

Subordinate Communities and the Utility of Ethnic Ties to a Neighboring Regime

Iran and the Shi'a of the Arab States of the Gulf

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The Shi'i communities of the Arab states of the Gulf are an example of a common, sometimes combustible, combination in international relations. The Shi'a lack political power in their home countries, even where they are a majority. The Shi'i communities, however, have a potentially valuable ally in Iran, a large and powerful Shi'i country that faces the Arab regimes across the Gulf. In this chapter I ask the following question: if we assume that the Shi'i communities of the Arab Gulf act strategically, what sort of aid will they seek and accept from Iran in their efforts to improve their political status in their home countries?¹ I am particularly concerned here with threats of violence made by a Shi'i community with Iranian backing, or made by Iran on behalf of the community.²

Despite the obvious power and influence of Iran in the Gulf, I find that the Shi'i communities have strong reasons to eschew aid from Iran. I further argue that this is generally true of many, though not all, similarly situated ethnic communities. This is counterintuitive, for the additional political resources provided to the Shi'i communities by their tie to Iran would appear to increase their leverage in negotiations with their home-country regimes. This extra leverage should allow them to secure a larger share of political goods from their home-country regimes.

The reason that the Gulf Shi'a usually eschew aid from Iran lies in the double-edged nature of threats. One possible response to a threat is appeasement: the threatened party may make concessions to prevent the other party from carrying out a threat. Yet the threatened side may also choose a different strategy: it may attack the source of the threat. Thus, making a threat is a dangerous endeavor: the threat-maker may provoke a response that causes it grievous harm rather than reap the concessions it had hoped for. Subordinate ethnic communities, like all political actors, must anticipate the reac-

tion of those they threaten before making a threat. If the likely response is repression, and not appeasement, the community may do well to abstain from making the threat. I will argue that, for a number of reasons, threats posed by subordinate communities on the basis of ethnic ties to a neighboring state very often elicit repression, and not appeasement, from the home-country regime.³ This is the case for the Shi'a of the Arab monarchies of the Gulf, and to a lesser extent Iraq, and this is reflected in the strategies adopted by these Shi'i communities.

Writings on the Shi'i communities of the Arab Gulf states generally do not view the actions of these communities as being informed by strategic imperatives. Instead, Shi'i actions are seen as the result of (1) Shi'i ideology and (2) susceptibility to Iranian provocation. That the Shi'i communities need to reach some sort of accommodation with their home-country regimes, and that they should regulate their ties with Iran in light of this need, is recognized only implicitly, if at all.⁴ One writer, discussing Iranian efforts to instigate terrorism by the Shi'a, argues that the "extremism which is prevalent in the Middle East rests on a very broad popular base and can be tapped with impunity [by Iran] to produce violence on order."⁵ Another author argues that the Shi'a will resist the Arab regimes even without Iranian help, and without much reference to the consequences of such opposition for the community. The Arab regimes, it is said, do not

realize that no degree of religious pretense, socio-economic cooptation, and political manipulation will resolve their Shi'i majority or minority problem . . . The Shi'is perceive their accumulated grievances in terms of their historical experience as the most deprived group (*mahrumin*), and also in terms of the emotional and spiritual promise of salvation (*najah*), and the establishment of justice by the Mahdi before the Day of Resurrection (*qiyamah*). This is, in my view, the fundamental force that underlies Shi'ism.⁶

Attributions of ethnic conflict to feelings of deprivation are not limited to discussions of the Gulf Shi'a. Other writings on ethnic relations in the Middle East, and more generally, attribute ethnic violence to feelings of deprivation experienced by ethnic communities.⁷

The ethnic contracts model of ethnic conflict, by contrast, argues that ethnic violence grows out of uncertainty and the fear it engenders.⁸ It is not the unfairness of ethnic domination, in itself, which causes ethnic conflict. Violence instead grows from differing information, differing measures of the probable result of a conflict, and difficulties in making credible commitments

to abide by the provisions of ethnic contracts. The latter is often exacerbated by violence by extremists. The Shi'i communities of the Arab Gulf states are, in differing degrees, deprived communities, and their imputed ideological leanings seem to militate against any resignation to this fact.⁹ The ethnic contracts model, however, suggests that the Shi'a might well reach an accommodation with their regimes, one that recognizes their subordinate status, but one which they might not desire to upset by accepting or seeking Iranian aid in subverting their home-country regimes.

We can thus outline two competing explanations for the political strategy of the Shi'i communities. One finds the chief motivation for the actions of the Shi'a in ideology and in feelings of deprivation. The other explains the actions of the Shi'a (and subordinate ethnic groups more generally) as the result of calculations of community interest, informed by the limitations of the community's bargaining resources and aware of the dangers of uncertainty. In the remainder of this chapter I do three things. First, I lay out the constraints on the bargaining position of the Shi'a, in an effort to identify the types of strategies that might make sense for the Shi'i communities in the Arab states. Second, I examine the strategies of the Shi'i communities of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Dubai, and Iraq. From this we can hazard some conclusions on which of the two viewpoints mentioned above best describe Shi'i political action in the Gulf. Finally, I briefly compare the experience of these Shi'i communities with that of other subordinate ethnic communities in the Middle East, and elsewhere, with the goal of arriving at some general statements on the political behavior of such communities.

The Constraints on the Shi'i Communities in the Arab Gulf States

When the Shi'i communities of the Arab Gulf states consider the use of Iranian aid in threatening their home-country regimes, they must weigh the probable response of these regimes. When faced with such a threat, the home-country regime's potential costs of repression lie in the possibility that the subordinate community might make good on its threats: (1) it might overthrow the home-country regime; (2) it might secede, or achieve regional autonomy, by force of arms; (3) its co-ethnic neighbor might rescue the community by force of arms.

For the home-country regime, appeasement also has its potential costs: appeasement, especially in the form of power sharing or employment of the subordinate group in sensitive state organs, raises the potential amount of harm the group can do. Repression, by contrast, removes resources from the control of the subordinate community.

The Shi'a of the Gulf monarchies (though not Iraq) cannot reasonably hope to overthrow their rulers or to secede, with or without Iranian aid. This is not to say that either of these things is flatly impossible, for they are not. But they are improbable, even in Bahrain. This is a consequence of several factors.

1. The ruling families have displayed a remarkable degree of resilience in the past decades. It does not appear that any group, Sunni or Shi'a, has the resources to overthrow them. This is a result of the character of their regimes, which are composed of extended families. The rules and norms of these families promote cooperation among their members and the exclusion of others from control of the regime. As a result, these monarchies prove surprisingly resilient.¹⁰

2. The regimes have excluded the Shi'a from their armed forces, and particularly from the officers corps. This exclusion ranges in severity from a "quarantine" in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain to a less systematic limitation in Kuwait.¹¹ Throughout the monarchies no Shi'i officers are in a position to lead a coup against the Sunni regimes.

3. None of the Shi'i communities in the monarchies lives in an area amenable to secession. Most of the Shi'a live in urban areas, and the Shi'a of Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, precisely because they live on top of the oil, cannot reasonably hope to gain autonomy from the rest of Saudi Arabia.¹²

Iran has not made a credible commitment to rescue the Shi'a of the Arab Gulf states, nor to inflict major harm on the monarchies if they do not treat their Shi'i communities better. The American presence in the region renders any Iranian threat to invade a GCC state not credible.¹³ Iran could do damage to shipping in the Gulf, or to GCC oil installations, yet chaos in the Gulf would severely damage Iran itself. Iran has shown little inclination to put its national interests on the line for the sake of the Shi'i communities in the monarchies.¹⁴

This sharply limits the threat to the monarchies posed by the Shi'a and lowers the potential costs of repression. Very frequently the regimes' best strategy, in the face of Iranian-supported violence by domestic Shi'a, is repression of the threat.

These constraints force the Shi'a to seek their share of political resources *within* the framework of the political systems in which they live. Most of these resources come from the state and are under its control. The Shi'a cannot seize them, nor credibly threaten to. These resources include employment opportunities in state institutions, admission to universities, spending on infrastructure and public services in Shi'i areas, a share of state con-

tracts, seats in the parliament (in Kuwait) or the *majalis al-shura* (elsewhere), and so forth. The Shi'i communities cannot easily adopt a policy of withdrawal from the larger society and are consequently vulnerable to repression by the regimes.

The Shi'a communities, and others likewise situated, also must concern themselves with nongovernmental reactions of members of the dominant ethnic communities. Private individuals and organizations have the power to impose costs on the Shi'a through acts of exclusion—from business opportunities, professional groups, and a myriad other spheres in which ethnic communities intermingle. Ethnic polarization breeds this sort of exclusion, and subordinate communities that accept aid from foreign powers court ethnic polarization.

The Shi'i Communities in the Arab Gulf States

Before discussing the types of strategies adopted by Shi'i communities in the Arab Gulf states, a few observations on the general ethnic situation in the area are useful. The Gulf Shi'a are divided, by nationality, between Arabs and Persians. Shi'a of Persian origin make up the larger part of the Shi'i communities of the UAE, Kuwait, and (it seems) Qatar.¹⁵ The Shi'i majorities of Iraq and Bahrain are predominantly Arab, with some Persians, while the Shi'i minority in Saudi Arabia is very largely Arab.

Five of the six ruling families of the GCC monarchies are Sunni—the exception, the Omani ruling family, is Ibadhi. The regimes, however, do not stress Sunnism as the cornerstone of their identity. The ruling families make much of their Arabness, and of Islam. Most of the ruling families stress their noble Bedouin origins. All have dynastic claims to legitimacy, in the sense that they attempt to identify the state with the family. While some of these identities involve Sunnism (noble Bedouins are Sunni, the Arab/Persian split has an imprecise sectarian undertone), the ruling families do not assert Sunnism as the primary component of national identity. (The Al Saud, however, are associated with a particular interpretation of Sunni Islam—Wahhabism.) The GCC states are not Sunni in the sense that the Turkish state is Turkish or the Israeli state Jewish. The states are instead dynastic and gain their sectarian coloring through their ruling families.

While I focus in this chapter on the Shi'i/Sunni ethnic cleavage in the Arab Gulf states, this is not the only, or even always the most salient, ethnic cleavage. Many Shi'a are also Arabs and often identify with Sunni Arabs more than with Shi'i Persians. All Shi'a under discussion here are also nationals of the states in which they live, and they may identify strongly with the specific

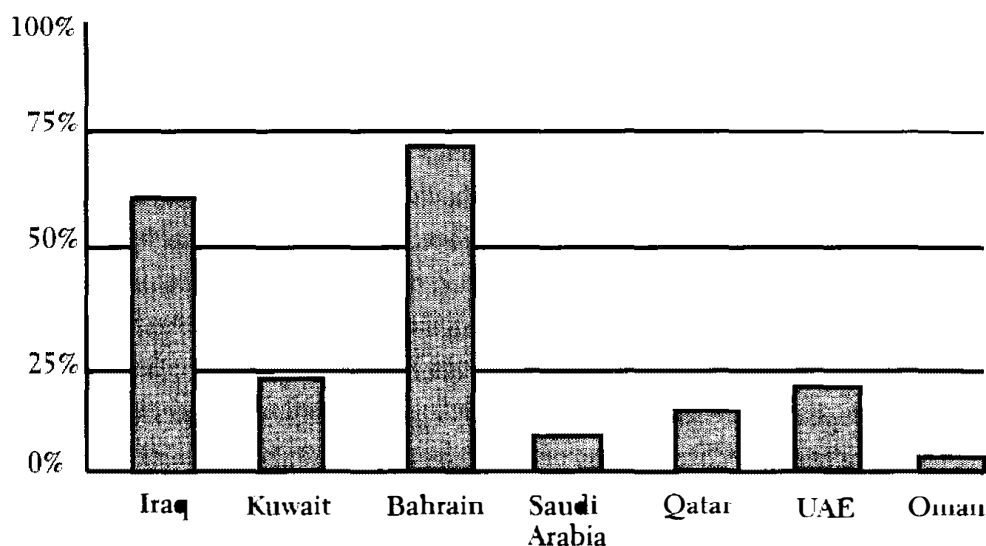


Fig. 1. Estimates of the Shi'i percentage of the citizen populations of the Arab states of the Gulf.

Source: James Bill, "Islam, Politics and Shi'ism in the Gulf," *Middle East Insight* 3, no. 3 (January/February 1984): 6.

state-level nationalism put forward by the local rulers. It is, however, indisputable that the Shi'i-Sunni sectarian difference is deeply rooted in these societies, and is the most salient ethnic fault line among the citizen populations.

In the following sections I discuss the position of the Shi'i communities in several of the Gulf monarchies. To understand the nature of their ties to Iran I discuss the particular situation of each community in its home country. This situation is determined largely by domestic political considerations, and particularly by the nature of the political alliances entered into by the ruling families to facilitate their rule. There is a pattern that emerges in examining the nature of ethnic accommodations between the dynastic monarchies and the Shi'i communities: where the Shi'a make useful allies, they tend to secure more rewards from the ruling family.

Saudi Arabia

For all the reputed revolutionary fervor of the Shi'a, the Shi'i community in Saudi Arabia has displayed only modest opposition to the Al Saud, particularly when we take into account the weight of the social, economic, and political discrimination under which the Saudi Shi'a labor. The Shi'a have no presence in the security forces or military; only two of sixty members of the *majlis al-shura* are Shi'i (and this is seen as a symbol of inclusion); Shi'a have diffi-

culty gaining admission to the kingdom's universities; Shi'a have suffered from the imposition of a hiring ban at ARAMCO.¹⁶ The Saudi Shi'a, in short, are an oppressed minority. Despite this, the informal ethnic contract between the Shi'a and the Al Saud has remained in place since the 1920s, with the exception of the period following the Iranian revolution.

The roots of the unfortunate position of the Shi'a in Saudi Arabia lie in the political alliances the Al Saud have entered into to maintain a monopoly of power in their kingdom. The Al Saud have long associated their rule with the Wahhabi interpretation of the Hanbali *mathhab* of Sunni Islam.¹⁷ Adherents to this doctrine often display a good deal of hostility to Shi'ism.¹⁸ The Al Saud have appeased the Sunni Islamists by allowing them a prominent voice in public affairs (though not control of state power, which remains firmly in the hands of the family). The emergence of Arab nationalism as the chief threat to regional monarchies in the 1950s and for several decades thereafter induced the Al Saud to further cultivate Sunni Islamists as a counterbalance to leftists and secularists. In such a circumstance, the Al Saud had little reason to improve the situation of the kingdom's Shi'a: while the Sunni Islamists made useful, if prickly, allies, the Shi'a had relatively little value as allies, while any overt cultivation of the Shi'a would offend Wahhabi opinion.

The ethnic contract between the Al Saud and the Shi'a thus had the following nature: the Shi'a could be Shi'a, if they wished, without threat of death, forced conversion, or expropriation. They could not, however, fully participate in public life, could not publicly practice their religion, and would have little recourse against state-sponsored discrimination on the basis of their religion.

This informal ethnic contract, however unsatisfactory on grounds of justice (by most measures of that elusive quality), continued throughout the decades between 1929 and the Iranian revolution. The Shi'a made few public protests against the political hegemony of the Saudi state or the pervasive discrimination they suffered. Some Shi'a did display a sympathy for Arab nationalist appeals, for in Arab nationalism the Shi'a found an ideology that both lessened the distance between them and Sunni Saudis, and at the same time challenged the House of Saud. Yet this found expression in small clandestine groups of limited importance.¹⁹

The events in Iran in 1979, however, partially unraveled the implicit ethnic contract of the preceding decades. In 1979, during the Muslim month of Muharram, the Shi'a of the Eastern Province held public *'ashura* processions in defiance of bans on these ceremonies. The processions, and the efforts by the regime to stop them, led to severe rioting. This outbreak of pro-

test against the Saudi regime, the most serious since the founding of the kingdom, followed two unexpected signals of the weakness of the Saudi state. The collapse of the Iranian monarchy, a juggernaut up to the mid-seventies, threw into doubt the stability of all regional monarchies. Second, in November 1979 a band of Sunni zealots occupied the Grand Mosque in Mecca, one of the holiest sites in Islam. The Al Saud base their legitimacy, in part, on the protection of the holy cities, and the occupation of the mosque dealt a vicious blow to their prestige and power.

The Shi'a based their acquiescence to Saudi rule on the premise of the stability of the regime, and in 1979 the regime no longer appeared stable. The rioting of 1979 can be explained as the product of simple contagion from Iran, but its timing has a rational basis as well. If the Shi'a were to test the regime, this was the best time in decades to do it.

As it turned out, the signals of the Al Saud's weakness were faulty: the regime was, and is, far stronger than the shah's. The Al Saud deployed the national guard, made up of Sunni Bedouins loyal to the ruling house, against the rioters, with the expected result. The Shi'a could not challenge the Al Saud by force. Yet the Shi'a won some rewards for their efforts. After crushing the rebellion, the regime poured resources into the Eastern Province in the 1980s, dramatically improving the infrastructure and public services of the Shi'i areas.²⁰

The Al Saud, however, did not substantially improve the status of the Shi'a in other respects, and the Shi'a remained as excluded as before from political and social life of the kingdom. The concessions made by the Al Saud did not have a high cost for the dynasty. In the early 1980s the ruling family did not lack for money. The Shi'a received no concessions that strengthened their political position in the kingdom. Indeed, at the end of the decade the regime imposed restrictions on Shi'i employment at ARAMCO, where many Shi'a worked in the earlier years of the oil boom.²¹ The Shi'a enjoyed a certain leverage against the regime at ARAMCO, and the hiring ban removed this lever.

Iran had little direct hand in the riots of 1979 and 1980, but for the remainder of the decade Iran sponsored Shi'i opposition groups outside of Saudi Arabia, broadcast appeals to the Saudi Shi'a, and generally did what it could to provoke the Shi'i community against the Al Saud. This was the period of the Iran-Iraq War, in which Saudi Arabia sided with Iraq. The Shi'a inside Saudi Arabia, however, remained quiet. Iran did not promise, and could not promise, to help the Shi'a in any really substantial way against the Al Saud, and it appears that the Shi'a recognized the high costs and scant returns of participation in regional politics on the side of Iran.²²

At the end of the Gulf War, in 1991, the internal situation for the Shi'a improved somewhat. Iraq had reclaimed from Iran the title of chief regional threat to the monarchies. Inside the kingdom a sizable part of the Sunni Islamist right went into overt opposition to the regime. This cast some doubt on the wisdom of the Al Saud's previous appeasement of Islamist opinion. The regime has made some effort to cultivate the political opponents of the Sunni Islamists, who in the kingdom today consist of liberals and Shi'a. In 1993 the Al Saud quieted the Shi'i opposition abroad by promising limited improvements in the position of the Shi'a in the kingdom, and, it is said, by buying off the leaders of the opposition. The concessions made by the Al Saud amounted to a lifting of some restrictions on the community and a few symbolic gestures of inclusion. In most ways, however, the agreement amounted to a formalization of the ethnic contract between the Shi'a and the Al Saud.²³

In 1996 it appeared that the Shi'a may have been, with help from Iran, responsible for the bombing of the Khobar Towers, in the most significant instance of Shi'i terror in the kingdom's recent history.²⁴ Yet by mid-1998 the investigation appeared to have foundered over insufficient evidence and the improvement of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia.²⁵ In this case, the subordinate community appears to have benefited from an improvement in relations between its home-country regime and its co-ethnic neighbor.

The evidence of the Saudi Shi'a, in their relations with the Saudi regime, suggests that the Shi'a recognize the limitations of their political situation within Saudi Arabia. The Al Saud have not had much need of the Shi'a as allies in domestic politics, and this has contributed to the poor deal that the Shi'a have received from the regime. Yet, notwithstanding the oft-cited Shi'i proclivity to rebellion, over the past decades the Saudi Shi'a have shown a willingness to enter into ethnic contracts and to eschew almost all Iranian-inspired subversion.

Kuwait

The pattern of relations between the Kuwaiti Shi'a and the Al Sabah family was set in 1938, the year that dynastic control over the Kuwaiti state crystallized and the Shi'a emerged as allies of the Al Sabah against the dynasty's challengers. In that year a group of Sunni urban notables attempted to seize control of the Kuwaiti state by setting up a parliament. The electorate of this majlis, which for a period of some months essentially ruled Kuwait, did not include the Shi'a.²⁶ As a result, the Shi'a sided with the Al Sabah against the growing power of the Sunni notables. The Shi'a even demonstrated in the

streets — with the blessing of the Al Sabah — against the majlis before its closure in 1939.²⁷

In the decades after 1938 the Al Sabah continued to cultivate the Shi'a as a counterweight, first to the Sunni merchant notables, then to Arab nationalists. The Shi'a, who lacked the political resources to contest control of the state, nonetheless had the demographic weight (at around 25 percent of the citizen population) to make useful allies of the Al Sabah. When the Arab nationalists surpassed the Sunni merchant notables as the main challengers to the Al Sabah in the 1960s, the Shi'a maintained their allegiance to the regime. Unlike the Shi'a of Saudi Arabia or Bahrain, the Kuwaiti Shi'a mostly are of Persian descent. While Arab nationalism offers Arab Shi'a a way to claim membership in the Arab political community as equals, Arab nationalism only further excluded Kuwaiti citizens of Persian Shi'i descent and made them particularly useful to the dynasty as a counterweight to the Arab nationalists.²⁸

The period from 1938 to 1979 saw what we might reasonably call an informal ethnic contract between the Shi'a and the Al Sabah, in which the Shi'a provided a measure of useful political support for the Al Sabah, while the ruling family, in return, ensured the inclusion of the Shi'a in the Kuwaiti political community and gave the Shi'a a share of the oil wealth and business opportunities that came with the oil age. Most notably, the Shi'a received full political rights, including the right to vote and run in parliamentary elections. In the parliament the Shi'a served the useful purpose of diluting the representation of both Sunni merchant notables and Arab nationalists in the parliament.

In this period, up to 1979, the issue of Iranian aid to the Kuwaiti Shi'a against the Al Sabah did not arise. Kuwait enjoyed generally good relations with Iran. The shah did not seek to destabilize the emirate, and, from the Kuwaiti point of view, a friendly Iran played a crucial role as regional counterweight to Iraq.

The 1979 revolution, and the subsequent war between Iran and Iraq, undid the previous calculations of the Kuwait regime toward Iran, toward Iraq, and toward Kuwait's Shi'a. Only a notoriously thin stretch of Iraqi territory separates Kuwait from what were the frontlines of the Iran-Iraq War. During the war Iraq placed increasing pressures on Kuwait for support; Kuwait eventually loaned Iraq billions of dollars and allowed Iraq to ship war materiel through its port. In no small way, Iraq pulled Kuwait into the war on its side, raising the costs to Kuwait of an Iranian victory.

From the point of view of the regime, the revolution and then the war transformed the Shi'a from useful allies into a potential threat. The specter

of an Iranian victory, which came into view at times during the war, haunted the Al Sabah and poisoned the ethnic atmosphere within Kuwait. The Al Sabah removed the Shi'a from their posts in the military and security forces. The Shi'i community also lost many of its parliamentary seats: the number of Shi'i deputies sank from ten in 1975 to four in 1981 and 1985.²⁹

The Kuwaiti Shi'a, despite their sympathies for Iran and the loss of many of their privileges in Kuwait, in large part remained loyal, or at least acquiescent, to the Kuwaiti regime. While the Shi'i community, particularly those outside the elite families, did evince a good deal of enthusiasm for the revolution, it was Shi'a from abroad, and not Kuwaiti Shi'a, who carried out most of the numerous acts of terrorism in Kuwait during the 1980s. A few Kuwaiti Shi'a did, however, carry out terrorist acts, and this was enough to cast doubt on the loyalty of the rest of the community.³⁰

The Iraqi invasion again turned the situation on its head. Iran reverted to its more customary role—in Kuwaiti eyes—as regional counterweight to Iraqi ambitions. The Shi'i community, previously of suspect loyalty, joined with Sunni Kuwaitis in rejecting Saddam's claim. While the Shi'a might have been suspected of sympathizing with Iran in the 1980s they could hardly be suspected of having any sympathy for Saddam.

By the late 1990s the place of Shi'a in Kuwaiti political life had returned, in large part, to what it was before 1979. The Shi'a, there should be no doubt, remain a step or two farther from political and economic power than urban Sunnis, and share a sense of not quite full inclusion in the political community. Nonetheless Shi'a deputies sit in the parliament, one in the dress of an Iranian cleric, and the Shi'a receive a share of the oil wealth. Indeed, one finds today no signs whatsoever of Iranian-inspired Shi'i subversion. Instead the Kuwaiti Shi'a act as useful facilitators of Kuwaiti relations with Iran, reaping the profits of a period of relatively good relations that are based in part on mutual bitter experiences at the hands of Saddam. The Kuwaiti Shi'a today have little reason to accept or seek Iranian aid against the Al Sabah. Such a move would result in the loss of their substantial political privileges in Kuwait, with no hope of any countervailing benefit. The ethnic contract between the Shi'a and the dynasty delivers real benefits to the Shi'a, and the Shi'a have little reason to upset the contract by impugning their membership in the Kuwaiti political community.

Bahrain

In Bahrain, unlike Kuwait or even Saudi Arabia, the dynastic regime and the Shi'a have not come to an accommodation. Shi'a compose around 70 percent

of the citizen population of Bahrain but have very little voice in its government. Shi'a hold some cabinet posts, but the regime denies them positions in the more important ministries and resolutely excludes them from the military, police, and security forces. Since 1993 the Shi'a have carried out a campaign of protests against the ruling family. These protests have involved a good deal of violence, mostly on the part of the regime, and have led to mass incarcerations, torture, and a very serious alienation of a large segment of the population from the Al Khalifa. Iran's role in the protests is the subject of debate, as we shall see, but it has not in any case been very large.

It would be a serious error to view Bahraini politics solely through the prism of the Shi'i-Sunni ethnic divide. The Sunnis themselves fall into several groups, and among the Shi'a only the "tribal" elements have displayed a strong and consistent support for the Al Khalifa.³¹ Sunnis have long made up an important part—in some periods, the most important element—in Bahraini protest against the ruling family. This was particularly true in the 1950s, when a united Sunni-Shi'i opposition led a serious challenge to Al Khalifa (and British) rule.

Shi'is have led the recent protests, and the regime's repressive response has focused on the Shi'i community. Nonetheless many Sunnis have joined their voices in demands for a parliament, and Sunnis were among the tens of thousands of Bahrainis who have signed petitions demanding the resumption of parliamentary life.³² The conflict in Bahrain thus should not be misunderstood as simply Sunnis vs. Shi'a. It is instead a conflict between a Sunni ruling family, with their Sunni and foreign allies, against a wide spectrum of Bahrainis, mostly Shi'a but including some Sunnis.

The opposition has accused the regime of deliberately exacerbating the sectarian divide in the population, in a purposeful effort to polarize Shi'a and Sunnis. Strategically, the Shi'i community has a strong interest in avoiding this polarization: domestically the Shi'a do not wish to alienate Sunni supporters of reform (whose support they need), and internationally the Shi'a do not wish the conflict to be portrayed in sectarian terms. Opposition literature reflects this realization.³³

The mere fact of Sunni dominance over a Shi'i majority does not explain why the Shi'i community resorts to violence against the regime. Both sides incur a substantial cost in this struggle, and, as Fearon points out in regard to war, skipping the violence and going straight to the settlement leaves both sides better off in most situations.³⁴ That one side might lose relative to their starting position, or relative to an abstract notion of a just settlement, is not the point—if that is to be the result anyway, why spill blood and spend treasure getting there?

It appears that the Al Khalifa and the Bahraini opposition have differing evaluations of the utility of pressure on the regime in bringing about concessions. The opposition believes that continued protests can impose such high costs on the regime that it will yield, while the regime calculates that it can absorb the costs of the protests long enough to exhaust the opposition.

Shi'i rule, or the overthrow of the ruling family, does not appear to be possible in Bahrain. The Al Khalifa enjoy the loyalty of their security forces, which are in large part composed of foreign mercenaries.³⁵ Should the regime show signs of collapse, the Al Saud would send the Saudi national guard across the causeway to save the Al Khalifa. No measure of aid from Iran, short of an invasion, could give the Shi'a the resources necessary to overthrow the Al Khalifa. Shi'i rule is not a goal the Bahraini Shi'a are likely to achieve.

Lesser goals, however, may be achievable. In the early 1980s, when revolution looked possible (even though it later was shown not to be) some Shi'i groups refused compromise with the regime and demanded its removal.³⁶ In the recent wave of protests, however, the main opposition groups have instead sought the resumption of parliamentary life under the 1973 constitution.³⁷ Such a goal is worth considerable sacrifice on the part of the Shi'i community.

Thus far, however, the regime has not conceded a parliament. The Bahraini constitution (modeled after the Kuwaiti) leaves political power largely in the hands of the ruling family. The military and security forces, in particular, remain under the direct control of shaykhs of the ruling family. In *Polyarchy*, Dahl argues that authoritarian elites faced with a choice between repression and liberalization will liberalize with greater likelihood if they can secure guarantees of political and economic resources after the liberalization takes effect.³⁸ The Al Khalifa can secure such guarantees: the cost of opening the parliament is not open ended.³⁹ Yet the dynasty, thus far, appears to have calculated that it would prefer to avoid even a partial diminution of its power.

To the internal costs of capitulation for the Al Khalifa, we also must add the costs that can be imposed by the dynasty's main external sponsor, Saudi Arabia. Bahrain is the poor man of the GCC, and the Al Saud spend a considerable sum subsidizing the Al Khalifa.⁴⁰ The Al Saud have a long and inglorious history of opposition to parliamentary experiments in the smaller Gulf states, one dating back to the Kuwaiti majlis of 1938. There is little doubt that they would strongly prefer not to see the revival of constitutional life in Bahrain. Resisting popular demands, however, drives the Al Khalifa ever farther into Saudi vassalage. By negotiating with their opposition the Al

Khalifa would move, at least incrementally, farther out of the clutches of the Al Saud and toward policies dictated more by Bahraini public opinion and less by the interests of the Al Saud.

For the reformist opposition, overt Iranian involvement in its struggle with the Al Khalifa has very high costs. The Al Khalifa rule a small country with limited resources, one dependent on the help of outside powers. Those outside powers—the United States, Britain, and Saudi Arabia—have suspicious relations with Tehran. The Bahraini regime can avoid pressure for reform by these powers if it can define the conflict as one of “resisting Iranian subversion” of the Arab monarchies, a particular nightmare of official Washington. The regime has a very strong strategic incentive to identify and publicize any connections between the opposition and Iran, and indeed to invent such ties. In June 1996 the regime claimed that Iran had sponsored a coup attempt by Bahraini Shi’a, and the opposition reacted with the charge that the regime invented the episode in order to influence Western opinion.⁴¹ The actual truth of the matter is still a subject of debate.

While the opposition has strong reasons to avoid any *overt* aid from Iran, covert aid is potentially another matter. Yet the costs of revealing links to Iran probably overcome the possible benefits that Iranian aid could provide. In short, given the fact that the opposition cannot overthrow the ruling family, or reasonably hope that Iran will do the job, the opposition has sought reform. In this project, aid from Iran is not very useful.

Western support for the Al Khalifa is not necessary to prevent the emergence of an Islamic Republic of Bahrain, for such a thing is unlikely. Instead, such support merely reinforces the absolutist camp among the GCC dynasties and supports the Al Khalifa’s efforts to fan the flames of ethnic hatred in Bahrain.⁴² This cannot be in the interest of Bahrain’s Western protectors, and in this context the tacit American support for the ruling family’s absolutism damages American interests in the region.⁴³

Dubai and the Lower Gulf States

The Shi’i communities in Qatar and the UAE have not been the subject of any extensive comment, either in English or in Arabic. A measure of the paucity of information can be found in the wildly varying figures on the size of the Qatari Shi’i population, which range from 18 to 80 percent.⁴⁴ This lack of information has several causes, the main one of which is the apparently cordial relations between the regimes and their Shi’i communities. In Qatar and the UAE we find none of the sectarian strife that characterizes Bahrain or Saudi Arabia.⁴⁵ By the logic of the ethnic contracts model, the

lack of public conflict over the status of the Shi'a in these societies suggests not that the ethnic contracts are necessarily fair, but instead that neither side — and particularly the Shi'a — calculates that overt expressions of discontent will win any gains.

The UAE is the only GCC state to have an active border dispute with Iran. In the early 1970s, when the shah resolved a large number of border conflicts with its neighbors — including Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Abu Dhabi, and Oman — he also occupied several islands (Abu Musa and the two Tumbs) in the lower Gulf claimed by Ras al-Khayma and Sharjah (two emirates of the UAE). This dispute has festered ever since and flared again in the early 1990s when Tehran tightened its grip over the islands.⁴⁶ This significantly impeded the rapprochement between Arab and Persian sides of the Gulf in the aftermath of the two Gulf wars.

The substantial Shi'i community of the UAE, which is largely Persian in descent and centered in Dubai, has not overtly sided with Iran in the dispute, and there appears to be no question of Iranian-sponsored subversion by the Shi'a against the UAE ruling families. Instead, several of the emirates, especially Dubai, have maintained strong economic ties with Iran in the midst of the international hubbub over the islands.⁴⁷ The Shi'i community of Dubai carries out much of this trade with Iran, with the strong encouragement of the Dubai government. This is, in part, a consequence of the role that Dubai seeks to play in the regional economy, as the premier entrepôt of the Gulf. To this end, the Shi'i community has a valuable role in facilitating economic ties between Iran and the Dubai, a role which reaps for it economic and political benefits in the UAE. In this regard, deterioration in relations between Tehran and the UAE threatens the livelihood of the UAE Shi'i community, and it has a strong incentive to promote good relations.

Iraq

The political situation of the Shi'i community of Iraq differs greatly from that of the Shi'a of the Gulf's Arab monarchies. This is in large part a consequence of the instability of the Iraqi regime and the real — if somewhat distant — possibility that the Iraqi Shi'a could bring an end to the Sunni monopoly on political power in Baghdad. This makes aid from Iran potentially useful for the Iraqi Shi'a, and it increases the degree of threat that the Shi'a pose to the Sunnis.

Shi'a constitute 60–65 percent of the Iraqi population. The Iraqi Shi'a are very largely Arab, and many descend from Bedouin tribes that settled in southern Iraq in the nineteenth century. The Sunni population of Iraq is

divided between Kurds and Arabs, with the Kurds occupying the northern mountains. There are also Christian and other minorities, so that the Sunni Arab population of Iraq is probably in the neighborhood of 15 percent.⁴⁸

Sunni Arabs have dominated the Iraqi regime from the creation of the country in the 1920s. This is a consequence, most directly, of Arab Sunni predominance in the military, which dates back to the early days of the monarchy and before.⁴⁹ Various regimes have risen and fallen in the coups since 1958, but none have altered Sunni Arab control of the army. Nonetheless, Shi'a have held important posts in various regimes.⁵⁰ Several Shi'is held the prime ministership in the later years of the monarchy. The Communist Party, which played a major role in Iraqi politics in midcentury, was composed in large part of Shi'a. Even most of the Ba'th leadership was Shi'a in the early 1960s, though Sunnis predominated when the party returned to power in 1968.⁵¹

The participation of so many Shi'a in various governments and opposition groups discourages a purely sectarian view of the distribution of power in Iraq. No regime has been overtly sectarian in its ideology (as distinct from its political practice), and political struggles within and between various regimes and opposition groups have not had a consistently sectarian coloring. While Sunni control of the army has not been any sort of accident, it likely results less from a consciously sectarian strategy than from a tendency to favor officers from the towns and tribes of regime leaders. Thus Batatu argues that Saddam, "by dint of the relative thinness of his domestic base and the repressive character of his government . . . has been driven to lean more and more heavily on his kinsmen, or members of his own clan, or old companions from his underground days."⁵² Similarly the Slugletts argue that the importance of the sectarian division in Iraqi society is often exaggerated.⁵³ On the other hand, the Sunni/Shi'i cleavage plays an important role in regime politics. A member of a Sunni tribe that launched several coup attempts against Saddam explained his tribe's support of Saddam during the 1991 rebellion in the south as a product of ethnic fear.⁵⁴

The attitude of the current regime to the sectarian issue might be compared with that of the Bahraini regime. Both make copious symbolic gestures to sectarian unity and include Shi'a in nominally important positions in the government. Yet both regimes have an interest, at the same time, in raising the sectarian issue in their own community to induce Sunni solidarity against their opponents.⁵⁵

In deciding whether or not to accept Iranian aid against the Iraqi regime, the Iraqi Shi'a face a difficult choice. While a challenge to Sunni supremacy

might succeed, in propitious circumstances, the costs of failure are also high. The Shi'a paid many of these costs, in fact, in 1991. The costs of explicitly drawing on Iranian support and still failing might be higher still.⁵⁶ Yet the possibility of escaping Sunni domination makes it more likely that Shi'i groups will seek Iranian aid against the regime, though a policy of accommodation, even with the current regime, might be more prudent.

Predicting the future course of Iraqi politics is a hazardous endeavor: however there are scenarios in which the Shi'a—with Iranian help—could upset the Sunni lock on political power in Iraq. At the same time, none of the scenarios appears all that likely. The uncertainty clouds the picture, raising the odds that extremists can tip the situation into sectarian polarization.

There are several ways in which the Shi'a might capture political power: by overthrowing the regime in Baghdad, by establishing their own state, by accepting annexation into the Iranian state. The last possibility is the most distant: as Arabs, the Iraqi Shi'a have little interest in living in a state dominated by Iranians, and the international context makes a successful Iranian annexation unlikely. Secession, too, seems to be a remote possibility. The topography and ethnic makeup of Iraq tends to militate against the formation of a Shi'i splinter state in southern Iraq. The Kurds, unlike the Shi'a, have made several attempts to establish autonomous areas under Kurdish control in northern Iraq—indeed, the Kurds have received, at times, significant Iranian support in this endeavor. Kurdish aspirations to autonomy derive from the mountainous, and thus more easily defended, topography of their home areas in northern Iraq. The Shi'i areas in the center and south, by contrast, are flat and facilitate central government control. The potential for a successful Shi'i secession from Sunni Iraq is further made difficult by the demography of non-Kurdish Iraq. The Shi'a make up between 75 and 80 percent of the Arab (non-Kurd) population of Iraq. Baghdad itself has a Shi'i majority. A Shi'i state that encompassed most of Iraq's Shi'a population would leave little room for a militarily viable Sunni state.

The history of Shi'i relations with Baghdad reflects the military difficulties facing an effort to secede. Since the strengthening of the Iraqi central state in the 1930s, the Shi'a have mounted few large-scale rebellions against Baghdad, particularly in comparison with the more geographically advantaged Kurds.⁵⁷ Between the mid-thirties and the rebellion of 1991 the Shi'a attempted no large-scale uprisings against Baghdad, although there were occasional small-scale protests and much covert violence. The 1991 rebellion occurred immediately after the Iraqi army's defeat, which made it the most propitious time to revolt in decades. Yet without substantial outside assistance the rebellion failed.

If the establishment of separate Sunni and Shi'i states in Iraq does not seem that likely, the emergence of a Shi'i regime in Baghdad appears somewhat more plausible. The Shi'a have potential allies in the Kurds and Iranians. Although Saddam's regime, in 1998, looks more durable than observers imagined after the eviction from Kuwait, the regime could still come to a messy end, and this could weaken the ability of the army to respond to rebellions in the north and the south. On the other hand, Sunni domination of the army and the Iraqi state has proven quite resilient, surviving the fall of the monarchy and the subsequent coups. It will probably survive the end of Saddam's regime, whenever that may occur. The Sunni military and political elites recognize the clear sectarian danger posed by an armed Shi'i movement, and it is reasonable to suppose that this tends to strengthen Sunni solidarity.

The situation of the Iraqi Shi'a can be compared to that of their sectarian counterparts in the GCC states. In the monarchies the Shi'a can have little hope of overthrowing Sunni political predominance. Recognizing this, the Shi'i communities tend to seek an accommodation—an ethnic contract—within the bounds of the existing political situation. In Iraq the political situation is murkier, and it is at least conceivable that the Shi'a could put a permanent end to the Sunni monopoly over political power, perhaps with Iranian aid. But this possibility, while it may offer hope to a group long discriminated against, also increases the threat the group poses to the dominant political group. In such a situation, sectarian polarization becomes more likely, imposing serious costs on the Shi'a community, while not offering much prospect of a resolution favoring the Shi'a.

Comparisons

The Shi'a of the Gulf Arab states are but one example of a more general phenomenon, that of the division of an ethnic community between neighboring or proximate states, with the community ruling one state but politically subordinate in another. The common ethnic tie across borders raises the possibility of cooperation aimed against the subordinate community's home-country regime. Ethnicity thus becomes not merely an issue of domestic political arrangements, but also of international affairs.

I have listed in table 1 some of the more prominent situations of this sort in the Middle East and Muslim Europe. Several groups, like the Shi'a of the monarchies, have little hope of successful rebellion, autonomy, or of rescue by a state controlled by their own ethnicity. Accepting aid from a co-ethnic neighbor courts ethnic polarization and repression, without providing the community with the resources to escape the consequences. The Arabs of

Table 1. Cross-border ethnic groups in the Middle East and Muslim Europe

<i>Subordinate community</i>	<i>Co-ethnic neighbor</i>
<i>Limited or no opportunity for rebellion, secession, autonomy, or rescue</i>	
Israeli Arabs	Arab states
Arabs of Alexandretta (Turkey)	Syria
Azeris of Iran	Azerbaijan
Egyptian Copts	The EU, the U.S.
Muslims of Bulgaria	Turkey
Foreign labor in the Gulf	Respective home countries
Jews of Arab countries	Israel
<i>Possibility of rebellion, secession, autonomy, or rescue</i>	
Albanians of Kosovo	Albania
Palestinians of Jordan	Palestinian Authority
Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza	Arab states
Shi'a of Lebanon	Iran
Turks of Cyprus	Turkey
Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh	Armenia
Shi'a of Afghanistan	Iran
Uzbeks of Afghanistan	Uzbekistan
Indian Muslims	Pakistan

Israel, for example, cannot hope to overthrow the Jewish state or to secede from it. Given Israel's military might, conventional and unconventional, the neighboring Arab states cannot credibly threaten to invade Israel and defeat the Jewish majority. The Israeli Arabs thus must seek to improve the status of their community within the existing Israeli political framework. This is much harder to do if the community accepts aid from countries with which Israel is hostile.

The Serbs of Croatia serve as a warning to communities that attempt to draw on the help of a neighbor in freeing themselves from their home country. Serb politicians encouraged and aided the Serbs of Croatia to carve out autonomous Serbian areas of Croatia. Eventually, however, international pressure on Serbian politicians increased, and Serbia abandoned the Serbs of the Krajina region to the Croatian army and agreed to a peace with Croatia that returns the Serbs of eastern Slavonia to Croatian sovereignty. In other places ethnic communities have done somewhat better. The Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh used aid from Armenia to break away from Azerbaijan,

and Turkey separated the Turks of Cyprus from the Greek Cypriots. Both communities paid a high cost in violence and destruction. Neither breakaway state is recognized by the international community, and Azerbaijan may yet try to recapture Nagorno-Karabakh, as Croatia reduced the autonomous Serb enclaves on its territory.⁵⁸

Some subordinate ethnic communities can hope to successfully rebel, secede, or be rescued by a co-ethnic neighbor. This is by no means an un-mixed blessing. If such communities negotiate a settlement with the regime, it may well give them better terms than less threatening communities. Yet the security dilemma can make it impossible to work out such a contract: the two sides may not be able to make a credible commitment that they will abstain from doing harm to the other, and one or both sides feel that failure to act first will seriously damage their chances of winning any eventual struggle. Mutual threat can lead to ethnic war, and while one side or another may "win," both bear enormous costs. It is in such cases that extremists have the most power to destroy ethnic contracts by negating mutual guarantees. Most often this is accomplished by acts of violence designed to instill fear in one or the other communities and thereby provoke repression, counteraction, and a spiral into ethnic war. The subordinate community consequently often has a strong interest in self-policing, in preventing any acts of violence which damage the status of the community as a whole.⁵⁹ Self-policing is more likely to be effective where (1) the regime and the ethnic community work out an accommodation, and (2) ethnic violence will not spiral out of control as the result of individual acts of terror. Where ethnic polarization plainly cannot succeed in overturning the ethnic balance of power, ethnic contracts have much more resilience in the face of extremist action.

Only in quite limited circumstances do ethnic communities register a clear gain from the presence of a threatening co-ethnic neighbor. The Russians of the Baltic states are one example. These Russians do not threaten the Baltic regimes so much by what they might do, but instead by what Russia might do to help them. Appeasement of the Russian minorities makes Russian involvement less likely, while repression puts wind in the sails of Russian nationalist politicians and raises the threat of a disastrous intervention. It helps in this that the Russian minorities, by and large, do not want to be rescued, for the Baltic economies are far sounder than Russia's.⁶⁰ The Baltic governments thus tend to appease, the Russian minorities benefit, and everyone avoids the cost of ethnic polarization.

Finally, it is worth noting that it is in some respects to the advantage of a subordinate community that it cannot pose a serious threat to the dominant

ethnicity. A community that can plausibly threaten to rebel, secede, or seek rescue poses an enormous threat to the home-country regime. While the home-country regime may respond to this potential threat with appeasement, it is also quite possible that the regime and the subordinate community will fail to negotiate an ethnic contract which will provide security guarantees for both sides. In the absence of this, the security dilemma often propels both sides toward escalating violence, especially if extremists deliberately try to exacerbate ethnic polarization. From this issue the sort of vicious ethnic wars that have blighted the ex-Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and Nagorno-Karabakh. While the subordinate community might win such a war—as have the Armenians of Azerbaijan, at least thus far—such a victory comes at enormous cost. Where the level of threat is lower, as in the Gulf monarchies, the security dilemma does not come into play.

Conclusions

On first glance it would seem that subordinate ethnic communities would stand to gain a great deal by the proximity of a state controlled by members of their own ethnicity. Power resides largely in states, and a group able to draw on the power of a neighboring sympathetic state would appear to have an advantage over a group lacking such a tie. In practice, while this is occasionally the case, more often it is not. The subordinate community, because of its ethnic tie to a neighboring state, often poses a threat to the home-country regime. The home-country regime often responds to this threat with repression rather than appeasement. Only rarely can subordinate communities avoid paying most of the costs of this repression. The Shi'a of the Arab Gulf monarchies cannot overthrow the regimes, secede, or reasonably hope for rescue from Iran. In this situation, the communities drawing on Iranian support for subversion of the home-country regimes invites repression, not appeasement.

For all the reputed fanaticism of the Shi'a, and their hatred for oppression, the political history of the Shi'i communities of the Arab Gulf monarchies suggests that these communities are aware of the weakness of their position, and that this is reflected in their political strategies. On a few occasions Shi'i extremists have sought support from Iran in carrying out violent attacks against their home-country regimes. These instances have not provoked ethnic polarization and spiraling ethnic violence. Neither have they helped the Shi'a in bargaining with the ruling families. The scarcity of these acts of violence over the past decades, and in the face of real political deprivation, suggests that the communities recognize the political constraints of their situa-

tions, and that pragmatism usually overcomes any ideological predisposition the Shi'a may have for martyrdom in the pursuit of lost causes.

Notes

1. There are well-known analytic dangers in treating communities of individuals as rational actors. It is, however, often a useful device to ask what the interests of a community (or those of its members) may be, so that we can discern whether or not collective action problems prevent the community from realizing those interests.

2. I am thus excluding situations in which subordinate ethnic communities facilitate cooperation between their home country and a neighbor: in these situations, it would seem, ethnic communities often do benefit from the presence of a co-ethnic neighbor.

3. It is sometimes even the case that the mere existence of the ethnic tie, absent any actual action on the part of the subordinate community, poses a threat to the home-country regime and results in the repression of the ethnic community. Japanese-Americans during World War II are an example.

4. The most prominent exception is an article by Joseph Kostiner, "Shi'i Unrest in the Gulf," in *Shi'ism, Resistance, and Revolution*, ed. Martin Kramer (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1987), 173–86.

5. Shahram Chubin, "The Islamic Republic's Foreign Policy in the Gulf," in *Shi'ism, Resistance, and Revolution*, ed. Martin Kramer (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1987), 169. See also Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran–Saudi Arabia Relations and Regional Order*, Adelphi Paper no. 304 (1996), 33–35.

6. R. K. Ramazani, "Shi'ism in the Persian Gulf," in *Shi'ism and Social Protest*, ed. Juan R. I. Cole and Nikki R. Keddie (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986), 54.

7. Milton J. Esman and Itamar Rabinovich, "The Study of Ethnic Politics in the Middle East," in *Ethnicity, Pluralism, and the State in the Middle East*, ed. Esman and Rabinovich (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 19–20.

8. David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild, "Containing Fear: The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict," *International Security* 21, no. 2 (Fall 1996): 41–76. See also James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 379–414.

9. Some analyses of Shi'i political ideology note the quietist strain in Shi'i thought, which coexists with the revolutionary aspect that came to the forefront with the revolution of 1979. To the degree that the quietist strain is also given weight, the utility of ideology, alone, in predicting Shi'i political behavior meets with some immediate difficulties, for it must be explained why one aspect determines action in one place and time, and the other elsewhere.

10. For the full version of this argument, see Michael Herb, "All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution, and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies" (Albany: State University of New York Press, forthcoming, 1999).

11. Gregory F. Gause, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1994), 97–98.

12. The Shi'a of Bahrain make up the larger part of the rural population, but the very modest size of the state—the smallest of the GCC countries—makes regional autonomy a non-issue.

13. Iran has occupied the Emirate islands, but this is not a measure of capability to invade, say, Abu Dhabi. Even absent the American presence, it is by no means clear that Iran could successfully invade a GCC state: Iran, unlike Ba'hist Iraq, has little recent history of such things, and the GCC states benefit from the natural water barrier of the Gulf.

14. In some situations a subordinate group can deliberately provoke repression by their home-country regime precisely in order to force a co-ethnic neighbor to protect them. Since Iran does not have the capacity to protect the Shi'i communities in the Arab states, such a strategy would not seem merely irresponsible—as it would for communities that stand some chance of being rescued—but instead inexplicable, which is a different thing.

15. Both the Persian and the Arab Shi'i communities are *ithna ashari* Shi'a, followers of the twelfth imam.

16. On the majlis al-shura, see R. Hrair Dekmejian, "Saudi Arabia's Consultative Council," *The Middle East Journal* 52, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 213. The U.S. State Department provides a useful yearly summary of the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia in its *Country Reports on Human Rights*.

17. Adherents of the doctrine refer to themselves as the *muwahhidun*, or Unitarians, believers in the unity of God. The founder of the school of thought was Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab, whence the term *Wahhabism* came.

18. In the 1920s, before their 1929 defeat, the *ikhwan* sought to convert, by force, the Shi'a of the Eastern Province to Wahhabi Islam. See Jacob Goldberg, "The Shi'i Minority in Saudi Arabia," in *Shi'ism and Social Protest*, ed. Juan R. I. Cole and Nikki R. Keddie (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986), 231–36, and John S. Habib, *Ibn Saud's Warriors of Islam: The Ikhwan of Najd and Their Role in the Creation of the Saudi Kingdom, 1910–1930* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 122–23.

19. Goldberg, "Shi'i Minority," 238–39. He notes that the Shi'a "were intimidated by the power of the Saudi regime, and they conducted their affairs in a highly subdued and cautious manner."

20. R. K. Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran: Challenge and Response in the Middle East* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 41; Richard F. Nyrop, ed., *Saudi Arabia: A Country Study*, Foreign Area Handbook Series (Washington: American University, 1984), 51–52; Goldberg, "Shi'i Minority," 243.

21. U.S. State Department, *Country Reports on Human Rights: Saudi Arabia* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1993).

22. Kostiner, "Shi'i Unrest."

23. Riad Najib El-Rayyis, *Riyah al-sunum: Al-sa'udiya wa duwal al-jazira ba'da harb al-khalij* (Poisonous winds: Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states after the Gulf War) (London: Riad El-Rayyis Books, 1994), 197–214.

24. At least one report suggested that the bombing reflected a breakdown in the 1993 agreement between the Al Saud and the Shi'i opposition, though it is also possible that the bombers had entirely different motivations. *Washington Post*, November 1, 1996.

25. *New York Times*, "US-Saudi Inquiry into 1996 Bombing is Falling Apart," June 21, 1998.

26. The best surviving written record of the majlis, recorded by its secretary, Khalid al-Adsani (himself of a prominent Sunni family), reveals a deep bias against the Shi'a, many of recent immigration to Kuwait. Khalid Sulayman al-Adsani, *Muthakkirat Khalid Sulayman al-Adsani, rahimahu allah, sikritir majlis al-umma al-tashri'iya al-awal wa al-thani* (The memoirs of Khalid Sulayman al-Adsani, Allah have mercy on his soul, the secretary of the first and second legislative bodies of the nation)(photocopy of unpublished manuscript in possession of author, n.d.).

27. *Ibid.*, 90. On the period, see Herb, "All in the Family," and Jill Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

28. Abd al-Ridha Ali Assiri, *Al-kuwayt fi al-siyasa al-duwaliya al-mu'asira* (Kuwait in the context of modern world politics)(Kuwait: n.p., 1993), 171–72.

29. *Ibid.*, 172–74; Adil al-Tabtaba'i, *Al-sulta al-tashri'iya fi duwal al-khalij al-'arabi* (Legislative power in the states of the Arab Gulf), *Manshurat majallat dirasat al-khalij wa al-jazira al-'arabiya* no. 14, Kuwait, 1985, 388.

30. The bombings of the American and French embassies in 1983 and the attempted assassination of Emir Jabir in 1985 were carried out mostly by foreign Shi'a, but Kuwaiti Shi'a were responsible for the oil-installation bombings of 1986. See Assiri, *Al-kuwayt fi al-siyasa al-duwaliya*, 432–52; Kostiner, "Shi'i Unrest," 180–82.

31. On the ethnic and sectarian divisions in Bahraini society, see Fuad I. Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 1–4.

32. See the extensive comment on the current unrest by the Bahrain Freedom Movement at ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/Bahrain.

33. The relatively radical Shi'i opposition organization that came to prominence after 1979, the *Jabha al-islamiya li-tahrir al-bahrayn* (Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain—IFLB), decried the sectarian "trap" laid for it by the regime, explicitly recognizing that the sectarian issue helped the regime more than it harmed the opposition. Faysal Marhun, *Al-bahrayn: Qadaya al-sulta wa al-mujtama'* (Bahrain: Matters of state and society)(London: Dar al-safa, 1988), 223.

34. Fearon, "Rationalist explanations for war."

35. British officers have headed the security forces and the officers and men are a cocktail of nationalities, from Pakistan, Britain, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere. Those who are Muslims are not Shi'a.

36. Marhun, *Al-bahrayn*, 26, 245.

37. *Al-mujtama' al-madani: Taqir al-sanawi 1995* (Civil society: The 1995 annual report) (Cairo: Markaz Ibn Khaldun li'l-Dirasat al-Inma'iyyah), 191.

38. Dahl, *Polyarchy*, 14, 16, 36, 46, 47.

39. For a fuller discussion of the nature of parliamentary constitutions in the Gulf monarchies—and in particular Kuwait—see Herb, "All in the Family," chap. 6.

40. In the IMF's *Government Finance Statistics Yearbook* grants (of unspecified origin, though Saudi Arabia is the only candidate) come to \$100 million a year since 1984, following even greater sums in the years immediately following the Iranian revolution. Oman and Bahrain shared, between 1984 and 1994, a GCC subsidy, for armaments, of \$1.8

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billion, though apparently only Saudi Arabia paid its share. Saudi Arabia sustains the BAPCO (the Bahrain oil company) oil refinery by providing 80 percent of its oil. Helen Chapin Metz, ed., *Persian Gulf States: Country Studies*, Area Handbook Series (Washington: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1994), 352; Anthony H. Cordesman, *After the Storm: The Changing Military Balance in the Middle East* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1993), 558, 629.

41. For the government's view, see *Al-wasat*, June 10, 1996. Certainly it is clear that the regime hoped to use the putative coup attempt to garner international support in its struggle against its domestic opposition. For the oppositions' view, see the Bahrain Freedom Movement's log of events in Bahrain for June 1996.

42. Chubin and Tripp also discuss the implications of the Bahraini conflict for American policy. Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, "Iran-Saudi Arabia Relations and Regional Order," *Adelphi Paper* no. 304 (Oxford: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1996), 35.

43. In May 1996 the chairman of the U.S. joint chiefs of staff, General Shalikashvili, met with the Bahraini crown prince and announced that the United States was "most supportive of Bahrain's efforts to ensure its stability," a reference to U.S. support for the regime's repression of Bahraini dissidents. *Reuters*, May 29, 1996.

44. The lower figure comes from James Bill, "Islam, Politics, and Shi'ism in the Gulf," *Middle East Insight* 3, no. 3 (January-February 1984), while the higher is mentioned, along with Bill's figures, in Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran*, 277. The lower figure is almost certainly closer to the truth.

45. Oman has only a very small Shi'i population, part of it Indian Ismaili sects.

46. There are a number of accounts of the dispute, including Hooshang Amirahmadi, ed., *Small Islands, Big Politics: The Tombs and Abu Musa in the Persian Gulf* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996). See also Rouhollah K. Ramazani, *The Persian Gulf: Iran's Role* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1972), 56-68; Cordesman, *The Gulf and the Search for Strategic Stability*, 417, 425.

47. This is also reflected in the continued economic ties between other emirates and Iran. Sharjah and Iran continue to share the revenues of an oil field near the largest of the three islands, even while various Arab capitals and Tehran exchange hostile barbs over the issue of sovereignty. *Middle East*, February 1994, 29.

48. CIA 1996 *World Factbook*; Bill, *Islam, Politics and Shi'ism*; Joyce N. Wiley, *The Islamic Movement of Iraqi Shi'as* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1992), 9. Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25-44. All figures on Iraq's ethnic composition are estimates.

49. Abd al-Karim al-'Uzri, a Shi'i politician of the monarchical era, discusses the sectarian problem and the role of the army in *Mushkilat al-hukm fi al-'Iraq: Tahlil lil-'awamil al-ta'ifiya wa al-'unsuriya fi ta'til al-hukm al-dimuqrati fi al-Iraq wa al-hulul al-dururiya lil-taghallub alayha* (Problems of government in Iraq: An analysis of how sectarian factors prevent democratic government in Iraq and of necessary solutions to overcome them) (London: n.p., 1991), 335-42.

50. Amazia Baram argues that the rising percentage of Shi'a in high political positions in the Ba'athist regime in the 1980s signaled a weakening of the sectarian character of the regime. The argument may be overstated, but it is not insignificant that some Shi'a did

hold high positions; at the same time, Sunni Arab control of the core state organs never fell into any doubt. "The Ruling Political Elite in Ba'thi Iraq, 1968–1986: The Changing Features of a Collective Profile," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 21, no. 4 (November 1989): 447–93.

51. Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 182, 968, 1017, 1042–44, especially 1078–79.

52. Hanna Batatu, "Iraq's Underground Shi'a Movements: Characteristics, Causes and Prospects," *Middle East Journal* 35, no. 4 (Autumn 1981): 592.

53. Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1990), 190. They follow this, however, with the less convincing assertion that the "fundamental" division in Iraqi society is between the "haves" and the "have-nots."

54. Interview with Mish'an Rikkad al-Damin al-Juburi in *Al-hayat*, April 25, 1993.

55. Shi'i opposition publications recognize the danger of sectarian polarization and do not attack Sunnis as such. In this, the Iraqi Shi'i opposition follows a strategy similar to that of the Shi'a of Bahrain. See Joyce N. Wiley, *The Islamic Movement of Iraqi Shi'as* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1992), 148.

56. On Iran and the Iraqi Shi'a, see Gregory Gause, "The Illogic of Dual Containment," *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 2 (March–April, 1994): 56–67.

57. In 1920 the Shi'a, with support from many Sunnis, revolted in response to the declaration of the British Mandate over Iraq. One observer has discerned an aborted effort at "state formation" by these Shi'i leaders. In the mid-thirties, however, a newly strengthened Iraqi army established its military supremacy in the south. Nakash, *Shi'is of Iraq*, 7, 72, 120–25; Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 65–67.

58. On Nagorno-Karabakh see David Rieff, "Case Study in Ethnic Strife," *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 2 (March–April 1997): 118–33.

59. On self-policing among ethnic communities, see James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Explaining Interethnic Cooperation," *APSA* 90, no. 4 (December 1996): 715–35.

60. William Maley, "Does Russia Speak for Baltic Russians?," *World Today* 51, no. 1 (January 1995): 4–6.

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