

# “Securing Democracy in Iraq”: Sectarian Politics and Segregation in Baghdad, 2003—2007

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Physical, sectarian-based segregation is a recent phenomenon in Baghdad. This essay examines how this urban condition has resulted from U.S. political interventions in occupied Iraq, which have actively reproduced, intensified, codified and spatially reinforced the significance of sectarian difference. It discusses the emergence of sectarian militias, details the violent practices used to consolidate territory, and maps the transformation of once heterogeneous neighborhoods into separate Shi'a and Sunni enclaves. By focusing on intersecting security discourses and the erection of concrete walls by the occupying Multi-National Forces (MNF), the essay argues that Baghdad's new segregated neighborhoods have hardened and intensified patterns of internal conflict, diminishing the potential for reconciliation.

Sectarian identity marks people and demarcates space in Baghdad today as never before. Since the U.S.-led invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003, a person's identity as either Shi'a or Sunni Muslim carries new political significance in the city. Since 2006, sectarian identity has also been transformed into a spatial marker that designates where a person can safely move, live and work in the city. By early 2007, sectarian militias had effectively displaced and segregated Baghdad residents into homogeneously populated Shi'a or Sunni neighborhoods. But since then, a network of concrete security walls, constructed by the occupying Multi-National Forces (MNF) and monitored by Iraqi police units, have produced a new spatial condition that has hardened and intensified divisions between population groups and transformed the experience of everyday life in Baghdad.

Sectarian segregation is a recent phenomenon in the Iraqi capital, where Sunni and Shi'a Muslims once regularly married, resided and worked together in shared communities, families and neighborhoods. Before the current occupation, Baghdad residents could traverse the city without concern for sectarian difference within the population.

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Indeed, the new political significance and spatial meaning of sectarian difference has so transformed the city that it is now unrecognizable to most Iraqis. The present condition raises several important questions: How did the actions by occupying authorities help politicize sectarian identities after the removal of Saddam Hussein? How have these politicized identities transformed Baghdad's previously mixed neighborhoods into segregated militia territories? And what role has the construction of security walls separating Sunni and Shi'a areas played in the perpetuation of urban segregation?

This essay addresses these questions in several ways. First, it examines the political interventions following the U.S.-led invasion in 2003 that codified the political significance of sectarian difference within Iraq's emerging government. Second, it considers how the divisive rationale of political sectarianism has determined the spatial reordering of the city. Last, it focuses on the intersection of security discourses and practices of segregation to analyze the impact of security walls in Baghdad.

For residents of Baghdad, the network of MNF walls and checkpoints provide a constant reminder of the burden of military occupation. The concrete walls, punctured occasionally by armed checkpoints, obstruct the flow of everyday life, increasing traffic, restricting the mobility of pedestrians and vehicles, and creating dependence on sanctioned sectarian militias, soldiers and police. By the end of 2007, however, in conjunction with a cease-fire declared by the Shi'a leader Muqtada al-Sadr, this strategic system of walls and surveillance points had reportedly succeeded in improving security in the city. Nevertheless, the MNF's subsequent decision to begin to bring down the walls has revealed the fragile nature of security conditions in segregated Baghdad, where sectarian political parties and militias continue to rule. In 2010, sectarian and MNF-targeted violence is on the rise again. And Baghdad residents remain obliged to invent subversive tactics and temporary solutions to work around or adapt to daily obstacles imposed by the divided spatial condition.

This essay aims to unsettle assumptions that sectarian segregation in Baghdad is the inevitable outcome of removing former President Saddam Hussein from power and, in effect, "taking the lid off" bottled-up sectarian tensions.<sup>1</sup> It argues that political interventions sanctioned by the U.S.-led occupation have fundamentally reproduced and codified the political significance of sectarian difference in Iraq, which Sunni insurgent groups, Shi'a militias, and government parties have operationalized to consolidate territory and transform the city. Furthermore, the essay shows that while the MNF walls may have helped temporarily arrest the conflict, the strategic approach they represent neglects the overriding problem of sectarian division and produces a misleading illusion of security. Ultimately, the walls cannot provide sustainable and lasting conditions for the reconciliation of Baghdad's Sunni and Shi'a residents. On the contrary, they have perpetuated and intensified conditions of urban segregation.

This essay has been produced with some difficulty. Due to restrictions on access to the city since 2003, the author has not been able to carry out fieldwork in Baghdad. Therefore, the essay draws on qualitative and statistical evidence published in reports by international organizations and journalists working in Baghdad, as well as on correspondence between the author and Iraqi sources. However, to the extent possible, the author has relied on sources that represent events and experiences on the basis of interviews and surveys with a socioeconomically and religiously diverse cross-section of the city's population.

It should also be noted that the scope of this article is limited to examining segregation practices that affect Sunni and Shi'a Arabs living in the capital. It is unable to address the complex and problematic conditions of other ethnic and religious minorities. The author calls for further research to investigate how the current sectarian-based political structure continues to reinforce and produce urban violence. She also calls for further studies of tactics that residents use to work around or adapt to Baghdad's new geography.

#### "DEMOCRACY-BUILDING" OR THE REPRODUCTION OF SECTARIAN POLITICS?

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "sectarianism" as "adherence or excessive attachment to, or undue favouring of, a particular sect or party," especially a religious one.<sup>2</sup> Political sectarianism thus refers to a system of governance that favors and facilitates the empowerment of parties with platforms and constituencies defined on the basis of sectarian identity. Ussama Makdisi has argued that sectarianism is too often dismissed as "an upswelling of primordial religious solidarities," when in fact sectarian tensions are "actively produced" and must be analyzed as such. To this end, Makdisi has emphasized the ways in which political interventions have worked to establish "a new political order based on religious differentiation."<sup>3</sup> This essay uses Makdisi's critical approach to sectarianism as a framework for examining the emergence of sectarian-dominated politics in Iraq.

After the U.S.-led Multi-National Forces (MNF) declared war on Iraq on March 19, 2003, and succeeded in invading the country, the United States assumed authority over Iraq in place of the toppled Ba'ath regime through the establishment of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). In the months that followed, a series of political interventions enacted or facilitated by the CPA helped produce a political structure that empowered sectarian parties. It is crucial to trace sectarianism in Iraq back to these political interventions, because it was ultimately the rise to dominance by 2005 of governing parties with explicitly Shi'a loyalties that was most responsible for the later increase in violence in Baghdad.

During the period immediately following the invasion, the administration of U.S. President George W. Bush maintained a

discourse emphasizing the spread of democracy and freedom to the people of Iraq.<sup>4</sup> However, on March 6, 2003, without Senate confirmation, Bush unilaterally appointed L. Paul Bremer III as Presidential Envoy and Administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority.<sup>5</sup> The CPA had been charged with temporary powers of government in Iraq as a means to "restore conditions of security and stability, to create conditions in which the Iraqi people can freely determine their own political future (including by advancing efforts to restore and establish national and local institutions for representative governance)."<sup>6</sup> However, under Bremer, the CPA also executed official orders that privileged the religious difference between Sunnis and Shi'as as a fundamental political criterion.

One reason for this position was that senior CPA officials and Washington-based authorities had entered their project of "regime change" in Iraq with rigid and uncritical assumptions about religion, society and power in the country. A former CPA official explained that from the outset the agency viewed Iraq as an amalgam of "monolithic communities" that fit into narrowly defined political groups. Of these, Sunni Arabs were essentially equated with Saddam-Ba'ath loyalists, while Shi'a Arabs and Kurds were understood to represent the opposition to the former regime.<sup>7</sup> Relying on these narrow assumptions and working in cooperation with exiled Shi'a politicians who had vowed to eliminate the power base of the former Ba'ath regime, the CPA facilitated the emergence of a sectarian government in Baghdad. Ultimately, this new power structure failed to address the problematic sectarian favoritism formerly exercised by Saddam Hussein. Instead, it reproduced a new and even more divisive sectarian politics under the false banner of democracy.

During his years as dictator, Saddam Hussein had pursued the promotion and appointment of Sunni Arabs as high-ranking officials as a way to control rebellion within the Iraqi population — a policy that was especially important during the Iran-Iraq and first Gulf Wars. While in power, Hussein had also deliberately established a sectarian hierarchy within government ranks, largely empowering Sunni Arabs over Shi'as.<sup>8</sup> The former president viewed Iraq's Shi'a population as a threat, one that he claimed was backed by the Iranian and American governments. Hussein was also notorious for the brutal "Arabization" policies that displaced Iraqi Kurds in the north and Shi'a Arabs in the south in an attempt to control the country's ethno-sectarian demographics. And he pursued a violent campaign of persecution against Shi'a Muslims after the uprisings that followed the first Gulf War.

Although Hussein carried out such discriminatory and manipulative practices based on ethno-sectarian differences at the national scale, it was often noted by Iraqis that Shi'a and Sunni Arabs living in Baghdad did not regularly experience sectarian discrimination or segregation. According to the International Crisis Group, such differences were "largely social and cultural, endemic but relatively benign."<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Sunnis and Shi'as in the city continued to reside, socialize

and work in heterogeneous communities and neighborhoods as had historically been the case. In fact, Hussein's position toward sectarian groups was never black and white. He often manipulated sectarian symbolism in his propaganda, provocatively representing himself as a champion of both Shi'a and Sunni communities, irrespective of his secular Ba'ath Party affiliation.<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, Hussein's national policies did promote differential treatment of Iraqis based on ethno-sectarian identities, with visible impacts on the socioeconomic and political status of some Shi'as living in the capital. However, before his fall in 2003, these top-down designations failed to widely permeate the fabric of everyday life for the majority of Baghdad's residents.

Following the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the CPA executed a succession of quick-fire decrees and appointments that served to reproduce, magnify and codify differential treatment of Shi'as and Sunnis as the foundation of Iraq's new "democratic" political system. Just ten days after the invasion, Bremer signed an order to "de-Ba'athify" Iraqi society. This was followed by an order to dissolve all government ministries, political organizations, and military entities affiliated with the previous regime.<sup>11</sup> These CPA Orders, Numbers 1 and 2, categorically disenfranchised high-ranking Ba'ath Party members and government officials from participation in Iraq's future government, irrespective of whether they continued to pledge support to the former Ba'ath regime. Because Hussein had established a sectarian hierarchy within his government, Baghdad University Professor Nabil Younis explained that "de-Ba'athification [turned] out to be de-Sunnification."<sup>12</sup> Thus, in the context of the power vacuum created in the wake of Hussein's fall, the de-Ba'athification policy reproduced the differential treatment of citizens based on sectarian difference.

The initial CPA order signaled that the emerging Iraqi political system would not only reproduce but also institutionalize sectarianism after 2003. By opening the way for Shi'a politicians and blocking Sunni leaders from participating in a new Iraqi government, Bremer's de-Ba'athification order endowed sectarian identities with critical political significance. Overnight, thousands of Sunnis were left jobless and without any prospects of assistance or employment from the new government. Thereafter, resistance to the new order being imposed by the occupational authority came in many forms — from public demonstrations to voting boycotts — and was increasingly led by disaffected Sunnis. It was hardly surprising, then, that armed resistance to foreign occupation quickly formed, and this movement soon came to be dominated by disenfranchised former Ba'ath soldiers and officials. A 2006 International Crisis Group report addressed this salient character of the "insurgency" in Baghdad: "Although the insurgency comprised both Sunnis and Shiites at the beginning, over time it assumed a predominantly Sunni (Arab) character because it fed especially on the disaffection of Sunni Arabs who felt disenfranchised and marginalized."<sup>13</sup>

Bremer reinforced the importance of sectarian identity on July 13, 2003, in his order establishing the Interim Governing Council (IGC) as “the principal body of the Iraqi interim administration.”<sup>14</sup> Without seeking official consensus from Iraqi leaders, this order specified that the council be composed according to sectarian criteria, and set quotas that predetermined a Shi’a majority. Furthermore, during the previous month, the CPA had collaborated exclusively with the country’s exiled Shi’a leadership to hand-pick IGC members through an undemocratic process. The process was later criticized for its lack of transparency, its failure to consult a sufficiently broad spectrum of Iraqi political parties, and its imposition of divide-and-rule tactics that privileged Iraqi leadership on the basis of ethnic and sectarian identities.<sup>15</sup>

The first general elections in Iraq following the U.S.-led invasion took place a year and a half later, in January 2005. As expected, their outcome reflected the sectarian political structure predetermined by CPA orders and quotas. Indeed, the Shi’a leadership, selected by the CPA during the first years of the occupation, continued to dominate. Its United Iraqi Alliance received a clear plurality with 140 interim National Assembly seats, followed by the representatives of two Kurdish parties and a variety of Sunni, Assyrian and Turkomen representatives.<sup>16</sup> The International Crisis Group suggested that “Iraqis searching for leadership and stability in profoundly uncertain times essentially turned the elections into confessional exercises.”<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, the Iraq Islamic Party, the country’s largest block of Sunni representatives (and a majority of Sunni voters), boycotted the January 2005 elections, which further cleared the way for the triumph of the CPA’s hand-picked Shi’a leadership.

Four months after the general elections, the newly formed Iraqi government established a constitutional committee, which was charged with writing a new Iraqi constitution in less than three months.<sup>18</sup> Fifteen Sunni Arab representatives were invited to participate in the drafting process in an attempt to make up for the lack of Sunni representation in the 55-member National Assembly committee. Mijbel Sheikh Issa, one of the fifteen invited representatives, described his participation in this process:

*[Shi’a and Kurdish leaders had] already made their own decision. We Sunnis joined the committee very late. They thought they had chosen the Sunnis who would not discuss matters with them. They thought that we would come and sign the papers. They were not expecting us to respond to them and make comments.<sup>19</sup>*

According to third-party documentation of the committee process, most of the objections and comments raised by Sunni representatives remained unresolved by the time the final draft was submitted. Reportedly, some key committee negotiations took place apart from official channels in the homes and offices of Kurdish and Shi’a leaders. Eventually,

in protest, the Sunni Arab representatives withdrew from the drafting process. Yet, despite this setback, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld insisted, “We don’t want any delays [in the constitutional process]. They’re simply going to have to make the compromises necessary and get on with it.”<sup>20</sup> Ultimately, pressure by the United States forced the Iraqi government to complete the process without reaching consensus among all parties.<sup>21</sup> The resulting constitution, when adopted, further codified the sectarian political system established during the first years of the occupation. Professor Kanan Makiya, an Iraqi exile and early proponent of the U.S. invasion, emphasized that its language guaranteed a future of “disunity” and “diminished sovereignty,” because it encouraged the breakdown of centralized political and economic power into protected ethno-sectarian regions.<sup>22</sup>

In December 2005, parliamentary elections resulted in another Shi’a majority government, in which the CPA-nurtured anti-Ba’ath Shi’a parties captured 128 of the 275 seats in a new Iraqi Parliament. Iraq’s government was dominated by the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) — a coalition of the Shi’a Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and the Da’wa Party — followed by a minority 53-seat coalition of Kurdish parties.<sup>23</sup> By the close of the year, attacks by insurgent militias had also taken on a clearly sectarian bent. Early cooperation between resistance groups, comprised of masses of disenfranchised Sunnis and the paramilitary Mahdi Army under the command of Shi’a cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, had fallen apart by mid-2004.<sup>24</sup> And the 2005 elections had only confirmed the ascendancy of U.S.-backed Shi’a political parties. Meanwhile, the Sunni-based resistance movement consolidated under the leadership of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian who was the founder of Al-Qaeda in Iraq. His leadership galvanized Sunni insurgents into a campaign of attacks against Shi’a political targets, and eventually Shi’a communities.

Publicly, religious leaders and political officials in Baghdad condemned the escalation of sectarian violence, and especially discouraged retribution attacks. However, the 2005 elections had effectively handed the SCIRI control of Iraq’s Interior Ministry, opening the door for its militarized arm, the Badr Organization, to take control of the Iraqi police force and use state power to target insurgent groups like Al-Qaeda in Iraq.<sup>25</sup> An investigation by the *Los Angeles Times* in late 2005 reported that Shi’a militia factions dominated the ranks of Baghdad’s police force, and that these militiamen had been encouraged to enlist in the Iraq’s national security forces under CPA Order 91 in June 2004.<sup>26</sup> According to the International Crisis Group:

*Iraqis witnessed a steep rise in killings of Sunnis that could not be explained by the fight against insurgents alone. Carried out during curfew hours in the dead of night and reportedly involving armed men dressed in police or military uniforms arriving in cars bearing state emblems, raids*

*in predominantly Sunni towns or neighbourhoods appeared to cast a wide net. Those seized later turned up in detention centres or, with a disturbing frequency, in the morgue after having been found — hands tied behind their backs, blindfolded, teeth broken, shot — in a ditch or river. These raids prompted suspicions that they were carried out by Badr members operating under government identity and targeted the Sunni community rather than any particular insurgent group or criminal gang.*<sup>27</sup>

By 2005, the violence in the capital (bombings, kidnappings and assassinations), which had previously been carried out by a unified national resistance movement against MNF troops, had become explicitly linked to divided sectarian militias working both within and against the new Iraqi government.<sup>28</sup> Shi'a and Sunni insurgent groups identified vulnerable communities, families, and individual civilian residents in Baghdad according to sectarian identity, and transformed them into targets for politically driven retaliation attacks. Then in early 2006 a further significant shift occurred, and the sectarian violence that had been motivated by general political grievances began to manifest itself in practices aimed at dividing the city into distinct Sunni and Shi'a neighborhoods.

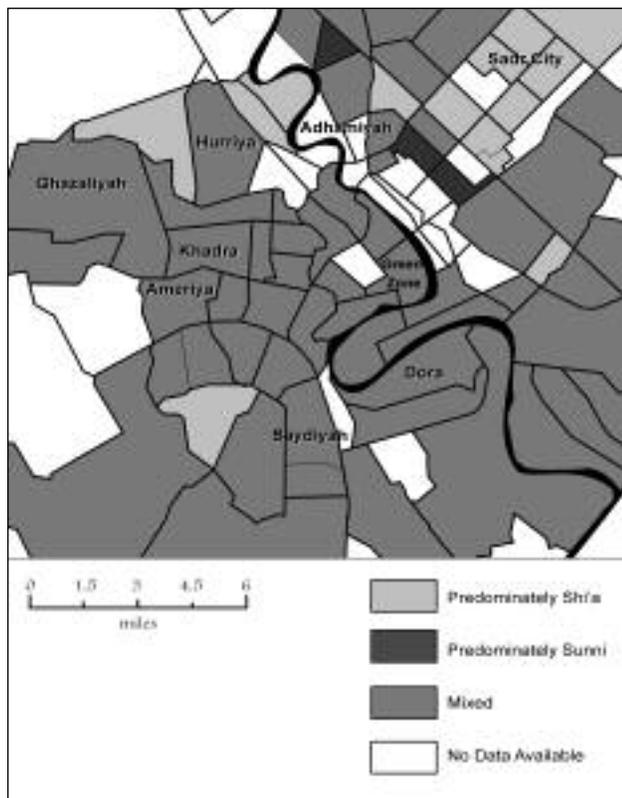
#### FROM MIXED NEIGHBORHOODS TO SEGREGATED TERRITORIES

In late February of 2006 militants detonated explosives inside the al-Askari Mosque in Samarra, demolishing the golden dome of this sacred Shi'a shrine (FIG. 1).<sup>29</sup> It was the most spectacular incidence of sectarian violence in Baghdad to date. Shortly afterwards, in retaliation, the newly empowered Shi'a-dominated police force and the paramilitary Mahdi Army launched a series of attacks citywide that targeted Sunni militia fighters and Sunni civilians. The attacks were part of an aggressive campaign set in motion by al-Sadr and directed at mixed neighborhoods throughout the city, which sought to establish Shi'a-controlled territories and amass political and economic power. As Derek Gregory has observed, "Politically these territorial gains were of immense symbolic significance. This was, after all, the capital city."<sup>30</sup>

Throughout 2006 the Mahdi Army battled opposing Sunni militias in an aggressive campaign to displace civilians from contested neighborhoods. And within one year the divisions codified by the CPA in Iraq's political system had been replicated in Baghdad's fractured and segregated urban landscape. Brutal practices were used by militias on both sides to seize territory and displace opposing populations. The demographic change in Baghdad from 2006 to 2007 could be clearly mapped. The new sectarian division of the city had serious impacts on the lives of all residents of the capital.



**FIGURE 1.** *The February 2006 bombing in Samarra destroyed the golden dome of one of Iraq's most famous Shi'a shrines, making it the largest and most spectacular sectarian attack to that date. AP Photo/Khalid Mohammed from flickr.com.*



**FIGURE 2.** Baghdad prior to February 2006. The map shows the relative prevalence of Sunni, Shi'a and "mixed" areas before the dramatic rise in sectarian violence and displacement in 2006. It indicates that the majority of neighborhoods were home to both Sunnis and Shi'as, with a few exceptions such as the low-income district of Sadr City in eastern Baghdad. Source: based on Map 2 in *International Medical Corps, "Iraqis on the Move: Sectarian Displacement in Baghdad"* (2007).

A map of Baghdad prior to February 2006 illustrates the predominance of neighborhoods where Sunni and Shi'a residents lived together (FIG.2). Some such "mixed" areas, such as Ameriya and Adhamiyah, were predominantly Sunni with a significant presence of Shi'a families; others, such as Hurriya and sectors adjacent to Sadr City, were home to a majority of Shi'a families, but with extensive numbers of Sunni families. According to Ala Hussain Al-Qazzaz, a former director general and advisor to the Iraq Housing Commission at the Ministry of Construction and Housing, "religion or sect never played a major role in determining where people lived prior to 2003."<sup>31</sup> Historically, Al-Qazzaz explained, Iraqis tended to reside in the same neighborhoods where their families had first settled when they arrived in Baghdad during Ottoman times.

The importance of these traditional settlement patterns in the construction of social networks was stressed in a Ministry of Planning and Development report: "Traditionally, social life in Iraq is tied to family and clan relations, and

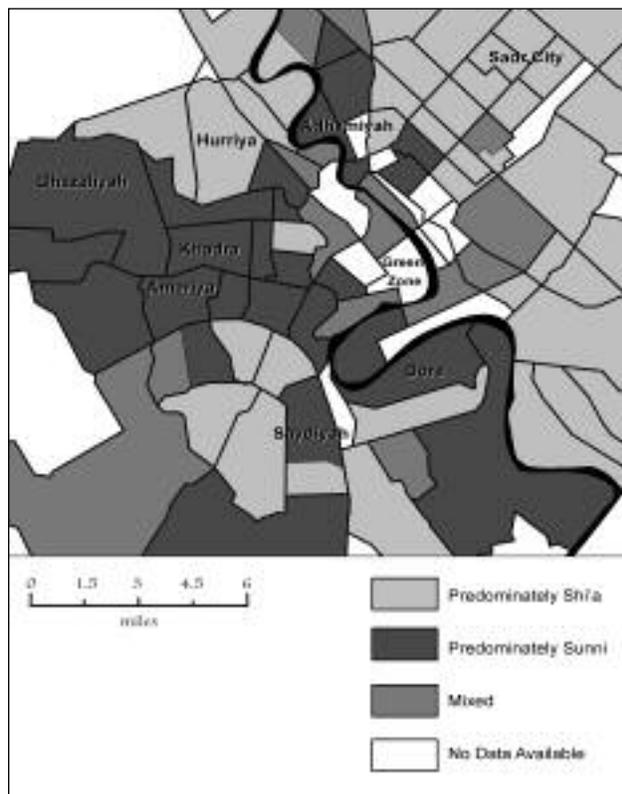
social networks are often centered around the *mahalla*. Distance to friends, relatives, and family are important factors for quality of life and the ability to seek advice and share experiences."<sup>32</sup> Before the 2006 campaigns, most Iraqis owned the same properties their families had occupied for generations; families generally only moved when necessary to sustain or improve their economic circumstances. Moreover, according to Al-Qazzaz, homes were traditionally passed down through families, endowing them with emotional and social significance that tied families to neighborhoods. Omar Fekeiki, an Iraqi journalist and blogger, has described shared traditions as part of the richness of Baghdad's historically diverse communities. He recounted, for example, how every year his family and its Sunni neighbors would join local Shi'a families during the celebration of Ashura, participating in such social rituals as stirring large pots together as part of the festivities.<sup>33</sup>

The map of Baghdad prior to February 2006 showed just such a general distribution of heterogeneous neighborhoods throughout the capital — with a few exceptions, such as "Sadr City" in eastern Baghdad. Formerly referred to "Saddam City," and prior to that as "Al-Thawra," Sadr City is a dense, regularized residential district, originally established in the 1960s as a public housing project for low-income, mostly Shi'a families (FIG.3). Largely neglected by Hussein during the 1980s and 1990s, it became a recruiting ground for the paramilitary force, known as the Mahdi Army, which eventually orchestrated a campaign of widespread civilian displacement throughout Baghdad.

Following the Samarra bombing in February 2006, unprecedented levels of population displacement began to appear among Iraqis, reaching as many as four million people worldwide by September 2007.<sup>34</sup> By 2008 the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center estimated that more than 2.8 million Iraqis had been displaced within the country. Of these, sectarian violence was estimated to have displaced more than 1.6 million.<sup>35</sup> At the national scale, displacement resulted in migration that reflected historical ethno-sectarian settlement patterns, with Shi'as concentrating to the south, Sunnis to the west, and Kurds to the north. However, in the city of Baghdad, where most neighborhoods had heterogeneous populations, forced migration after February 2006 drastically transformed urban life by establishing radical new distinctions between Sunni and Shi'a areas of residence.

Although Sunni militias had begun to drive Shi'a residents out of their homes in mixed but predominantly Sunni areas before 2006, their efforts did not compare in scale or impact to the strategic campaign of the Mahdi Army following the Samarra bombing. From Sadr City, the Mahdi Army executed a successful campaign throughout 2006 to drive Sunni residents out of surrounding mixed neighborhoods. This was facilitated in large part by the SCIRI-controlled Interior Ministry's police force, staffed purposefully with Shi'a militiamen who were already notorious for extrajudicial

**FIGURE 3.** An aerial image of Sadr City reveals the distinct, regularized grid of public housing blocks in east Baghdad. The Iraqi government planned the public housing project in what was called the Al-Thawra district in the 1960s. The name has changed to Saddam City, and recently to Sadr City, but the district has remained a site of low-income, predominantly Shi'a residents. Source: Google Earth.



**FIGURE 4.** Map of Baghdad as of February 2007, indicating the dramatic transformation of the city's mixed neighborhoods. Following the campaign of Shi'a and Sunni militias to consolidate territory through the displacement of civilians, these largely came to be populated by residents identified with a single sect. By early 2007, the Mahdi Army had displaced Sunnis from most neighborhoods adjacent to Sadr City, and made significant inroads into western districts like Dora and Hurriyah. Thus, the city was not divided simply into east and west. Rather, certain neighborhoods that were previously mixed became battlegrounds until one sectarian militia was able to establish control. As the map shows, Sunni-dominated areas, including Adhamiyah, Saydiyah and Dora, were largely isolated within Shi'a controlled areas. Source: based on Map 3 in International Medical Corps, "Iraqis on the Move: Sectarian Displacement in Baghdad" (2007).

sectarian killings in 2005.<sup>36</sup> In addition to armed militia conflict and political assassinations, territorial expansion involved strategic practices intended to eliminate Sunni or Shi'a civilians from designated areas of the city. Charles Tripp has suggested that the battle for territory between Shi'a and Sunni militias reflected how "each side is still seeking to impress on the other that it cannot take everything, that its enemies are so formidable that some kind of deal — to share or devolve power, to divide the spoils — is required."<sup>37</sup>

The Mahdi Army campaign initially began on the eastern side of the Tigris River, driving Sunnis out of mixed neighborhoods adjacent to its Sadr City stronghold. However, as the map of Baghdad as of February 2007 shows, the city was not clearly divided into a Sunni-controlled west and Shi'a-controlled east (FIG. 4). Rather, Shi'a and Sunni militias fought for control of key areas throughout the city to ensure a strong presence on either side of the river. As a result, areas like Adhamiyah and Hurriyah changed from mixed neighborhoods to isolated sectarian enclaves surrounded by homogeneously populated areas controlled by the opposing sect. As a result, many neighborhoods that had been mixed but predominantly settled by Shi'a residents, such as Hurriyah, became sites of intense street fighting between the Mahdi Army and armed Sunni groups.<sup>38</sup>

Shi'a and Sunni militias both engaged in practices of intimidation, kidnapping, murder, and other forms of violence as a means to drive civilians identified with the opposing sect from their homes. These practices were carried out as an explicit strategy. In Baghdad, death threats, bombings, kidnappings, and widespread fear eventually forced the eviction of more than 400,000 Iraqis from their homes. Displaced residents who remained in the city typically moved to a different neighborhood that had come under the protection of the other sectarian militia.<sup>39</sup> In general, Sunni residents fled to the formerly mixed neighborhoods that Shi'as had left, and Shi'as fled to neighborhoods controlled by the Mahdi Army. Reportedly, the Mahdi Army cooperated with local mosques to arrange for Shi'a residents to move into the abandoned homes of Sunni families.<sup>40</sup> Yet while its campaign succeeded in expanding Shi'a territory westward, Sunni militias managed to keep control over a few key areas on either side of the river, including Adhamiyah, Ameriya and Dora. As the February 2007 map illustrates, the stark segregation of Sunnis and Shi'as into separate neighborhoods resulted in the isolation of several Sunni-populated neighborhoods, which were surrounded by Shi'a populated areas. By early 2007, an estimated 5.25 million out of Baghdad's total population of 7 million reportedly lived in areas dominated by a single sect.<sup>41</sup>

An International Organization for Migration (IOM) survey of displaced residents revealed that militia-issued threats against individual lives or the well-being of families on the basis of their sectarian identity were the primary reasons most Iraqis chose to move after February 2006. The IOM reported that such "threats" included kidnapping, murder, and verbal or written warnings conveyed through phone calls, text messages, leaflets and graffiti.<sup>42</sup> In addition to individual threats, messages intended to drive either Sunni or Shi'a residents out of a mixed neighborhood often included blanket intimidation tactics. Examples included the following graffiti, which appeared on walls where they would be widely seen: "Every household must contribute one man to the local militia. Whoever refuses, his house will be burned"; and "Our anger has reached its limits. To the followers of the dead Saddam, your end in hell is very close."<sup>43</sup>

General fear provoked by militia threats and armed street conflict was eventually very successful in displacing vulnerable residents from hostile areas.<sup>44</sup> Reportedly, residents occasionally resisted forced displacement, and many families risked their own safety to protect or hide neighbors after they had been threatened.<sup>45</sup> From his own family's experience, Fekeiki recounted that the separation of Sunnis and Shi'as did not come easily. When Shi'a families were driven out from his neighborhood, "the Sunni neighbors were sobbing, crying in the street, literally," and they gathered together to throw water behind the departing neighbors in a gesture expressing hope that they would soon return.<sup>46</sup> But resistance was largely futile.



**FIGURE 5.** *Fleeing their homes due to sectarian violence and intimidation, displaced Iraqis, like this family from the Dora neighborhood, packed belongings into vehicles and left the family house behind. Copyright The New York Times Company. Published online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/10/world/middleeast/10walls.html?pagewanted=all>, accessed February 1, 2009.*

Displacements were frequently brutal. Residents might sometimes have to abandon their homes within hours, or even minutes, of receiving a direct threat (FIG. 5).<sup>47</sup> According to the International Medical Corps, "families [were] given no time to rent or sell their houses, and they [were] not allowed to return to make arrangements for disposing of their property and belongings. Those who tried to sell their houses in anticipation of fleeing, [were] stopped by insurgents posting 'not for sale' or 'wanted' signs on their properties."<sup>48</sup> And in addition to those Baghdad residents who fled from one neighborhood to another, millions of others relied on social networks and personal financial resources to leave Iraq altogether, seeking asylum in other countries.<sup>49</sup> Most Baghdad residents, however, could not afford, or did not choose, to leave the city.

Such political pressure sometimes had severe impacts at the level of individual families. The overwhelming demand for housing pushed up rental prices in relatively secure areas, resulting in the eviction of families who could not afford to pay the increased amounts. In 2006, housing became a top concern and need in Baghdad because of increased competition, limited supply, inadequate quality, loss of income, and overcrowding.<sup>50</sup> By the end of the year, Istabraq al-Shouk, Iraq's Deputy Housing Minister, declared a national housing crisis, citing a shortage of at least two million units.<sup>51</sup>

Following displacement, many families transitioned into informal shared housing arrangements. Commonly, a host family in a relatively safe area would open its home to as many as two or three displaced families. Intended as a temporary solution to the crisis, this often meant that several families had to share the limited shelter, electricity, food and water meant for a single family.<sup>52</sup> Alternatively, thousands of

people in Baghdad squatted in abandoned houses, government buildings, and former military bases. Typically, however, these arrangements lasted only until militia or government authorities evicted the squatters.<sup>53</sup> In September 2006, hundreds of squatters in Baghdad held a public demonstration to protest their eviction from government buildings and schools, demanding that the authorities take action to address the housing crisis.<sup>54</sup>

However, local Shi'a and Sunni organizations, mosques, and militias were ultimately more effective than the Iraqi government in helping to relocate displaced families.<sup>55</sup> According to the IMC, "the abandoned houses of one sect's expelled families [were] given to newly arrived displaced families fleeing the violence from the opposite set — either for free, or at cheap rental fixed fees usually collected by local mosques."<sup>56</sup> Al-Qazzaz described the overall shift that occurred in the city: "most Iraqis believe that displacement and the eventual division of Baghdad will be permanent. Accordingly, they are trying to adapt to this fact. Any Iraqi who can build or buy a house now will definitely choose the area where the majority of his sect lives."<sup>57</sup>

The lived experience of Baghdad residents during 2006 has been compared with dark memories of Sarejevo in the 1990s. One newspaper report recounted how both cities came to be "latticed with boundaries that are never openly indicated but are passed on in fearful whispers among neighbors who have suffered horrific losses."<sup>58</sup> And a 2006 ICRC report further confirmed that during this period, "families [were] often too afraid to leave their homes to go to work or to shop and too afraid to send their children to school because of random violence and the threat of kidnapping for ransom."<sup>59</sup>

By 2007, the segregation of Shi'as and Sunnis into separate urban areas also severely restricted physical, social and economic mobility. Civilian residents not only found it impossible to return to old neighborhoods, but also to traverse the city safely through its proliferation of sectarian boundaries and checkpoints. Sectarian identity marked men, women and children as militia targets. According to a Red Cross report, people everywhere in Baghdad were cut off from normal access to jobs, education and social networks, forced to carve out new patterns of life, "as they search for ways to stay in their Sunni or Shiite neighbourhoods."<sup>60</sup>

To enforce the new patterns of territorial segregation, militias set up armed checkpoints, imposing random searches on individuals and automobiles. At these checkpoints, paramilitary soldiers often assumed a driver or passenger's sectarian identity based on name alone. To move about the city and subvert this sort of militia surveillance, Iraqi men increasingly resorted to acquiring and carrying two different *gensiyas*, or government-issued identification cards: one official card identified his actual name, while the second was an authentic-looking fake that bore a name identified with the opposite sect. Not only fake IDs, but also name changes, false license plates, religious bumper stickers, and mobile

ringtones served as sectarian markers, which men could use to manipulate sectarian identity and increase mobility in the segregated city.<sup>61</sup> Yet not even these extravagant ruses guaranteed safe passage in the city where it has been noted that "Shiites have killed Shiites and Sunnis have killed Sunnis out of uncertainty over whom to trust."<sup>62</sup>

Iraqi women suffered tremendously under these conditions, especially due to increased violence, restrictions on physical mobility, socioeconomic pressures, and changes in family life. Since men were the primary targets of general and sectarian violence, they frequently lost husbands, fathers, brothers and sons. As a result, the emotional and economic burden of supporting a household often fell on widows. Moreover, sectarian and gender-based violence — including kidnapping, carjacking and sexual assault — was used to target women directly and limit their mobility in Baghdad as never before. Sectarian segregation severed many women's access to jobs, support networks, and basic resources. During the height of displacement, according to one Iraqi women's-rights activist, "Women [were] being assassinated, just because they [were] women." Until today women continue to struggle to survive in Baghdad under conditions of extreme poverty and personal hardship that developed under the occupation.<sup>63</sup>

Rampant unemployment, estimated to be between 40 and 60 percent, and a general lack of income across the country worsened the already abysmal humanitarian conditions in Baghdad during 2006.<sup>64</sup> The lack of income restricted most Iraqis' access to basic resources such as food, clean water, and medical care.<sup>65</sup> In 2007, IOM estimated that more than two-thirds of Baghdad households received only one to three hours of electricity per day. Meanwhile, potable water was unavailable for 20 percent of the city's residents, and less than 5 percent of the city's population had access to fresh food, relying primarily on dried goods.<sup>66</sup>

Young children and those born in the city during this period have also been adversely affected by the social limits imposed by its new segregated geography. In addition to suffering the severe psychological trauma of displacement, loss of loved ones, and regular exposure to extreme violence, children were often unable to attend school because they could not move around the city safely, and because of an overwhelming lack of teachers, space and materials. By and large, those schools that were able to function catered exclusively to children living nearby, and provided social interactions only with members of the same sect.<sup>67</sup>

By early 2007, al-Sadr's campaign to extend Shi'a control over major areas of the city had largely succeeded on his terms. In general, Baghdad's mixed neighborhoods had been transformed by militias on both sides into homogeneously populated Sunni or Shi'a territories, sometimes cut off and surrounded by areas controlled by the opposing sect. After a majority of Baghdad residents had thus been displaced, however, U.S. military authorities identified isolated Sunni areas such as Adhamiyah and Dora as some of the

most insecure parts of the city. And in April 2007 the U.S. military announced plans to construct a series of concrete perimeter walls around these neighborhoods. The U.S. commanders compared the walls to those of “gated communities” that have become a ubiquitous residential pattern the world over. Within days, MNF soldiers began to erect concrete barriers that reinforced the new spatial division of Baghdad, hardening the separation of Sunnis and Shi’as.

#### “SECURITY” DISCOURSES AND SEGREGATION WALLS

Walls have been characteristic of the U.S. occupation of Iraq from the beginning. Blast walls, roadblocks, military checkpoints, and barbed-wire barriers have been used to surround the occupied Green Zone, ministry buildings, central markets, hotels and universities to deter insurgent attacks (FIG. 6). However, following the campaigns of sectarian violence and the consolidation of separate militia-controlled territories in Baghdad in 2006, the MNF extended this strategy to include boundary walls around Sunni and Shi’a neighborhoods in at least ten areas of the city. Yet, while MNF officials have likened the erection of walls around enclaves like Adhamiyah and Ghazaliyah to creating “gated communities,” Iraqi residents have protested that the walls are more equivalent to the Iron Wall that Israel has erected to imprison the residents of occupied Palestine.<sup>68</sup>

Critics of the walling strategy in Baghdad have argued that “though these walls helped to temporarily dampen sectarian violence, they . . . bolstered sectarianism, isolating Iraqis from their neighbors and leaving them dependent on militias like the Mahdi Army for food, supplies and protection.”<sup>69</sup> Rather than addressing the root causes of sectarian violence, the MNF strategy has been an attempt to systematically “freeze the conflict” until it appeared the country was secure enough for the U.S. to leave.<sup>70</sup> These “security” barriers have thus served to intensify and harden segregation lines while allowing sectarianism to remain the problematic basis for Iraq’s political system. As a result, they have prevented the possibility of genuine strategies to address sectarian segregation and establish conditions for a lasting reconciliation between Iraqi Sunnis and Shi’as.

David Kilcullen, Senior MNF Counter-Insurgency Advisor, argued that the “gated community” plan, which involved the construction of twelve-foot-high walls made of 14,000-pound, T-shaped concrete segments around individual Sunni neighborhoods, would stop sectarian violence in three ways. The walls would make it more difficult for “terrorists to infiltrate” the community; they would make it more difficult for “terrorists to launch attacks from within that district”; and they would protect the gated community against retaliation, reducing fear and increasing cooperation with the MNF.<sup>71</sup>

Coalition spokesman and U.S. Navy Rear Admiral Mark Fox also insisted that the enclosure of Sunni enclaves like Adhamiyah was an Iraqi-approved and -initiated plan.



**FIGURE 6.** *The Ministry of Finance building in Baghdad, enclosed by MNF concrete blast walls to prevent car bombs and attacks by insurgent militia groups. Photo by Prof. Ghada al-Siliq, University of Baghdad.*



**FIGURE 7.** In Adhamiyah, 2,000 protesters walked the streets with banners written in Arabic and English to demonstrate opposition to the MNF “gated communities” plan, which would enclose the Sunni neighborhood perimeter with blast walls. Photo by Wisam Sami/AFP–Getty Images, posted online at <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/04/23/against-a-wall-in-baghdad/>, accessed February 1, 2009.

However, demonstrations against the construction of the walls by 2,000 people in Adhamiyah shortly after the plan was announced indicated that such suggestive talk of “communities” was an artificial imposition (FIG. 7). Protesters instead denounced the walls as a “sectarian barrier” and expressed a desire to restore the heterogeneous neighborhood they had once known. Fearing isolation from the rest of the city, residents carried banners that proclaimed, “Separation is a big prison for al-Adhamiyah citizens,” and “Children in al-Adhamiyah want a Baghdad without walls.”<sup>72</sup> Through these public demonstrations, residents made it clear that despite the high levels of violence in the city, they refused to accept its transformation into segregated “prisons” with surveillance and walls to keep Sunni and Shi’a “communities” apart.

In her study of gated communities in American and around the world, Setha Low has revealed that such spaces typically derive from a voluntary withdrawal from the public sphere into a privatized residential enclave. “Many residents want to feel safe in their homes and argue that walls and gates help keep out criminals. . . . The logic of the symbolism satisfies conventional middle-class understandings of the nature of criminal activity — ‘it makes it harder for them to get in’ — and justifies the choice to live in a gated community in terms of its moral and physical consequences.”<sup>73</sup>

The official response to protests against the construction of “gated communities” in Baghdad has thus revealed the misuse of the term. In this case it implies that Iraqis themselves desire enclosure, as a way to protect themselves from the “other,” the “terrorist,” the “enemy.” In fact, the premise has been reversed. As one defense official admitted: “You can create gated communities because the population wants them, because the population wants to feel secure . . . or you can create them to control the population and its movements, and make it more difficult for insurgents to operate. That is the theory behind it.”<sup>74</sup>

Low’s analysis of the spatial mechanisms behind gated communities and the surveillance systems that go with them offers a further useful framework for examining the intersec-

tion between MNF discourse and the construction of the new “security” barriers in Baghdad. According to Low:

*In this scheme of “spatial governmentality,” policing and enclosures create areas where a protected group — for example, the very wealthy — is shielded from “others” behavior. A safe environment excludes all those who are considered dangerous. But while this strategy may work for the privileged few living within the protected area, it has the drawback of diminishing collective responsibility for the safety of society as a whole.*<sup>75</sup>

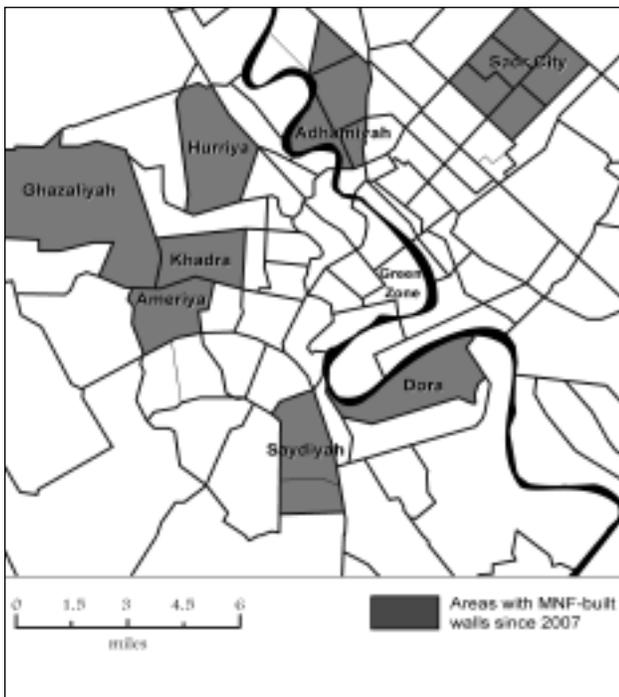
In the case of Baghdad, residents living in neighborhoods planned for MNF enclosure reportedly expressed fears that walls would leave them isolated and imprisoned, and further diminish their autonomy and mobility.<sup>76</sup> However, whether an enclosing mechanism creates conditions of privilege or imprisonment, Low’s analysis illustrates how the very spatial hierarchy implicit in the mechanism of separation walls separates “us” from “them.”

Scholarship examining the intersections of security discourses and urban segregation also sheds light on the ways in which the construction of walls by the MNF may reproduce, intensify and harden sectarian segregation in Baghdad. For example, Mike Davis has linked the production of fortified spaces (such as gated communities) in American cities along lines of race and class to the popularization of neoliberal discourse and policies since the 1980s.<sup>77</sup> In general, this has valorized the privatization of space and led to disinvestment in the public realm. Building upon Davis’s work, Teresa Caldeira has analyzed the “security” discourses that legitimate the proliferation of fortified enclaves in Sao Paulo, Brazil. She examined how these new urban forms “are changing the city’s landscape, its patterns of spatial segregation, and the character of public space and public interclass interactions.”<sup>78</sup>

Where Caldeira has examined how the everyday discourse of crime legitimizes segregation by class and race in



**FIGURE 8.** MNF soldiers worked through the night using a crane to lower concrete 14,000-pound blast wall segments between Shi'a and Sunni neighborhoods in Dora. Photo by Chris Hondros/Getty, posted online at [http://iraqlogger.powweb.com/fullimage.php?img=75030515\\_10.jpg](http://iraqlogger.powweb.com/fullimage.php?img=75030515_10.jpg), accessed February 1, 2010.



**FIGURE 9.** Baghdad neighborhoods where MNF walls have been installed since 2007. This map shows the areas where MNF troops constructed concrete walls to separate Shi'a and Sunni neighborhoods after the announcement of the "gated communities" plan in April 2007. Comparing this map to the distribution of sectarian areas in Figure 4 illustrates that MNF wall construction targeted neighborhoods with an interface between Sunni and Shi'a militia-controlled "territories." The path of walls differs according to each area; for example, a continuous three-mile wall was constructed around the perimeter of Adhamiyah the separate it from areas controlled by the Mahdi Army, while a wall was constructed in the south of Dora to separate Shi'a and Sunni-controlled streets. Source: based on several reports from Baghdad during 2007, including E. Wong and S. Cloud, "U.S. Erects Baghdad Wall to Keep Sects Apart," *New York Times*, April 21, 2007; M.R. Gordon, "U.S. Begins Erecting Wall in Sadr City," *New York Times*, April 18, 2008; K. Brulliard, "'Gated communities' for the War-Ravaged," *Washington Post*, April 23, 2007; and author correspondences with Prof. Ghada al-Siliq, University of Baghdad.

Brazilian cities, Peter Shirlow has focused on how spatial segregation perpetuates discourses that reproduce hostilities already dividing residents along sectarian lines in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Of Belfast, he wrote, "The reorganisation of space, due to violence, increased separation and re-emphasized the fundamentals of ethno-sectarian 'difference'."<sup>79</sup> The future perpetuation of conditions of urban segregation in Baghdad can also be understood in light of this cyclical process, which reinforces meanings of "difference" through both discursive and spatial mechanisms.

Following the controversial announcement of the "gated communities" plan in late April 2007, MNF paratroopers worked through the night for two months to erect a massive cement wall along the perimeter ring road of Adhamiyah (FIG. 8). The locations of documented MNF security walls around segregated Sunni and Shi'a neighborhoods by the end of 2007 are indicated by the shaded areas on the accompanying map (FIG. 9). In western Baghdad, walls went up around the Sunni neighborhoods of Dora, Ameriyya and Ghazaliyah — as well as the Shi'a-controlled Hurriya area. East of the river, MNF walls strategically enclosed the Mahdi Army stronghold in Sadr City as well as the Sunni area of Adhamiyah, as discussed. Upon completion of the barrier in Adhamiyah, Jared Purcell, Public Affairs Officer for 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, whose unit operated in the area, commented, "Since we started building the wall, we've already seen a noticeable decrease in violence." He further noted that in the future his unit intended to constantly "[reevaluate] the wall to make sure it is providing maximum security with minimum disruptions to people's lives."<sup>80</sup>

The reported decrease in sectarian-based attacks in neighborhoods around which the MNF has constructed walls has undoubtedly come at the expense of the everyday lives of their residents. Eyal Weizman has examined how a similar instance of wall-building is part of a broader campaign by the Israeli state to perpetuate conditions of segregation between Palestinians and Israeli-Jews. In that case, physical measures have both reproduced discursive constructions of difference and employed familiar security discourses to legitimate the open-ended occupation of Palestinian space. As integral parts of a system of occupation, Weizman observed, Israeli settlements, road systems, military checkpoints, and the so-called Iron Wall, "have become not only brutal means of segregation but active sensors within Israel's network of



**FIGURE 10.** MNF soldier conducting a search of an Iraqi resident passing through a checkpoint. Photo by Zoriah, published online at [www.zoriah.com](http://www.zoriah.com), accessed February 1, 2010.

surveillance, registering all the Palestinians passing through them.”<sup>81</sup> Likewise, in Baghdad, the growing MNF system of walls and checkpoints has subjected residents to constant monitoring — and even biometric identity verification — by occupying forces and police (FIG. 10).

Typically, the walls enclosing segregated districts have been punctuated only by a limited number of entry and exit points, monitored around the clock by Iraqi policemen, often with ambiguous loyalties.<sup>82</sup> The excruciating pace of movement through these checkpoints has only aggravated traffic conditions, and the terrifying possibility of car bombs has created constant tension between everyone in their vicinity. The checkpoints have also confined the flow of economic and social interaction into and out of each segregated space, creating new pressures for conformity within them. Physically deterred from accessing former places of employment and commerce on the other side of the wall, for example, Adhamiyah residents have been forced to change where they shop, what modes of transportation they use, and where they can look for work — not to mention who they can visit.<sup>83</sup>

For Baghdad residents, the sight of the long concrete blast-wall barriers flanking checkpoints, surrounding buildings, and obstructing roads has become a quotidian reminder of the spatial transformation of their city since the beginning of the occupation (FIG. 11). Soon after the walls began to go up in 2007, recognizing that they would not be removed in the near future, an international organization even launched a \$10,000 program to mask their austere presence by painting colorful murals on them (FIG. 12).<sup>84</sup>

In 2007, the United States launched its “surge” strategy, drastically increasing the number of coalition troops deployed in Iraq, and especially Baghdad. And in August of that year, al-Sadr called for a tentative cease-fire, largely due to increasing pressure from the occupying forces, but also due to divisions within his own constituency.<sup>85</sup> By the end of the year, the U.S.-



**FIGURE 11.** Twelve-foot-high MNF security walls cut through Baghdad’s neighborhoods, towering over pedestrians, restricting civilian mobility in an out of the area and keeping apart Sunnis and Shi’as. Photo by Zoriah, published online at [www.zoriah.com](http://www.zoriah.com), accessed February 1, 2010.

led MNF had also recruited thousands of residents of key Sunni neighborhoods, including Ameriya, Adhamiyah and Dora, to work alongside them, despite the fact that many recruited individuals had previously been active in the anti-occupation insurgency. The strategic formation of these “awakening councils” was seen as a success because violence in the capital decreased during 2008, both as a result of their operations and al-Sadr’s decision to seek a cease-fire.<sup>86</sup>

A significant overall decrease in violence during 2008 prompted MNF officials to declare that both the surge and the construction of security barriers had been a success. Following this declaration, MNF-sanctioned cranes began ceremoniously to dismantle the network of walls surrounding



**FIGURE 12.** As the MNF erected large concrete walls throughout Baghdad, Iraqi artists painted murals to make them easier to live with. As one Iraqi muralist explained to a reporter, “We Iraqi artists wanted to say that Iraqis are like other communities who love peace and want to get rid of this situation to live normal life.” (“Painting Away the Terror”). Photo by Mszczuj, from [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com), accessed February 1, 2010

**FIGURE 13.** Scenes like this, of the initial effort to remove an MNF wall from the Dora neighborhood were covered enthusiastically by the media in late 2008 and the following summer. However, since 2009, the volatile security situation throughout Baghdad has kept the majority of walls in place. Photo by Max Becherer/Polaris, for the New York Times, published online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/10/world/middleeast/10walls.html?page-wanted=all>, accessed February 1, 2010.



the Dora neighborhood (FIG. 13). In June 2009, foreign media reported extensively on how the removal of these barriers had allowed a tentative resurgence of circulation between segregated neighborhoods, boosting local economies and permitting the revitalization of areas that had been cut off and damaged by their presence.<sup>87</sup> However, a flood of recent reports documenting a resurgence of attacks by sectarian militia groups has overshadowed news of continued wall removal in Baghdad's neighborhoods.

Early this year, the *New York Times* blog website featured a post confirming that, despite media attention to the spectacle of barrier removal in 2009, walls continue to dominate and segregate Baghdad's landscape. As *New York Times* blogger Rod Nordland wrote candidly:

*No one is seriously talking about taking the walls down around neighborhoods like Amiriya and Qadisiya, which were besieged by sectarian conflict and where everyone is funneled between a few gaps and checked to make sure they belong there. In Huriya, there is still an hourlong wait to be searched before going home — behind the blast walls. In Adhamiya, they put blast walls back up around the police station after Aug. 19, and they are still there today. Blast walls still ring Mustansariya University, where a car bomb killed 70 students and others in 2007. On much-bombed Palestine Street, they still stretch for miles, high ones in front of the Ministries of Oil, Electricity and Interior, lower ones on commercial blocks. Many of the businesses behind them have painted their names and advertised their wares on them, hidden as they are otherwise.*<sup>88</sup>

This report indicates that rather than reconciling divided Sunni and Shi'a communities, the state of security the walls and the troop surge helped facilitate is extremely fragile. In fact, the situation in Baghdad today points to the perpetuation of the condition of spatial segregation, which has been intensified and hardened by the construction of MNF walls since 2007.

## THE SPATIAL DIMENSION OF SECTARIAN POLITICS

In November 2003, President Bush delivered a major speech in Washington, D.C., highlighting his administration's objective of "securing democracy in Iraq." Bush declared that the Coalition Provisional Authority and the Iraqi Governing Council were, "working together to build a democracy."<sup>89</sup> However, as this essay has demonstrated, while the Bush administration used the rhetoric of democracy-building to legitimize its occupation of Iraq, the conduct of Paul Bremer and the CPA-appointed Governing Council served first and foremost to reproduce and codify sectarianism in the foundation of Iraq's new political system. The CPA's purported mission was to "restore conditions of security and stability," and "create conditions in which the Iraqi people can freely determine their own political future."<sup>90</sup> However, Bremer's political interventions in the first years of the occupation not only ensured the establishment of an exclusive and sectarian political system, but also facilitated new conditions of instability, insecurity, and ultimately segregation in Baghdad.

Poignantly, residents in Baghdad have nicknamed the concrete barriers that snake through the city "Bremer Walls."<sup>91</sup> Indeed, the ominous network of walls that continues to segregate Baghdad's Sunni and Shi'a neighborhoods can be read as an indication that the sectarian divisions present in Iraq's government continue to shape the spatial dimension of politics on the ground. Denselow has offered an astute criticism of the MNF security walls, asserting that while presented as a solution to the security crisis, "physical barriers represent a failure of the human imagination to deal with political problems."<sup>92</sup> The temporary success of the MNF walls in reducing violence will prove in the long run to be a superficial and unsustainable fix, one that cannot address the root causes of sectarian segregation, which run deep in Iraq's current political system.

Any genuine effort to reconcile the displaced and segregated Sunni and Shi'a communities of Baghdad requires

questioning whether bridging the spatial divides created by sectarian politics is possible under a government designed to empower political leaders on the basis of sectarian identities. The discourses of democracy-building and security used by the United States between 2003 and 2007 to legitimate the continued occupation of Iraq have obscured this critical point. In this case, Shirlow's analysis of the intersection of discourse and practice in the context of the segregated city are useful to consider: "the capacity to reconstruct identity and political meaning is obviated by political actors who mobilize fear in order to strengthen unidimensional classifi-

cations of political belonging."<sup>93</sup> As Shirlow's analysis suggests, as long as the condition of sectarian segregation remains the overriding spatial logic of Baghdad, it may obstruct any opportunity for Iraqis to reconstruct political meaning and reestablish the foundation for an inclusive, democratic government. As walls continue to harden Baghdad's divided landscape, further research should question whether the spatial condition of segregation deepens constructions of sectarian difference within segregated communities — and if so, how such communities respond to this fundamental transformation.

## REFERENCE NOTES

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13. *Ibid.*, p.9; and International Crisis Group, "In their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency," Middle East Report 50 (2006), p.5.

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