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AUSTRALIA**

**RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE**

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**Questions**

- 1. What is the current security situation in Nasiriya and the surrounding governorate of Thiqr especially with regard to threats to al Sistani supporters by al Sadr supporters, and their ability to carry them out? Please locate any discussion by a reliable source about the most likely security situation in al Nasiriya as US forces withdraw. How likely it is that al Sadr/Mahdi Army will be motivated to harm non-supporters in the area?**
- 2. How easy is it for an Arab Iraqi from one part of Iraq to resettle in another part?**

**RESPONSE**

- 1. What is the current security situation in Nasiriya and the surrounding governorate of Thiqr especially with regard to threats to al Sistani supporters by al Sadr supporters, and their ability to carry them out? Please locate any discussion by a reliable source about the most likely security situation in al Nasiriya as US forces withdraw. How likely it is that al Sadr/Mahdi Army will be motivated to harm non-supporters in the area?**

**Security in Thiqr and the withdrawal of foreign troops**

The governorate of Thiqr (also rendered as Thi-Qar, Dhi-Qar, Dhiqr, etc) and its capital of Nasiriya (also: Nassiriya, Nasiriyah, etc) is a predominantly Shia locale and it would appear that most commentators consider the almost wholly Shia Thiqr to be a relatively quiet sector compared to elsewhere in Iraq. A March 2009 report by the US military shows Thiqr to be among the most peaceful of Iraq's provinces in terms of reported insurgent attacks over the period 1 December 2008 to 28 February 2009. In April 2009 the UN High Commissioner for Refugees reported that: "The situation in these three governorates of the Lower South appears to be relatively stable, and there have been no major security incidents in 2008. Given that the MNF-I [Multi-National Force-Iraq] presence in these governorates is limited, car bombs,

roadside bombs and grenade attacks are infrequent and usually specifically targeted at MNF-I convoys or the major MNF-I base at Tallil Air Station southwest of Nasseriyah”. Even so, security incidents in Thiqr have been ongoing and June 2009 saw approximately 30 civilians killed in an attack on a market in Thiqr by unknown perpetrators. Some news reports have speculated that the June 2009 attack may have been linked to a wider pattern of violence which occurred across Iraq at this time when US withdrawals were transitioning other Iraqi areas to security self reliance. Thiqr itself was not among the Iraqi areas being affected by the June 2009 transitions; the governorate transitioned to security self reliance in September 2006 and has, since this time, been under Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC). Iraqi security forces in Thiqr were formerly receiving support from Australian troops: “Since handing over security of Dhi Qar province to the Iraqis, the main role of the Australian battle group, numbering about 515 soldiers, [was] to train and support Iraqi forces”. Following the withdrawal of Australian forces from the area in June 2008 this role was transferred to US forces who would appear to maintain troops in Thiqr in this supporting role (for the September 2006 transition and security in Thiqr, see pp.31 & 25 in: ‘Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq’ 2009, US Department of Defense website, March 2009 Report to Congress In accordance with the Department of Defense Supplemental Appropriations Act 2008 (Section 9204, Public Law 110-252), March [http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq March 2009.pdf](http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/Measuring_Stability_and_Security_in_Iraq_March_2009.pdf) – Accessed 11 November 2009 – Attachment 1; for the area as a relatively calm locale, see: UN Inter-Agency Information and Analysis Unit 2009, ‘Thi-Qar Governorate Profile’, July [http://www.iauiraq.org/reports/GP-Thi-Qar\\_v1.pdf](http://www.iauiraq.org/reports/GP-Thi-Qar_v1.pdf) – Accessed 30 September 2009 – Attachment 3; and also: UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2009, *Eligibility Guidelines For Assessing The International Protection Needs Of Iraqi Asylum-Seekers*, April – Attachment 2; for the withdrawal of Australian forces, see ‘Australia withdraws troops from Iraq’ 2008, *Reuters*, 1 June <http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSL0164801020080601> – Accessed 11 November 2009 – Attachment 4; for the June 2009 bomb attack, see: ‘30 killed in Iraq market bombing’ 2009, *Agence France Presse*, 10 June – Attachment 5; ‘Blast rips through market ; Attack comes three weeks before June 30 withdrawal of US troops’ 2009, *Today*, 11 June – Attachment 6; for speculation of links to the June 2009 withdrawal, see: ‘Iraqi figures demand “clear position” on attacks after US withdrawal’ 2009, *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, source: *Al-Hayat* website (London, in Arabic 13 July 2009), 18 July – Attachment 7; for background on the June 2009 withdrawals as part of the Status of Forces Agreement agreement, see: Knights, M. 2009, ‘Iraq Withdrawal Deadline: Subtle Shift in U.S. Mission’, *Policy Watch*, Washington Institute website, no.1544, 26 June <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=3082> – Accessed 11 August 2009 – Attachment 8; for the continued presence of US forces in Thiqr in a support role, see: Madhani, A. 2009, ‘U.S. troops in Iraq have time on hands’, *USA Today*, 21 October [http://www.usatoday.com/news/military/2009-10-20-idle-troops-iraq\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/military/2009-10-20-idle-troops-iraq_N.htm) – Accessed 11 November 2009 – Attachment 9; ‘American commander: Continued rocket attacks in Thi-Qar has negative effect on investment’ 2009, *National Iraqi News Agency*, 28 October – Attachment 10; and: Quigley, S.L. 2009, ‘Military has met SOFA deadline, top U.S. general in Iraq says’, *American Forces Press Service*, 29 June <http://www.army.mil/news/2009/06/29/23578-military-has-met-sofa-deadline-top-us-general-in-iraq-says/> – Accessed 11 November 2009 – Attachment 11).

### **Sadrism security incidents in Thiqr in 2007**

Muqtada al-Sadr's *Jaish Al-Mahdi* (JAM; or the Mahdi Army) have reportedly operated in the area of Thiqr and UNHCR's April 2009 assessment of Iraq reports that "capitals of the three Governorates (Diwaniyah, Samawa and Nasseriyah) have all seen occasional outbreaks of violence in the past, mostly clashes among the two Shi'ite rivals, the JAM and the Badr Organization affiliated with ISCI" (the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, also SIIC; formerly the Supreme Council of Islamic Revolution in Iraq or SCIRI party) which has often been endorsed by, and associated with, the Shiite cleric, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani (though the relationship is complex; for more on which, see below). Serious clashes between Sadrists and Iraqi security forces were reported over May to July 2007. Reporting on the mid-2007 violence *Reuters* related that: "Two days of fighting between gunmen loyal to Shi'ite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr and Iraqi police linked to a rival Shi'ite faction have killed 35 people in the southern city of Nassiriya"; and that: "The fighting underscored frictions between Sadr's political movement and the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (SIIC)". A May 2007 *Free Republic* report noted of the clashes that: "Iraqi Security forces in the Dhi Qar governorate, as in other southern governorates, are dominated by members of the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (SIIC)". In February 2008 the International Crisis Group (ICG) reported on the success of the US-led coalition forces and the ISCI in organising local opposition to the Sadrists in the area of Nasiriya through the Shiite *sahwa* (awakening) movement. A Sadrist student reportedly told the ICG in January 2008 that: "In the governorates of Nasiriya, Diwaniya and Karbala, the *sahwa* movements have more or less succeeded"; and that: "In Nasiriya, the police chief belongs to the Supreme Council [ISCI] and is busy coordinating the arrest of Mahdi Army leaders" (UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2009, *Eligibility Guidelines For Assessing The International Protection Needs Of Iraqi Asylum-Seekers*, April – Attachment 2; for the mid-2007 clashes between Sadrists and Iraqi forces, see: 'Police, gunmen clash in south Iraq, 35 killed' 2007, *Reuters*, 19 June <http://www.reuters.com/article/newsOne/idUSL191306220070619> – Accessed 11 November 2009 – Attachment 14; Kasim, Z. 2007, 'Mahdi Army Clashes with Iraqi Troops ~ Marxist Insurgent Group Reveals Details of First Operation', *Free Republic*, 17 May <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1835347/posts> – Accessed 11 November 2009 – Attachment 26; see also: 'Clashes in Iraq's Shi'ite south kill eight: sources' 2007, *Reuters*, 16 May <http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSL1657487020070516> – Accessed 11 November 2009 – Attachment 12; for the July 2007 clashes, see: 'Factbox: Security developments in Iraq, July 18' 2007, *Reuters*, 18 July <http://www.reuters.com/article/topNews/idUSL1856320220070718> – Accessed 11 November 2009 – Attachment 13; for the February 2008 ICG report, see p.19 in: International Crisis Group 2008, 'Iraq's Civil War, the Sadrists and the Surge', Middle East Report No72, 7 February – Attachment 17).

### **Sadrist security incidents in Thiqr in 2008**

Nonetheless, March 2008 saw another outbreak of violence with Sadrists in control of Nasiriya for a brief time. According to UNHCR the "[v]iolence flared again...when the Iraqi Government began a crackdown against Shi'ite militiamen in Basrah, prompting reprisal attacks by Sadr's followers across the Southern Governorates". On 28 March 2008 *Aswat al-Iraq* reported that: "The death toll from the clashes erupted in the city of Nassiriya has risen to 30 dead, including four cops, 16 civilians and 10 gunmen, and 52 wounded, including 19 policemen, 26 civilians and 7 gunmen". According to UNHCR: "Those clashes quickly subsided when Muqtada Al-Sadr ordered his forces to stand down". On 31 March 2008 *The Long War Journal* reported that according to a US military officer: 'Nasiriya is approximately 90% under the control of the Iraqi security forces,' ...The Iraqi forces have

only received assistance from a small team of US advisers assigned to the police. The government has ordered the curfew to be eased in the southern city, while a Sadrist leader called for followers to ‘abide by [Sadr’s] directives’ and put an end to the fighting”. Another round of violence would appear to have followed in April 2008 when *Aswat al Iraq* reported that: “Clashes between Iraqi security forces and gunmen believed to be militiamen loyal to the Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr in Nassiriya, Friday overnight, left seven fighters killed and another one arrested”. Some weeks later, in May 2008, it was reported a local police chief from the “southern town of Suq al-Shiyukh” had been assassinated in a bomb attack. No claims of responsibility were reported but news sources noted the clashes with Sadrists that had occurred in the previous month (UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2009, *Eligibility Guidelines For Assessing The International Protection Needs Of Iraqi Asylum-Seekers*, April – Attachment 2; for Sadrists in control of Nasiriya in March 2008, see: ‘30 killed, 52 wounded in Nassiriya until Friday night’ 2008, *Aswat al-Iraq*, 28 March <http://en.aswataliraq.info/?p=74588> – Accessed 11 November 2009 – Attachment 27; ‘Iraq: Clashes Continue Between Shi’ite Militants, Government’ 2008, *Radio Free Europe*, 28 March – Attachment 15; ‘Iraqi state TV highlights political efforts to resolve Basra stand-off’ 2008, *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, source: Iraqi channels *Al-Sharqiyah* and *Al-Iraqiyah* (28 March 2008), 29 March – Attachment 16; for the re-establishment of control, see: Roggio, B. 2008, ‘Maliki: “Security operations in Basra will continue”’, *Long War Journal*, 31 March [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/03/maliki\\_security\\_oper.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/03/maliki_security_oper.php) – Accessed 11 November 2009 – Attachment 28; for the April 2008 clashes, see: ‘Nassiriya clashes left 7 gunmen killed, 1 arrested-police spokesman’ 2008, *Aswat al-Iraq*, 19 April <http://en.aswataliraq.info/?p=76869> – Accessed 12 November 2009 – Attachment 33; for the subsequent police assassinations, see: ‘Bomb under bed kills local Iraqi police chief’ 2008, *ABC News*, 19 May <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/05/19/2249564.htm> – Accessed 12 November 2009 – Attachment 34; ‘Bomb under bed kills local Iraqi police chief’ 2008, *Reuters*, 19 May <http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSCOL94337420080519> – Accessed 12 November 2009 – Attachment 35).

### **Sadrism activity in Thiqr in 2009**

While it would appear that since the March 2008 incident Nasiriya has remained under the effective control of Iraqi government forces, Nasiriya nonetheless continues to be host to a Sadrism office and political activities undertaken by Sadr Trend supporters in Thiqr are reported on regularly. “The Sadrists, as a militia, were banned from running for elections but pro-Sadrism lists did compete in the provincial elections” on 31 January 2009. According to *Associated Press* followers of Muqtada al-Sadr took 7 of Thiqr’s 31 available seats; ahead of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (who took 5 seats) but losing out to the State of Law list of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki’s Islamic Dawa Party (who took 13 seats). It is reported that Sadrists alleged that the election was affected by a number of irregularities. It would not appear that there have been any reports of reprisal attacks by Sadrists upon Thiqr residents for not supporting the Sadr Trend in the recent election (for Sadr supporters activities in Thiqr, see: Al-Ansary, K. 2008, ‘Thousands of Iraqis rally against U.S. troop accord’, *Reuters*, 30 May <http://www.reuters.com/article/newsOne/idUSL3093003820080530> – Accessed 11 November 2009 – Attachment 23; ‘The Sadr movement to start 7 party polling centers in Thi-Qar’ 2009, *Aswat al-Iraq*, 3 October <http://en.aswataliraq.info/?p=119842> – Accessed 11 November 2009 – Attachment 24; for results in the May 2009 provincial elections, see p.4 in: Khoury, D. 2009, ‘The 2009 Iraqi Provincial Elections’, Heinrich Böll Foundation [http://www.boell-meo.org/report\\_en/Iraqi\\_2009\\_Provincial\\_Elections.pdf](http://www.boell-meo.org/report_en/Iraqi_2009_Provincial_Elections.pdf) – Accessed 11 November 2009 – Attachment 18; see also: ‘Official Iraqi Election Results’

2009, Progressive Realist Blog website, 19 February  
<http://www.progressiverealist.org/blogpost/official-iraqi-election-results> – Accessed 11 November 2009; ‘Iraqi provincial election results’ 2009, *Boston.com*, source: *Associated Press*, 19 February  
[http://www.boston.com/news/world/middleeast/articles/2009/02/19/iraqi\\_provincial\\_election\\_results/](http://www.boston.com/news/world/middleeast/articles/2009/02/19/iraqi_provincial_election_results/) – Accessed 11 November 2009 – Attachment 19; Rubin, A. ‘Prime Minister’s Party Wins in Iraqi Vote but Will Need to Form Coalitions’, *New York Times*, 6 February  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/06/world/middleeast/06iraq.html> – Accessed 11 November 2009 – Attachment 20; Al-Sa’dawi, A. 2009, ‘Post-election analysis: real change or more of the same?’, *Niqash*, 19 February  
<http://www.niqash.org/content.php?contentTypeID=75&id=2389&lang=0> – Accessed 11 November 2009 – Attachment 21; and pp.70-72 in: UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2009, *Eligibility Guidelines For Assessing The International Protection Needs Of Iraqi Asylum-Seekers*, April – Attachment 2; for further background on the overall current political situation in Iraq see the UN Security Council’s June 2009 report: UN Secretary General 2009, ‘Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 1830 (2008)’, 30 July [http://www.uniraq.org/FileLib/misc/SG\\_Report\\_S\\_2009\\_284\\_EN.pdf](http://www.uniraq.org/FileLib/misc/SG_Report_S_2009_284_EN.pdf) – Accessed 11 November 2009 – Attachment 25).

### **Sadrists and followers of Al-Sistani**

No information could be located which referred to the activities of Sadrists in Thiqr with regard to the local relationship with followers of the Shiite cleric Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani (though of course, as is noted above, reports of clashes between Sadrists and the ISCI movement with which Al-Sistani is often associated have appeared). Reports of alleged attacks upon prominent followers of Al-Sistani have been reported of Iraq more broadly. In February 2008 the International Crisis Group reported that: “Between June and September 2007, a series of assassinations targeted ISCI governors as well as representatives of Ayatollah Sistani. Although there is of yet no clear evidence, Sadrists are widely believed to have been behind them”. The same report relates that: “According to a Mahdi Army fighter, ‘in Shu`la [a Baghdad neighbourhood] the Mahdi Army burned down the ISCI, Sistani and Da`wa [prime minister Maliki’s party] headquarters’ ... ‘Burned down’ may in fact simply mean ‘attacked’”. The report commented further of the relationship as follows:

The Sadrism relationship to Marja`iya also is unclear. After Ayatollah Sistani allegedly sanctioned the Mahdi Army’s activities at the height of the sectarian confrontation, the Sadrists for the most part moderated their criticism of him. A Mahdi Army fighter said at the time, “we are on good terms with most [Shiite] actors, including Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, because he opposes disbanding the Mahdi Army”. However, deep-seated hostility – at times expressed in surprisingly aggressive terms – resurfaced in the wake of the Karbala events and increased government and US pressure against the Sadrists. As a result, there is now considerable discrepancy between Muqtada’s official pronouncements and the feelings of his Shiite constituency.

...Heightened friction between Sadrists and other key Shiite actors precipitated the break-up of the Shiite electoral alliance known as *al-Ittifaq* (the United Iraqi Alliance, UIA). The Sadrists bolted from the coalition in mid-September 2007 and have since sought to undermine the ISCI-backed Maliki government. Concurrently, they improved ties with Fadhila (a party founded in 2003 by the Najaf-based cleric Muhammad al-Ya`qubi, a disciple of Muqtada’s father, whose popular base is concentrated in the far south), their main rival in Basra with which they recently had clashed.

...[A Sadrist in Baghdad told the ICG at interview that:] “For almost a year, the Sadrists stopped criticising or insulting Sistani’s Marja`iya. But Sadrists preachers have now resumed harsh denunciations. I attended Friday prayer. In his sermon, the sheikh referred to Sistani by citing Imam Ali’s statement: ‘the worst individuals are pious people who turn bad [shurr al-nas al-‘ulama idha fasadu]’. He also quoted one of the prophet’s sayings, ‘a religious leader will appear and seek to conquer you. He will hail from Sijistan [the origin and veracity of this saying remains unclear]’. He then remarked that, in its Arabic form, Sijistan becomes Sistan. Attacks against Sistani have become increasingly frequent among some Shiites”, Crisis Group interview, Sadrist, Baghdad, October 2007 (see pp.12: n.77, 14: n.94, in: International Crisis Group 2008, ‘Iraq’s Civil War, the Sadrists and the Surge’, Middle East Report N°72, 7 February – Attachment 39).

UNHCR’s April 2009 report notes a number of attacks against prominent followers of Al-Sistani although, in all cases, the perpetrators of the attacks would appear to remain unknown. The examples include attacks across a range of locales including Basrah, Kerbala, and Kut, it would not appear that any such recent attacks have been reported from Thiqr (for examples of attacks on prominent Sistani followers, see p.123: n.585, p.126: n.600, p.131: n.632, p.161: n.860, in: UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2009, *Eligibility Guidelines For Assessing The International Protection Needs Of Iraqi Asylum-Seekers*, April – Attachment 2).

[Further information on security in Thiqr](#): Should further detail be required, an overview follows below detailing significant information from recent major assessments of note. [Further information on the Sadr/Sistani relationship](#) is also supplied should it be required.

### **Further information on security in Thiqr**

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) maintains a multi-stakeholder research group, the Inter-Agency Information and Analysis Unit (IAU), which employs information retrieved from a range of UN agencies and partner NGOs to produce profiles on security and livelihood conditions in Iraq’s various governorates. The most recent Thi-Qar Governorate Profile was produced in July 2009. According to this report: “The security situation remains relatively calm” in Thi-Qar. A security graph in the report shows very few civilian deaths Thi-Qar as a consequence of security incidents during the latter half of 2008. A total of 11 security related civilian deaths are shown for the period June 2008 to December 2008 of which eight occurred in August 2008. When looking at other data noted on the Thi-Qar Governorate Profile it should be noted that the demographic data appears to refer to the Salah al-Din Governorate. Extracts follow:

Two thirds of Thi-Qar’s IDP population come from Baghdad. An unusually high proportion (55%) of the governorate’s IDPs have expressed a desire to settle in their current location. The security situation remains relatively calm.

Thi-Qar performs poorly according to many humanitarian and developmental indicators. Poverty is widespread in the governorate, with the populations of the Marshland districts of Al-Shatra and Al-Chibayish experiencing the highest poverty rates. Unemployment is almost double the national average for both men and women, with Al-Shatra experiencing the highest levels. Illiteracy and poor education are major problems for women outside Nassriya district, and low female labour force participation is prevalent in all districts. The quality of electricity supply is generally very good, with the exception of Rifa’i district, where it is extremely poor. Water access is extremely poor outside Nassriya. Acute malnutrition among children in Al-Shatra is triple the national average (UN Inter-Agency Information and

Analysis Unit 2009, 'Thi-Qar Governorate Profile', July [http://www.iauiraq.org/reports/GP-Thi-Qar\\_v1.pdf](http://www.iauiraq.org/reports/GP-Thi-Qar_v1.pdf) – Accessed 30 September 2009 – Attachment 3).

According to UNHCR's April 2009 *Eligibility Guidelines For Assessing The International Protection Needs Of Iraqi Asylum-Seekers* Thi-Qar is among those governorates where security is "relatively calm and stable, although political power struggles at times turn violent". This noted Thi-Qar is also listed among those locales in which: "Pro-Sadrists have shown that they are still a political force to be reckoned with". Further details follow:

#### Diwaniyah, Muthanna and Thi-Qar Governorates

219. The situation in these three governorates of the Lower South appears to be relatively stable, and there have been no major security incidents in 2008. Given that the MNF-I presence in these governorates is limited, car bombs, roadside bombs and grenade attacks are infrequent and usually specifically targeted at MNF-I convoys or the major MNF-I base at Tallil Air Station southwest of Nasseriyah. On 11 March 2008, a roadside bomb targeted a bus near Al-Batha military base on the Nasseriyah – Basrah road, killing at least 14 people and injuring 18 others.

220. The capitals of the three Governorates (Diwaniyah, Samawa and Nasseriyah) have all seen occasional outbreaks of violence in the past, mostly clashes among the two Shi'ite rivals, the JAM and the Badr Organization affiliated with ISCI, that usually ended after MNF-I intervention. Violence flared again in March, when the Iraqi Government began a crackdown against Shi'ite militiamen in Basrah, prompting reprisal attacks by Sadr's followers across the Southern Governorates. Those clashes quickly subsided when Muqtada Al-Sadr ordered his forces to stand down.

221. Recent security operations by the ISF in all three Governorates, with support from the MNF-I, led to the arrest of alleged militia leaders and the confiscation of weaponry. Allegedly, Iran-supported "Special Groups" operated three training camps in the Southern Governorates, including in Diwaniyah and Thi-Qar. Reports suggest that "Special Groups" are returning to Iraq. The police chief of Thi-Qar Governorate told AFP in September 2008 that some groups had arrived in Nasseriyah and that 20 motorcycle bombs had been seized. He said that these bombs were intended to target officials in Iraq and Nasseriyah. Consequently, the local authorities put in place tight security measures, including a ban on the use of motorcycles. In recent months, ISF has successfully defused a number of IEDs in Thi-Qar and seized weapon stockpiles. For example, on 2 December 2008, the police defused 10 bombs believed to have been placed to target the motorcade of PM Al-Maliki who was on a visit to the province. On 6 November 2008, an explosive charge placed in the Muthanna health department near the office of the director was defused.

For example, on 17 February 2008, ISF defused two explosive charges planted on a road linking Nasseriyah to Al-Refae suburb; Aswat Al Iraq, Two roadside bombs defused in Thi-Qar, 17 February 2009, <http://en.aswataliraq.info/wp-content/themes/s1/print.php?p=108249> ; on 11 February 2009, police defused a heavy and highly explosive roadside bomb that was planted near a school in Nasseriyah City; Aswat Al Iraq, Heavy, highly explosive charge defused in Nasseriyah 11 February 2009, <http://en.aswataliraq.info/wp-content/themes/s1/print.php?p=107933> ; on 14 January 2009, police defused a motorbike rigged with explosives in Nasseriyah City; VOI, Motorbike Bomb Defused in Thi-Qar, 15 January 2009, [http://www.iraqupdates.com/p\\_articles.php/article/43420](http://www.iraqupdates.com/p_articles.php/article/43420) ; and on 1 November 2008, police dismantled a bike bomb in Al-Hammar District east of Nasseriyah; Aswat Al Iraq, Bike bomb dismantled in Thi-Qar, 2 November 2008, <http://en.aswataliraq.info/?p=102347> (UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2009, *Eligibility Guidelines For Assessing The International Protection Needs Of Iraqi Asylum-Seekers*, April – Attachment 2).

UNHCR's April 2009 report also provides an overview of the recent provincial election results:

Election results from the provincial elections, released by the Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq (IHEC) on 19 February 2009,<sup>256</sup> indicate a major shift in the balance of power among the Shi'ite parties as the nationalist list supported by PM Al-Maliki, State of Law, made substantive gains in Baghdad, Basrah and several other Southern governorates. ISCI, which has strong ties to the religious establishment and dominated the provincial councils in Baghdad and most southern governorates since 2005, has been significantly decimated as voters apparently rejected its explicit sectarian identity and ambitions to decentralize the country along sectarian lines. It is also widely held responsible for failing to improve public services. Pro-Sadrists have shown that they are still a political force to be reckoned with, particularly in Baghdad, Najef, Missan and Thi-Qar, while Fadhila lost seats across Iraq, including in its former stronghold Basrah.

...In the aftermath of the elections, various parties made accusations of fraud and intimidation, fuelling fears that the transfer of political power may not be peaceful.<sup>267</sup> Accusations and threats of a violent backlash were most pronounced in Sunni-dominated Al-Anbar Governorate, where the tribal-based Awakening Councils were pitted against the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP). Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha, the leader of the Sunni Awakening, warned that the result threatened to reignite the insurgency and Sheikh Ali Al-Hatem, another local tribal leader who had backed another tribal-led state, warned that any outbreak of violence over the election results could become an intra-tribal conflict.<sup>268</sup> It should also be noted that pro-Sadrists vowed to appeal the results in Baghdad, Diwaniyah, Najef and Missan.

...In most governorates, no single party won a majority enough to rule on its own. An exception is Basrah, where the State of Law list won 57% of the seats (although it received only 37% of the votes). In Baghdad and Wassit, the list won a near majority (49% of the seats in Baghdad and 46% of the seats in Wassit). Across the Shi'ite-majority governorates, the State of Law list is in the lead, followed by either ISCI or the Sadrists competing for the second biggest number of seats. This fact makes it necessary to forge power-sharing alliances.

...Certainly, the elections solidified PM Al-Maliki's power basis and might lead to a further centralization of government power. This may deepen the conflict with his former allies, ISCI and the Kurdish parties, and further complicate the finding of a viable compromise with the Kurdish parties on the status of "disputed areas" and other pending issues. The elections also strengthened PM Al-Maliki's position ahead of national elections, in which he is said to be seeking to renew his mandate. While the political landscape has clearly shifted as a result of the provincial elections, the majority of seats in the CoR will continue to be held by parties that were disfavoured by the voters in the provincial elections until national elections are held in December 2009 (UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2009, *Eligibility Guidelines For Assessing The International Protection Needs Of Iraqi Asylum-Seekers*, April – Attachment 2).

Previous research on security in the Thi Qar governorate has previously been provided by the RRT Research Service as *Research Response IRQ33678* of October 2008, and this is supplied as Attachment 30 (RRT Research & Information 2009, *Research Response IRQ33678*, 3 October – Attachment 30).

### **Further information on the Sadr/Sistani relationship**

In March 2007 the Jamestown Foundation's Babak Rahimi provided the following overview of the manner in which the two clerics have related to each other as both rivals and sometime

partners, with Sistani's association with the Abdul Aziz al-Hakim led Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq also complicating the relationship:

Earlier in 2003, the erratic politics of al-Sadr, with his mix of Arab nationalism and militant chiliastic ideology, was considered to eventually collide with al-Sistani's quietist form of Shi'ism, which advocates that clerics should maintain a clear distance from day-to-day state politics. Since 2004, however, an unlikely alliance has gradually taken form between the former adversaries, which is bound to reshape Iraqi Shiite politics in the years to come.

...Despite a period of tension with the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and the Badr Organization, the largest Shiite militia that backed al-Sistani, al-Sadr finally joined forces with a Shiite-led political party approved by al-Sistani, the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), in the December 2005 elections. Since 2004, al-Sadr and al-Sistani have met a number of times to discuss issues related to elections, including a major meeting in mid-September 2004 that included Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, al-Sadr's main rival. In early September 2004, in a potentially explosive incident, al-Sistani helped al-Sadr by asking the Iraqi police to end the siege of his office in Najaf.

...After the January and December 2005 elections, al-Sistani refused to call for the disarming of the Mahdi militia. This decision was made in connection with the rise of sectarian tensions unleashed after the bombing of the Shiite al-Askari Shrine in Samarra in February 2006. With the absence of a strong centralized government in Baghdad, al-Sistani considered al-Sadr's militia as a major force to protect the Shiite community and its sacred shrines against Sunni extremist attacks. He even used al-Sadr to negotiate with the Sunni clerics about the looming problem of sectarian violence.

In an important meeting in early January of this year, al-Sistani persuaded al-Sadr to end his boycott of the UIA and return to the parliament. Al-Sadr agreed, and his followers returned to the parliament later that month. In another major meeting mid-February, al-Sadr sought the counsel of al-Sistani about attacks and death threats he was receiving from his own militia. Following al-Sistani's advice, al-Sadr reportedly left Iraq for Iran and he is now staying at his cousin's house, Jafar al-Sadr, in Qom]. This final meeting highlights the growing dependence of al-Sadr on al-Sistani's religious and intellectual authority, which has increased considerably since the toppling of Saddam's regime. For now, al-Sistani appears to have tamed al-Sadr, especially by helping him in becoming a major figure to advance an anti-sectarian platform (Rahimi, B. 2007, 'The Sadr-Sistani Relationship', *Jamestown Terrorism Review*, 30 March, vol.5: no.6  
[http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=1055](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=1055) – Accessed 11 November 2009 – Attachment 29).

Some months later, in May 2007, Rahimi commented that the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq' "recent pledge of allegiance to al-Sistani, then, could be viewed as a shrewd way to create a rift between Najaf [the Shia establishment led by Al-Sistani] and al-Sadr by forcing al-Sistani to choose sides between them – even though al-Sistani would most likely refuse such factional politics". Rahimi also observed at this time that: the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq's "tactic is to indirectly force al-Sadr to become estranged from Najaf by renewing the party's allegiance to al-Sistani; at this crucial stage of the political game, it appears that alienating al-Sadr from Najaf remains a high priority for al-Hakim". On 9 April 2008 *The Long War Journal's* Bill Roggio reported that Al-Sistani had "backed the government's position that the Mahdi Army should surrender its weapons" in what was being seen as "the latest in a series of moves to politically isolate the Sadrism movement and delegitimize the Mahdi Army" (Rahimi, B. 2007, 'A Shiite Storm Looms on the Horizon: Sadr and SIIC Relations', *Terrorism Monitor*, 24 May

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## **2. How easy is it for an Arab Iraqi from one part of Iraq to resettle in another part?**

As is noted above, Thiqr is often referred to as one of the quietist governorates in Iraq and one in which Sadrist have very little influence compared to places such as Baghdad and Basrah. Thiqr also continues to host large numbers of Shia internally displaced persons fleeing violence in other parts of Iraq. According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM): “IDP families in Thi Qar are predominantly Shia Muslim Arabs who fled Baghdad, Salah al-Din and Diyala in 2006. Nearly 90% say they fled after being targeted for their religious identity. Many report feeling safer in Thi Qar due to a homogenous host community and pre-existing ties with extended family”. It is also reported of Thiqr that: “The majority of IDP families in Thi Qar (58%) wish to stay and integrate into their current locations of displacement”. Even so, the northern Kurdish governorates of Dahuk, Erbil and Sulamanyah are reported to have the best security in Iraq but relocation to these Kurdish areas is said to very difficult for ethnic Arabs. The relocation of Shia Arabs to Sunni Arab dominated governorates such as Salah al-Din and Diyala is generally not recommended for reasons relating to ongoing sectarian tensions. In any event resettlement from one area of Iraq to another can reportedly be very difficult to achieve. UNHCR’s April 2009 *Eligibility Guidelines For Assessing The International Protection Needs Of Iraqi Asylum-Seekers* advises that: “Common ethnic or religious backgrounds and existing tribal and family ties in the area of relocation are crucial”; and that: “This is particularly true for both towns and rural areas, where newcomers, particularly when he/she does not belong to the existing sect, tribes or families, may be discriminated against” (International Organisation for Migration 2009, ‘Thiqr Governorate Profile: Sept 2009 IOM IDP and Returnee Assessment’, September [http://www.iom-iraq.net/Library/idp\\_gov\\_profiles/2009/Governorate%20Profiles%20-%20Thi%20Qar.pdf](http://www.iom-iraq.net/Library/idp_gov_profiles/2009/Governorate%20Profiles%20-%20Thi%20Qar.pdf) – Accessed 12 November 2009 – Attachment 31; for a comparative appreciation of security across Iraqs southern, central and northern regions, see pp.7-10 in: Danish Immigration Service, the Danish Refugee Council & Landinfo 2009, *Security and Human Rights Issues in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), and South/Central Iraq (S/C Iraq) Report from the Danish Immigration Service’s (DIS), the Danish Refugee Council’s (DRC) and Landinfo’s joint fact finding mission to Erbil and Sulaymaniyah, KRI; and Amman, Jordan 6 to 23 March 2009*, July <http://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/rdonlyres/5EAE4A3C-B13E-4D7F-99D6-8F62EA3B2888/0/Iraqreport09FINAL.pdf> – Accessed 10 August 2009 – Attachment 32; for an extensive assessment of the problems associated with relocation for an ethnic Shia Arab from, see the section Internal flight or relocation alternative (IFA/IRA) over pp.42–60 in: UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2009, *Eligibility Guidelines For*

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