense restrictions, a decline in student numbers, and ongoing security persecution. (Al-Nu'mani, 2005) The early years of Al-Sistani's leadership demonstrated his exceptional ability to manage sensitive affairs without provoking the regime, to protect the seminary's existence under suffocating conditions, and to preserve the independence of the religious authority while offering moral and religious support to believers. He also reorganized the affairs of representatives and authorized clerics, established a more regulated financial system, and began restoring cohesion to the seminary after the severe blows it had endured. (Al-Nu'mani, 2005)

### **Second Axis: The Shiite Religious Authorities in Holy Karbala**

Karbala is among the most important cities in the history of the Shiite, not merely due to its symbolic role as associated with Imam Al-Hussein (peace be upon him), but also due to the fact that this place has hosted some of the most prominent religious leaders who influenced the jurisprudential and political direction of the Shiite group. The city produced great scholarly seminaries hawzas which provided an alternative or supplement to the seminary in Najaf and provided the Karbala religious authority with a recognizable character in the modern Shiite tradition. His Eminence, the religious authority Muhammad Sadiq Al-Shirazi is among the most important and the most influential religious authorities in Karbala.

Muhammad Sadiq Al-Shirazi was born in the year 1930 in Karbala city to a family of great scholar. He was brought up in a family that was highly entrenched in education and faith. He was brought up in a place that appreciated education and attached much importance to religious education at a tender age. His father Hussein Al-Shirazi was a key figure in his life and devoted himself to educating and enlightening his children in different aspects of religion and academics. This was the environment that developed the personality of Muhammad Sadiq Al-Shirazi, and is what developed his intellectual ambition at a tender age. Although the four primary habits are similar, it is important to recognize the distinctions between them. Despite the similarities between the four primary habits, it is worth noting the differences between the habits.

At the tender age of youthhood, Muhammad Sadiq entered Karbala. The city had scholarly seminaries, which taught religious training, which incorporated the Quran, jurisprudence, Quranic exegesis, logic, and theology. These were the subjects that were used in the educational curriculum at that time. He was also good in comprehension and analysis and this quality attracted the attention of his teachers. He was taught by senior scholars in the seminary and this made a great contribution to his scholarly personality (World Center for Shirazi Studies, 2012). He was diligent and persevering in his studies to the best of his ability during his early years of schooling and this schooling interest went a long way in carving his intellectual interests particularly those regarding religion and politics, which would later be very clear during the later stages in his academic journey. (Shirazi, 2005)

Muhammad Sadiq would later resume his studies in Najaf under the tutelage of some of the top scholars of that time. He was given high training in jurisprudence (fiqh), legal theory (uṣūl), logic, philosophy, theology and Quranic exegesis. One of the brightest of his students, Mohsen Al-Hakim, was able to produce an influential influence on him in his intellectual development, alongside Abu Al-Qasim Al-Khoei, one of the most prominent juristic thinkers of the twentieth century. He was also a student of Ruhollah Al-Mousawi Al-Khomeini who made significant influences on religious and political thinking development in the region. These lessons enabled Muhammad Sadiq to understand the jurisprudence and legal theory as well as to become acquainted with various intellectual schools in the seminary. (Shirazi, 2005)

Later Muhammad Sadiq studied more special higher levels of seminary studies, which deals with the sophisticated jurisprudence problems and sophisticated legal-theoretical studies. He started studying complex texts of jurisprudence and uṣūl has been composed and gave his own lessons. He began to communicate with more students, with those students, who wanted to gain more knowledge in the religious sciences. In this context, he brought new subjects on jurisprudence and legal theory, which were at times thought to be complicated or

provocative at the time. He was also able to create his own teaching style which put much emphasis on the development of a critical thinking among his students. (Al-Kho'ei, 2008)

Following the demise of his father the religious leader Hussein Al-Shirazi and his brother Sadiq Al-Shirazi, the name of Muhammad Sadiq started coming out as a formidable contender of becoming the supreme religious leadership of the seminary. His followers increased with time both in Karbala and elsewhere. His opinions on law were of use to many people because of the simplicity and conciseness of his arguments and the approachable manner in which he presented the religious determinations. His jurisprudential school had a simplistic approach that led to his rulings being written in such a way that they could be easily understood by an average individual and this served to build his status as an esteemed religious leader. (Al-Kho'ei, 2008)

The religious leadership of His Eminence, Muhammad Sadiq Al-Shirazi, was marked by several distinctive qualities, perhaps the most important of which were: social and political openness, attention to religious media, and an emphasis on peace and nonviolence. Among his most notable works are:

(1) *Al-Bayān Al-Fiqhī* (The Jurisprudential Exposition): A comprehensive treatment of Islamic legal rulings presented through both evidential and practical methods. It covers matters of purification, prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, transactions, penal laws, and blood-money rulings. (Ahlulbayt Foundation, 2005)

(2) *Al-Islām Huwa Al-Ḥall* (Islam Is the Solution): A work addressing political and social challenges in contemporary Muslim societies. It explains how Islamic teachings offer fundamental solutions to issues such as authoritarianism, injustice, and civilizational decline. (Al-Najafi, 2014)

(3) *Al-Ḥurriyyah fī Al-Islām* (Freedom in Islam): This book reflects his intellectual perspective on balancing individual freedom with religious commitment. It stands as one of the important modern Islamic studies that examine religious and political freedom from an Islamic viewpoint. (Al-Najafi, 2014)

(4) *Jihād Al-Nafs* (Struggle of the Self): An ethical and pedagogical project aimed at refining the human soul, emphasizing that societal reform begins with self-reform. (Al-Ataba Al-Husseiniya Al-Muqaddasa, 2013)

(5) *Al-Akhlāq Al-Islāmiyyah* (Islamic Ethics): A work that addresses the moral values necessary for shaping a person's relationship with God and with other people, written in a practical and accessible educational style. (Al-Nasiri, 2009)

These works, along with his other scholarly contributions, became an ongoing source of intellectual enrichment within the religious seminaries. They were incorporated into the curriculum as essential references in the research level and in advanced jurisprudential studies. They also helped generations of students of Islamic sciences develop a balanced methodology of personal judgment "ijtihād" that integrates the religious text with an understanding of contemporary realities. (Al-Nasiri, 2009)

After a life filled with scholarship and religious service, the esteemed religious authority Muhammad Ṣādiq Al-Shirazi passed away on 26 Jumada Al-Akhirah 1422 AH / 14 September 2001. He died in the holy city of Qom in the Islamic Republic of Iran, which had been his final place of residence. His pure body was escorted in a grand funeral procession attended by large numbers of scholars, seminary students, and admirers, before being laid to rest in the shrine of Fatimah in Qom. He was buried in one of the shrine's corridors, where his resting place remains a destination for his students and followers, and a site visited by those who remember his scholarly and striving path.

## Section Two: The Discursive Nature of the Shiite Religious Authority in Iraq

The Shiite religious authority in Iraq represents an influential moral voice on various religious, political, social, and national issues. Its speech developed after 2003 as one of the key sources of guidance and influence in the context of significant changes. The authority used various types of discourses, such as Friday sermons, official statements, and fatwas, to solve the problems that faced the Iraqi society. Such an analysis of this discourse, therefore, stands as the key point of entry to the main role that the religious authority plays in modern-day Iraq. This will be discussed in the succeeding subsections:

### First Axis: Religious Discourse.

The post-collapse era of the state institutions in Iraq has been supported by the religious discourse of the Shiite authority after 2003, as the major pillar of directing the society and controlling its interaction with each other. This discourse served as a moral and doctrinal guide that served to mitigate the ethical emptiness that was caused by the collapse of the political system. The power, headed by Ali Al-Husseini Al-Sistani, became the key to restoring the awareness of the society, enhancing the role of religion, and reminding people of Islamic constants in the environment of a violent political and security situation. The authority also stressed the temperate discourse being free of the accusation of heresy "takfeer" and division, as well as tolerance and dialogue. That position provided it with a wide popular legitimacy which crossed the sectarian lines making it a symbol of the nation which helped to defuse the situation and rejuvenated the morality and religion of the Iraqi person in the post-occupation turmoil. (Salman, 2020)

The instruments and shapes of the religious discourse of the Shiite authority in Iraq changed slightly after the year 2003. This era recorded an increased use of media and technological resources to reach more people with religious messages. Although the essence of the discussion was still attached to the aspects of religion and doctrine, the nature and the techniques of communication continued to transform with the emerging social and technological shifts that came to play in the post-2003 period. (Salman, 2020). Some of these forms and tools include:



### **1. Friday Sermons as the Major Means of Religious Guidance:**

The Friday sermon has been one of the most significant tools in the hands of the religious authority to spread religious discourse. These teachings are a good tool of instructing the Shiite community on different moral and religious matters. Indicatively, the Friday sermons in Karbala by the representatives of the authority, like Shaikh Abdul-Mahdi Al-Karbala'i, and Ahmad Al-Safi, emphasized on religious issues of concern to the individuals and the general Shiite community. Shaikh Al-Karbala in a discourse in 2014 referred to the problem of having good expectations of God, as he encouraged believers to have trust in God, to repent and to go back to Him in times of trouble and to ensure sincerity in their worship activities. This sermon was a part of an awareness program meant to strengthen the spiritual aspect of things in the midst of the political and security crises that Iraq was going through during the time of this sermon. (Thuraya, 2022)

### **2. Religion Events to Enhance Identity by Rituals:**

The key forms of religious consciousness the authority employs to enhance Shiite identity are religious occasions, which include Arbacen (the end of a 40-day lamentation period of Hussein and others killed at Karbala), Muharram (The first holy month of the Islamic year, by spending the day in fasting and remembering Ashura), Safar (The second month of the Islamic year, traditionally associated with traveling and without any superstitions), and Eid Al-Ghadir (A Shiite festival honoring the appointment of Ali as the successor of the Prop In the course of such events, religious commands are made to advance the practices of the doctrine and lead the faithful in adherence to Hussein's teachings. As an illustration, in 2015, Arba failure to observe the proper religious behavior during the march was announced by a directive of the office of Al-Sistani (may his shadow endure) through media and online sources. It was a command that focused on moral restraint in the dealings with other people and also the need to observe Imam Al-Hussein (peace be upon him) by maintaining its rituals. (Jafariyan, 2014)

### **3. Digital Media and Internet Use:**

As the media became open in the post 2003 era, the religious authority started to rely more on the Internet and governmental websites to spread the religious discourse, especially with the rise of the digital media prevalence among the entire society. The authority also designed its official site that availed access to religious decisions made (fatwas) and explanations of Islamic legal issues, educational videos and access to downloadable books and Islamic booklets. (Jafariyan, 2014). In 2017, a course of online lectures on the jurisprudence of the acts of worship was established in collaboration with educational institutions in the seminary. Clips directed to the youth and non-specialists were provided every week to encourage proper religious knowledge. It was also possible to watch live jurisprudential talkshows on the official website of Al-Sistani to address the modern legal topics, including the rights of women and purification issues. (Al-Huda Association, 2021)

### **4. Lessons in the Seminary and the Direct Religious Education:**

Direct seminary education is one of the most important modes of religious discourse, either the classical seminaries of Najaf and Karbala or in courses held since 2003 to broaden the focus of religious teaching. These teachings were aimed at imparting religious concept in an objective and scholarly way so that the community can acquire a more in-depth insight into the Sharia ruling and the doctrine. As an example, a seminary course taught in 2016 at the Al-Huda Center in Najaf, students were supposed to study the books, i.e. Al-Kafi and Al-Wafi, focusing on the moral side of everyday life and the application of jurisprudence to modern reality. The preacher specialized training was also increased in Jaafari thinking, and this was to rejuvenate the ancient religious language in the modern world. (Hassan, 2020)

### **5. Religious Fatwas and Practical Treatises:**

The issuance of religious fatwas and practical treatises is one of the main tools utilized by the authority to give directions to the community in the daily matters in life. Since 2003, these fatwas were propagated more freely, by the means of modern media and technologies, such as television and radio, but with focus on following the religious teachings in all spheres of life. In 2014, when the campaign of the defensive Jihad against the ISIS began, the authority declared a historic fatwa under the leadership of Al-Sistani, which demanded the defensive jihad against terrorism. Although this fatwa was politically instigated, it was placed in a religious setting, where the sacred places and the homeland were to be defied, and the result was a strictly religious fatwa call. (Al-Zalmi, 2006)

### **Second Axis National Discourse.**

The importance of the national discourse of the religious authority is the idea that the religious authority is always trying to instill the spirit of inclusive citizenship, support the respect to the law, underline the adherence to the common good, and denounce violence and division. According to (Al-Huda Association, 2021), it has been clarified severally that the homeland does not necessarily exist in its geographical location, but rather in the hearts of all citizens. It is a religious and moral duty to maintain it but not a political one. Another issue that the authority highlighted as a threat to the integrity of Iraq was political sectarianism and urged the formation of a fair state that reflects all the parts of the state without discrimination. This national discussion became one of the main supports in keeping Iraq united under very sensitive times as the regime was most opposed to the efforts to divide the

nation, promoted unity, assisted the army and security agencies, and opposed turning Iraq into a battlefield between the region and international matters. (Al-Huda Center, 2021). The national discourse of the authority was not limited to transient statements or general slogans but was expressed through multiple media and impactful forms of communication that enabled the authority to consolidate its vision regarding the homeland, citizenship, and national unity. Among these forms are:

### **1. Friday Sermons (The National Pulpit):**

Friday sermon platforms of Karbala and Najaf have been one of the most significant instruments of the national discourse of the authority. Numerous sermons were devoted to the issues of national unity and coexistence of various parts of Iraq and denunciation of divisive or sectarian-promoting agendas. As an example, on 4 July 2014, after the ISIS took over Mosul, Shaikh Abdul-Mahdi Al-Karbala'i urged people to rise in defense of all Iraq, regardless of sect or ethnicity, stressing that the country is a trust left to all Iraqis. (Al-Huda Center, 2021)

### **2. National Fatwas (Mobilization in Practice):**

One such clear illustration on how the national discourse was put into practice with great force was the fatwa on the defensive Jihad declared on 13 June 2014 by Al-Sistani as a way of protecting the homeland against ISIS. This fatwa talked of the Iraqis as a whole and not sectarian and it was reviewed as a national stand which served to preclude the fall of the nation. The fatwa wrote that those citizens capable of taking arms and fighting the terrorists were to volunteer to join the security forces to protect their homeland, their honor, and their land and their holy places (Al-Saffar, 2022).

### **3. Official Statements and Unified Political Stances:**

The authority came up with official statements denouncing political sectarianism and demanded a national government that would represent all the Iraqis. It condemned politically leaders who create divisions and associated corruption with the lack of patriotism and that without patriotism a nation would fail. To illustrate this point, in a press release dated 7 August 2015, the authority stated that, according to it, corrupt politicians have betrayed the homeland because they put their personal and partisan interests above the national interest. (Ashbani, 2023)

### **4. National and Symbolic Occasions:**

The authority used national events and occasions to strengthen the notion of national identity, e.g., the celebration of the Revolution of 1920 to create an understanding of the importance of the tribes in the defense of the nation, or to promote the army or the police. In the celebrations of the defeat of ISIS at the end of 2017 the authority stated that the defeat was not the triumph of one sect of Iraqis over another, but rather the triumphation of martyrs of all Iraqi provinces whose blood was shed in the defense of the country, and their martyrdom was the victory of all Iraqis (Ashbani, 2023).

### **5. Media and Symbolic Discourse:**

The authority used media platforms, including Karbala TV, to show powerful national messages, capture Iraqi heroism in the war against terrorism, and create dialogue programs that accentuated the need to remain loyal to Iraq as a unifying motherland. As an example, the program, From Iraq, brought forth a theme of coexistence within mixed areas, Sunnis, Shiite, Christians and the Kurds coexist together thus building on the national discourse within the minds of the audience. (Saigh, 2020)

### **6. General Discourse: Anti-Sectarianism and Unity:**

The language of the national discourse of the authority is thorough, judicious, refuses sectarian or ethnic designations. Incorporating the guides and encouragement of the Iraqis, the words like the people, citizens and all Iraqis were used, with inclusivity being emphasized. (Sayegh, 2020)

These instruments and mechanisms of national expression had a key role in the development of the national mood of citizenship and loyalty to the Iraqi state, especially at the time when national institutions were relatively weak after the occupation and years of sectarian struggle. (Al-Ameed Center for Research and Studies, 2024) Friday sermons served the purpose of the authority to provide the inclusionary national messages of unity, opposition to sectarian and ethnic segregation, and the idea of mutual Iraqi identity that goes beyond a rigid affiliation. Likewise, its national utterances particularly at momentous times like those of ISIS or popular activism or elections were both an instrument of coercing politicians to act in national interest and to the public to enhance wise civic engagement. Nonetheless, the majority of firms competing within the same industry show minimal interest in marketing their products directly to their customers. However, most companies in the same line of business are not concerned at all with promoting their products directly to consumers.

### **Third Chapter: Analysis of the Political Discourse of the Religious Authority Toward the U.S. Policy.**

The U.S. policy and the Shiite religious authority has gone through several interactions since various events in Iraq occurred. The rhetoric of the power assumed other dimensions in which it had a religious, political and social outlook on the American presence. Thus, this discourse analysis is a valuable method of comprehension of the

positions of the authority and how they changed in the course of time. This has been outlined in the subsequent sections:

### **First Axis: Politically-Oriented Discourse.**

The Shiite religious authority after 2003 had to contend with a novel political reality whereby the American forces took charge of operations and the Iraqi state was left with the vacuum of sovereignty. Therefore, the discourse of the authority was a specific political position: it was neither in favor of the occupation nor insane antagonistic, but a moderate discourse that takes account of national interest and dignity of the state and its citizens. This discussion was reflected in a number of political aspects, which can be outlined in the following manner:

#### **1. Rejection of the U.S. Occupation and Position on Military Presence**

Since the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the U.S. the Shiite power has had a clear position denying the occupation. Such rejection is among the most striking developments of the politics of the Shiite government during the past twenty years. The matter of the U.S. occupation turned out to be the moment in the relations between the authority and the Iraqi political situation. The stance of the authority was a refusal in totality of any type of foreign intervention especially the American military presence that was not only perceived to be a threat to the sovereignty of the country but also to the identity of Iraq as a country. (Ghali, 2021)

At a religious level, the occupation was condemned in connection with one of the main tenets of Shiite jurisprudence the principle of national sovereignty. This principle confirms that each state must decide its fate without being interfered with by other countries, and any occupation was regarded as an act of aggression towards the inner sanctity and national sovereignty. In the case of Iraq, the power regarded the U.S occupation as an absolute contravention of these values, as American troops occupied the Iraqi territory without the permission of the legitimate government or even the permission of the Iraqi people. The occupation is a religious and a national obligation which implies that it is a disavowal of the occupation by the Shiite jurisprudence since it is a denial of the right of the Iraqi people to define their own fate and to independently dispose the matters related to their inner life.

This religious position was based on Quranic principle: ( وقال ربكم ادعوني استجب لكم ) And your Lord says, Call unto me, I will answer thee; (Ghafir: 60), which stresses on self-sufficiency and non-submission to outside authority. (Hassan, 2021)

This political position of the authority in conjunction to the religious rejection was due to the fact that it had a profound realization of the implications that the continued occupation would have on the social and political fabric of Iraq. At the very beginning of the war, the authority knew that Iraq could not reconstruct itself when the foreign military forces were present. Its discourse, as such, stressed the reestablishment of Iraqi sovereignty and other affirmed that it is solely up to Iraqi people to decide their political destiny, without interference or encroachment by other powers that serve their political or economic interests that do not further the best interests of the people of Iraq. (Al-Katib, 2007)

Among the biggest issues raised by the religious authority was the insecurity challenges posed by the occupation that might plunge Iraq into unsuspected chaos. The military invasion by the U.S. was not the only issue of concern to the authority, but also the actions, which ensued the dissolution of the Iraqi army, the decommissioning of the security institutions. The authority viewed these activities as highly threatening, since they left Iraq without the military and security systems that could secure order and avoid the nation getting into chaos. (Al-Katib, 2007)

Therefore, instead of bringing stability, as it was argued by some observers, the U.S military presence turned out to be one of the key contributors of the decline of the security and political situation in Iraq. Well-equipped militia group and terrorist organizations appeared and began attacking the people of Iraq causing the violation of tranquility and chaos. (Al-Katib, 2007)

The position of the authority also displayed its rejection of efforts to re-model the political system of Iraq or exercising political control of the country. The United States was interested in creating a government that is under its watch, which the authority strongly opposed. It was believed that any government that was not established in free elections would not be legitimate because it would only be another form of occupation and not the realization of the hopes of the Iraqi people. Thus, the power demanded that political process in Iraq could not be any more than Iraqi, without any foreign protection over it, and controlled by the Iraqis themselves. (Al-Zalmi, 2006)

The Shiite power also clearly understood that the occupation would increase sectarian and ethnic divide in Iraq. As the United States enacted economic policies and military policies to inflict a new political order on the country, the Iraqi political forces were caught up in wrangles on how to handle the occupation. The power threatened that any form of support to the occupation even by some political groupings within the country might drive Iraq into a prolonged civil war amongst the different sects and ethnicities in the country. This is why it was always demanding unification and internal solidarity within the country to stop any efforts of dividing Iraq. (Abdul-Razaq, 2008)

In this larger opposition to the occupation, the authority was clear in its calls of total withdrawal of U.S. forces within Iraq, which was regarded as a required measure towards re-asserting the under-all-inclusive Iraqi sovereignty. The presence of the foreign troops by the authority was perceived as a threat to the security, as well as a political and economic instability in the country. (Abdul-Razaq, 2008)

Besides this, the attitude of the religious authority to the American occupation also had a humanitarian and even ethical connotation. It demanded compelling the respect of human rights and the Iraqi people should not be exposed to torture, mass murders, or arbitrary arrests that were occurring under the auspices of the occupation. The religious authority felt that there was no justification of any kind that could be made on infringing these rights. From this standpoint, the authorities of Al-Sistani and other senior clerics in Iraq rejected violence, encouraged peaceful resistance, and affirmed that the right to protest and demand one's rights is a legitimate right that must not be violated (Abdul-Razaq, 2008).

### **Second: Political Participation within the Framework of the New Political Process**

One of the key issues in the speech of the Shiite religious authority was the political involvement in the context of the new political process. This participation was considered by the power as one of the basic means of restoring the Iraqi state that had been battered by the authoritarian regime and the political vacuum caused by the former regime (Al-Jazeera Center, 2023). With the new Iraqi situation, political participation involved participating in the government and the parliament, not to mention in the general process of political decision-making.

The religious force strived to persuade the Iraqi citizens and, in particular, Shiite, who were historically politically marginalized under the previous Ba'athist government, to engage in elections and political life. This stance was mirrored in how the authority insisted on the need to provide fair representation to all political groups in Iraq such as the Sunni, Kurdish and other ethnic and sectarian groups (Al-Jazeera Center, 2023).

It was also evident that the religious authority believed that political participation was a conclusive measure in enhancing the development of a democratic state because it felt that Iraq required an inclusive political process that incorporated all the political forces in the country on the condition that the forces should be loyal to the principles of justice and equality. According to the religious authority, the new political process must be transient and incorruptible and must be grounded on the norms of democracy in which all political entities will be able to express themselves freely (Al-Huda Center, 2021). Even though Iraq was going through the hard times and facing security threats, the religious authority demanded the fair representation of the Shi'a in the political process. This was in response to the political sidelining of the Shiite which had been experienced in the earlier regime as they were the majority group in Iraq yet were separated in accessing the political decision making centres. This is the reason why the religious authority appreciated the fact that the Shi'a take an active place in the new political process, and it was manifested in the wide involvement in the general elections (Al-Huda Center, 2021).

It was also necessary that political entry in the system of the new political process should be included in a national agreement uniting all the political blocs in Iraq. The religious figure encouraged the rejection of violence and extremism and called to make efforts to increase the national understanding of all political elements. In this regard, the authority pointed out that the participation in politics should be accessible to every group of Iraqis and it should not favor one group over another (Karimo, 2023). The religious authority knew too well that the new political process would be fraught with challenges, but it thought that political involvement was the most appropriate tool of making sure a state that operated under the rule of law and founded on the principles of democracy was achieved. It advocated the establishment of a government that would represent all groups of Iraqis even because making political compromises at times would lead to the agreement required to stabilize Iraq (Karimo, 2023). The other agenda of the religious authority was the fact that participation in politics should be founded on solid principles of transparency and political parties adhering to democratic principles and human rights. The authority requested the need of global supervision of the elections so that its integrity is not compromised and no form of manipulation or fraud can drop the political legality of the elections (Al-Furat Center, 2025).

The religious authority emphasized that political participation was not limited to elections only but also to participation in the legislative and oversight processes actively. It held the creation of independent institutions of legislature that would see representation of all the political groups and strive to make laws that would serve the interests of the people of Iraq in general. The authority insisted on the need to empower the political institutions in Iraq to be free and serving the national interest, not dependent on outside forces or foreign intervention (Al-Furat Center, 2025). Under the same theme, the religious authority was of the view that the political process should be defined as inclusive and fair where all political and social forces in Iraq are represented without any exclusion of a group or sect. This stand was based on its view that all people should contribute to the future of Iraq and that the political process should be free to everyone such that all groups of the Iraqi people are represented in the government and the parliament.

### **Axis Two: A Socially-Oriented Discourse.**

Since the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, the problems of the Iraqi society were not only political. Violence, division, and institutional collapse put the social fabric at fragment, and shook up communal values. In this framework, the rhetoric of the Shiite religious leader was a social utterance aimed at bringing back the equilibrium and the basis of a new era of group consciousness. This discussion transcended its jurisprudential facet and took significant civic and humanitarian functions in addressing the impacts of American policies in the nation. Within this framework (Al-Wafi Cenetr, 2020), the central characteristics of this discussion can be determined with the help of four major themes:



### **First: Preserving social cohesion in the face of sectarian division**

From the early days of the occupation, the Shi'i religious authority recognized that the real danger lay not only in the fall of the political regime but also in the collapse of the shared societal values that, despite long-standing tensions, had preserved a degree of communal cohesion for decades (Al-Wafi Center, 2020). In that regard, the social discourse of the authority was based on the strong belief that sectarianism was not a doom that threatened the Iraqi society but was an artificial project, which was connected to the conditions that surrounded the occupation and its mechanisms of managing the state. The United States created a political system of sectarian and ethnic quotas through the Coalition Provisional Authority that generated either intentionally or unintentionally a feeling of division and paved the way to social conflicts that were deeply rooted in the political discussion (Al-Sisitani Website, 2022).

The religious leader, namely the highest rank among marja', Ali al-Sistani (may his shadow endure), preferred to assume a social unifying role without sectarian or political affiliation (Al-Sisitani Website, 2022). The most obvious aspects of this discourse were manifested in the critical points, the most significant of which was the sectarian violence of 2005-2007. After the bombing of the two Imams Al-Askariyyin shrines in Samarra (February 2006), an event that ushered in a new wave of sectarian violence, the religious authority came in to save the situation by issuing statements and delivering direct sermons urging people to keep calm, avoid sedition and safeguard innocent civilians. It even sent out open messages to politicians saying they should not take advantage of the event to further divide (Fajr Ashura'a, 2022).

It was not a simple idealistic appeal to the civil peace, but a pragmatic social initiative, based on a number of fundamental principles (Fajr Ashura'a, 2022):

1. Revoking the legitimacy of any sectarian discourse. This is regardless of the group from which it comes from, whether in or out of the Shiite community.
2. Making reciprocated attacks between civilians illegal and denying the revenge and retribution logic.
3. It was confirmed that the blood of all Iraqis is holy and that there is no difference between Sunni, Shiite and Christian.
4. Threat to external agents in the brewing of sectarian conflict, actors who frequently had fertile soil because of the lack of security and social decay.

These instructions were decisive towards the minimization of tensions in the society. Most of the grassroots reconciliation efforts in the mixed neighborhoods depended on the neutrality and the unifying nature of Sistani. Although they were bound by the logic of sectarianism based on quotas, political forces were unable to disregard the plea of the religious authority when it clearly demanded the removal of the state of civil war and focused the priorities of the society rather than on sectarian loyalties (Noon News Agency, 2023).

At another level, the discourse of the authority served to instill a culture of dialogue and co-existence amongst sects whereby Friday sermons placed the focus on the Islamic and the national similarities to the differences in Islamic doctrines. In addition, the power secretly funded many of the gatherings of religious leaders across different sects to build a basis of understanding each other and to protect the society against sectarian politics polarization (Noon News Agency, 2023).

It must also be mentioned that this social discourse did not stand out of reality, on the contrary, it was shaped by the same events in the process of their development. Its tone and content varied in each stage depending on the scale of the problem: whereas in the early years it was more concerned with warning about the danger of sectarianism, in later years it was more active in demanding a reform of the political system based on sectarian quotas, which the author saw as the origin of social division. The outstanding feature is that this discussion was not of Shiite only, although it was produced by a Shiite leader, but targeted all Iraqis. It also often used such inclusive terms as the Iraqi people, dear citizens, and noble brothers, the words with the help of which linguistic features underline the social and humanitarian tone of the message (Tabeen Center, 2021).

Overall, the religious leadership of the Shiite discourse concerning the U.S. policy was neither elitist or theoretical; rather it was a discourse that was grounded and practical and which assisted in protecting the society against internal disintegration by influencing the opinions of the masses, putting pressure on the political parties and managing crises at the field level. Sectarian aspect was the most dangerous element in all this equation, so it was the reason why the religious authority preferred to put it in the epicenter of its social discussion (Tabeen Center, 2021).

### **Second: Regulating Social Conduct Amid Security Breakdown**

The period after 2003 entered Iraq into the era of profound security and political emptiness that left its mark on all spheres of life, including the social one, where values and the direct behavior of the population were literally shaken. The Shiite religious authority realized in the early times the threat of this state of affairs (Tabeen Center, 2021), and it proceeded to apply a consistent social speech that would control the behavior of people and maintain social order via various mechanisms:

#### **1. Security anarchy and the effects it has on the social structure.**

Security deterioration created a chaotic atmosphere, which made negative social phenomena, such as tribal revenge, armed robbery, harassment, moral corruption and extremism, spread. Here, the religious power became a moral and social power attempting to fill this vacuum and therefore provided a guiding message of ethics which

reminded people of the boundaries of religion and reason, and fostered a sense of unity, restraint, and self-control (Al-Kufa Jouranl, 2025).

## **2. Calling out to respect the law even though the state is weak.**

The religious leadership supported its teachings and pronouncements that nothing can be stable unless people embrace consciousness and discipline and chaos does not warrant the breaking of values and denying other people their rights. It also encouraged individuals not to slip into violence, revenge, or weaponry dependency, and emphasized that the state is not a replacement of the authority, yet it believes that the safeguarding of values among the population is what preconditions a just state in the future (Kufa Jouranl, 2025).

The religious representative stressed the importance of peace in the country and the necessity to get rid of sectarianism. It acted to suppress the popular response to sectarian attacks or provocations and threatened not to be sucked into plotting conspiracies of sedition. Friday sermons in Najaf especially those by the representatives of Al-Sistani were very clear that they rejected revenge, barred retaliation, ensured the safety of civilians and managing hard situations in a wise manner. This strategy was significant in limiting sectarian outbursts and maintaining a bare minimum of social integration (Al-Hawza, 2025)

## **4. Empowering community control and the family.**

The parents were encouraged to keep a watch on their children and to lead them to religious and national devotion. They urged tribal leaders to refuse the vendettas and the violations and settle disputes by intelligence instead of by arms. The authority underlined the fact that the family is the initial layer of social control and can educate people to pursue the values even in case formal control is not available. It in several statements confirmed that the moral decline cannot be addressed only by law but by creating social consciousness that denies anarchy and appreciates order (Al-Hawza, 2025).

## **5. Religion as a social control instrument during crisis.**

The religious power artfully used the religious discourse to control the behavior at the time of anarchy and associated disciplined behavior with true faith. It demanded the moral commitment to be based on conscience and not the fear of the law. Religious duty, responsiveness to God, the sanctity of the blood of a Muslim, the lack of harm to neighbors, patience, and self-control were some of the concepts applied in the formation of behavior. The authority argued that societies embracing these values will be able to survive even in the most gloomy situations and will be in a better position to restore the state under sound principles (Fajir Ashuraa, 2025).

## **6. Spreading hope of the future:**

Although this situation was dismal after 2003, the discourse of the authority was not totally warning; it was also full of hope and optimism that the situation could be restored and the state rebuilt, as long as people were conscious about it and behaved appropriately. The authority regarded chaos as short-lived and held the opinion that conscious societies are not collapsing. Therefore, it demanded social solidarity, assisting neighbors, safeguarding government property, and providing a civilized portrayal of the Islam religion as well as Muslims even in the harshest environments (Fajir Ashura'a, 2025).

## **CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS**

This paper has shown that, the Shiite religious leadership in Iraq following 2003 has been central towards responding to any political change, especially in the presence of the American influence. Its rhetoric was a combination of spiritual, national, and political aspects on the part of its vision of state-building and the protection of sovereignty. The influential religious figures were formed during this time period and it was demonstrated in the analysis that the discourse did not remain the same but changed according to transformed circumstances. In line with this, the power was a harmonious religious and political representation in a complex space. A number of conclusions were made in the study:

1. The Shiite leaders of Najaf and Karbala enjoyed the best influence in shaping the discourse of the people after 2003.
2. The dominating discourse was distinguished by the combination of both religious and national levels to maintain the integrity and nationality of Iraq.
3. The authority took on incremental political positions concerning American presence which were guided to resistant.
4. The speech avoided the slip into anarchy with demands on building institutions of the state and popular political involvement.
5. This discursive language was a strategic tool of airing a religious-political view in balance to the problems of occupation and democratic transition.

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