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Perspectives on Iraq's Past, Present, and Future in the Works of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and Yusuf Salman Yusuf

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Abstract

Through a look at the writings of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and Yusuf Salman Yusuf, I argue that Iraq's communists and Islamists during the middle of the twentieth century could not escape a common language, common circumstances and conditions which framed their conceptions of the relationship between their pasts, presents, and futures. Their political visions did not come from their disparate traditions, although couched in those terms, but from their common circumstances and struggles towards the establishment of a sovereign, independent Iraqi nation. Despite their disagreements or variously framed answers, they were guided by similar questions. Yusuf Salman Yusuf, also known as Fahd, presented his vision of the future within the communist tradition, which subscribed to the view that a progressive future is premised on a complete break with the past. Sadr posited a better future that would be undetached from the past and previous experiences, including the Shiite tradition. Both of their visions, as I will argue here, were shaped by the conditions of possibility and shared language of their present. While both Fahd and Sadr espoused a teleological view of history, the former secular and the latter theological, their political decisions and actions remained grounded in the circumstances of their time and place, both of them primarily concerned with the fight against colonialism, the establishment of political sovereignty, and a developed future for their nation-state. Those actions were not fueled by their respective Marxist and Shiite traditions but from their shared conditions and overlapping questions and concerns.

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On 8 April 1980, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr was executed. His execution aroused no criticism from the West against the Iraqi regime, however, because Sadr had openly supported the Ayatollah Khomeini's regime in Iran and because the West was distracted by the turbulence in Iran that followed the revolution. Governments both in the West and in the region were concerned that the Iranian revolution would be "exported," and they set about eliminating that threat. However, Sadr and Muhsin al-Hakim's eldest son Yusuf put their weight behind Khomeini. On the selection of Ayatollah Khomeini, see also Ajami, Fouad, *The Vanished Imam, Musa al-Sadr and the Shia of Lebanon* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), 194. 35 Qubanchi, *al-Jihād al-Siyāsī*, 74. Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr's relations with the Iraqi president were complex. He incorporated the slogan, "No, No, to America; No, No, to Israel," into his Friday sermons. He used to predict publicly that either the United States or Israel would assassinate him. Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr's soaring reputation and influence made him a suspect to the Iraqi president. Saddam Hussein's long-harbored distrust for Iraq's Shi'ite community only intensified after their 1991 uprising. In 1980, the regime executed Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, at the time, the family's patriarch. In 1999, assassins gunned down not only Muqtada's father but also Mu'mil and Mustapha, two of his three brothers. The government denied responsibility for the ayatollah's assassination.