

# Iraq and the material basis of post-conflict police reconstruction

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## Abstract

Existing scientific literature on post-conflict police reconstruction is largely divided between two camps. The first, and most widely employed in practice, can be termed a neo-liberal model, which argues progress comes through technological and organizational sophistication delivered by Western officials. This neo-liberal model has been the guiding principle of the reconstruction of the Iraqi state and police force. However, many scholars have argued this model is woefully inadequate for post-conflict reconstruction and have instead developed an alternative approach which can be termed a reflexive model. Similar to what is known as fourth generation peacebuilding in the International Relations literature, the reflexive model stresses building relationships with local stakeholders and relying on indigenous knowledge to guide post-conflict reconstruction. Drawing from 48 intensive interviews, 87 qualitative surveys, and six months of ethnographic examination of an Iraqi police training academy, this article argues that both the neo-liberal and reflexive models suffer from ignoring the material basis of reconstruction. This article employs the term ‘material’ in the theoretical sense; while police reconstruction programs spend significant effort on reshaping the ideologies of police, few address the real conditions police face, from the necessary levels of funding and equipment in their training centers, to basic concerns such as adequate pay to draw qualified applicants and prevent corruption. This study examines how economic inequality affects the ‘other side’ of conflicts, the security sector. The central finding is that the material deprivation experienced by Iraqi police has resulted in an underqualified force consisting of uninterested officers whose capacity and skill deficits have fed directly into the rise of powerful non-state organizations such as the Islamic State. This article explicates a central underlying cause of the problem with the reconstruction of the Iraqi police specifically and the larger case of neo-liberal post-conflict police reconstruction generally.

## Keywords

fourth generation peacebuilding, Iraq, neo-liberalism, police reconstruction

## Introduction

On the final day of training at the Sulaimaniyah Police Lead Training Academy, 40 young Iraqi police recruits march to a shooting range to receive their firearms training. As a requirement of graduation, all students fire ten bullets from the Glock and 15 from the AK they will carry as police. Positioning themselves 10m away from large paper targets, they wait for the command to fire and unleash their apportioned bullets; after all had fired, only one had managed to hit anywhere inside the target. ‘No one was a success’, the trainer disappointedly exclaimed. Immediately after finishing on the range, students were marched to an office building where they

signed their name to an official document verifying they had shot the requisite number of bullets. Hours later, these students graduated from the academy, were issued weapons, and sent to join security forces throughout the region.

I asked the trainer in charge why these students did not receive more time on the range given their lackluster performance. He explained that while students are legally required to fire that many bullets, those numbers also serve as a maximum, as there simply is not room in

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the budget for more. After I suggested this nominal amount of training does not appear to prepare the students for using the weapons they will undoubtedly need to use, likely in the near future, he agreed, but noted the best he could do is make them familiar with the sound and feel of shooting a gun. Such is life under the neo-liberal austerity of the Iraqi reconstruction.

Police reconstruction plays a key role in the viability of post-conflict state formation (Harris & Goldsmith, 2012; Herbst, 2004; Nascimento, 2011). Its success or failure is literally a life or death situation for many, and the federalist democracy favored by the international community requires not only stability, but consensus between multiple ethnic, religious, and cultural groups (Allen, 2010; Nuruzzaman, 2010). Police are central to building this consent, as a major factor affecting public trust of the state is positive interaction with government agents, and 'few such agents are more active, numerous, or potentially intimidating than police officers' (Wiatrowski & Goldstone, 2010: 80).

There is a long line of scholarly literature concerning best practices and lessons learned from previous reconstruction efforts (Bayley, 2006; Ellison & Pino, 2012; Goldsmith & Dinnen, 2007; Murray, 2011). Most can be categorized as belonging to one of two ideal types: a 'neo-liberal approach' viewing police reconstruction as a technical problem within the context of privatization and economic liberalization, and a 'reflexive approach' arguing police reconstruction must be context-driven, with an emphasis on incorporating local knowledge. While the reflexive offers a clear improvement upon the neo-liberal model, it similarly suffers from insufficient attention paid to the material realities of police reconstruction. Although far from the only problem afflicting such efforts, the important role played by a lack of funding has not been sufficiently addressed in the academic literature on Iraq or police reconstruction more generally.

Drawing from an intensive examination of an Iraqi police training academy, this article argues material shortcomings have played a significant role in the reconstruction of Iraqi police. They have resulted in an underqualified force consisting largely of uninterested officers with capacity and skill deficits so severe that even had the reconstruction followed the reflexive model, Iraqi police still would have been unable to provide law or order, or to combat the rise of organizations such as *D'aesh* (known in English as ISIS). Indeed, there is reason to believe this financial starvation of the police was enacted specifically to prevent the kinds of reflexive, indigenous policies that model calls for (Klein,

2007; Muttitt, 2012; Schwartz, 2008). While scholars have established funding as a key component for the success of insurgents (Collier, Hoeffler & Rohner, 2008; Mehlum et al., 2002; Richmond & Mitchell, 2011), this article demonstrates the same is true for those fighting them; the move from the neo-liberal to reflexive model requires not only a shift in ideological design, but significant shifts in material practices as well.

## Two views on police reconstruction

During the past two decades, international coalitions attempted to reconstruct police forces in post-conflict settings in over a dozen nations. The United States has led six such efforts over this time period, Iraq being the fifth in a majority Muslim nation (Dobbins, 2004), and this experience has produced two dominant schools of thought.

The most widely employed model is a *neo-liberal* approach, viewing police reconstruction as principally a technical enterprise of importing Western methods while improving capacity through training by Western police. Training is typically one part of a larger neo-liberal program resting on political and economic liberalization, largely ignoring variance in local conditions, such as previous forms of government or current levels of violence (Roberts, 2011; Goldsmith & Dinnen, 2007). The work of Bayley (2006) fits neatly within this paradigm, identifying four pivotal reforms for democratic forces, all echoing classic liberal arguments on the role of the state. Bayley argues police must be accountable to law rather than a particular government; protect human rights; be accountable to persons outside the force; and give priority to the needs of private citizens.

This neo-liberal model of police reform was the guiding principle of Iraqi reconstruction (Klein, 2007; You-sif, 2006), marking a break from previous, more successful US-led police reconstruction efforts, such as those in Haiti and Bosnia. While previous efforts were under the auspices of the Departments of Justice and State's joint International Criminal Investigation Training Assistance Program, Iraqi reconstruction was assigned to the Department of Defense, an unprecedented historical first (Jones 2007; Dobbins, 2004). Furthermore, the actual instruction and training of Iraqi police was conducted largely by private contractors as part of the Bush administration's push to privatize the invasion (Chwastiak, 2011). These twin unprecedented changes directly fueled many of the problems discussed below, as the Department of

Defense proved more interested in creating an auxiliary army (Wozniak, 2017; Jones, 2007), while private contractors regularly failed to deliver promised services (Hughes, 2007; Muttitt, 2012).

As such, many scholars (Ellison & Pino, 2012; Nascimento, 2011; Richmond & Mitchell, 2011; Roberts, 2011) argue the neo-liberal model is woefully misguided. A central problem is it assumes a predatory state, and thus insists upon as weak a state as possible, while giving deference to the capacities of a free market. Cases as disparate as Sierra Leone (Keen, 2005) and Kosovo (Schwarz, 2005) demonstrate forcefully that attempting to impose a weak state/free market paradigm on rebuilding nations engenders serious negative consequences, creating a situation in which the market is stronger than the state, despite the fact 'there is nothing in the nature of a market that confines transactions to those that are socially desirable' (Keen, 2005: 85).

The insistence on a free market further highlights how neo-liberal reconstruction privileges 'the goals of international actors, often excluding the needs, goals, and norms of local actors' (Richmond & Mitchell, 2011: 326). Such paradigms advance a 'selective emancipation' privileging 'freedom from political restraints that harm very few at the expense of freedom from economic restraints that kill millions annually' (Roberts, 2011: 2540). This has the effect of not only leaving a weakened state with little to combat a return to violent conflict (Herbst, 2004; Nascimento, 2011), but also producing a high likelihood of alienating the majority who do not benefit from the economic spoils of the newly free market (Richmond & Mitchell, 2011; Roberts, 2011).

Moving beyond the neo-liberal paradigm, many scholars (Ellison & Pino, 2012; Goldsmith & Dinnen, 2007; Wiatrowski & Goldstone, 2010) have instead argued for what can be termed a *reflexive* model, which advocates 'greater emancipation from structural violence, indigenous autonomy in determining peacebuilding priorities, and the idea of the "everyday" as a focal point' (Roberts, 2011: 2537). Goldsmith & Dinnen (2007) are emblematic of this model, arguing reconstruction efforts must be: preceded by serious study of the setting through consultation of local populations and utilization of local expertise; should be approached with reflexivity and humility, especially considering how actions may be perceived locally; must be flexible and adaptive, deferring to local knowledge; and must acknowledge the political nature of policing and attempt institutional reform not limited to organizational improvement, but grounded in a broader set of democratic political relations.

### *The missing variable*

There is growing recognition among scholars that economic needs must be part of reconstruction programs (Barbara, 2008; Richmond & Mitchell, 2011; Wennmann, 2009), but this has not been sufficiently addressed in the literature on post-conflict police reconstruction. As Keen (2005: 79) argues, those leading such projects have 'never got to grips with the problem of remuneration for government staff'. Contemporary Iraq provides a forceful example of the consequences of ignoring such a concern, as many of the problems with the reconstruction of its security sector were greatly exacerbated by the lack of attention to the material realities of post-conflict policing.

A number of scholars have found economic inequality directly feeds the instability of fragile and post-conflict states; Collier et al. (2004) and Østby (2013) both found that high social inequality is directly connected to increases in violence, while Burgoon (2006) demonstrates that social welfare spending tends to reduce terror attacks. However, these studies are focused on the behavior of rebel and terrorist groups, and as Herbst (2004: 357) argues, 'there has been no corresponding literature on, quite literally, the other side', namely, how funding and income inequality affect security forces. Neither the neo-liberal nor the reflexive model addresses the important role adequate funding plays in the success of reconstruction efforts.

This lacuna is significant, as the democratic state has two fundamental needs: legitimacy, in the eyes of its citizens and other nations, and effectiveness, in terms of services rendered (Call, 2011). This makes policing a key institution, as the legitimacy of the nascent state depends in large part on effectiveness, which in turn rests upon organizational capacity and the availability of resources (Bradford, Murphy & Jackson, 2014). In post-conflict scenarios a key measure of effectiveness is the ability to provide basic safety and security, with the strength of a democracy and the quality of life enjoyed by its citizens in large part due to the ability of police to effectively and legitimately discharge their duties (Nascimento, 2011).

Despite growing awareness that economic and material needs are preconditions of security and may reduce further occurrences of violent conflict (Harris and Goldsmith, 2012; Schwarz, 2005), the reconstruction process in Iraq has starved the police of the necessary resources to achieve effectiveness. While multiple factors have contributed to the instability of the Iraqi state, it is argued that by ignoring such a fundamental concern, coalition partners created a situation in which the

critical failures of police were almost inevitable regardless of levels of public support, wider questions of legitimacy, and other political factors. This is not to argue for a form of material determinism, but rather that without addressing the material needs of security forces, even the most well-intentioned reconstruction program is likely to fail.

## Data and methods

Data for this project were collected in Sulaimaniyah, located in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), the semi-autonomous region of Northern Iraq. Although the majority of the population are Kurds, there is a sizeable minority of displaced persons from active conflict zones in the South, as locals refer to wider Iraq. Kurdistan provides a partial glimpse into Iraq; Kurds comprise 15–20% of the population, but are an ethnic group distinct from the Arab peoples that largely populate the rest of the nation, and the region has experienced less violence while maintaining a relatively healthy economy. Although not directly representative of the nation as a whole, these factors make the KRG essentially a best case scenario for studying the development of policing within the Iraqi state: the region is relatively safe, stable and prosperous, and welcomes the presence of the USA. Kurds comprise one of the most organized political entities in the nation, and their support is central to the possibility of a democratic Iraqi state (Nuruzzaman, 2010). Furthermore, their organized unity means Kurdish security forces suffer few of the oft-debilitating sectarian problems facing those throughout the rest of the nation. Simply put, nowhere in the nation provides a better opportunity for US forces to successfully implement their vision.

Data collection was conducted in the spring of 2011 at the Sulaimaniyah Police Lead Training Academy. Founded in 2003, the academy is one of six regional training centers in Iraq and has, as of 2011, trained roughly one-fifth of all Iraqi police. Whereas originally all instruction was conducted by US advisers, training is now conducted by local police following materials provided by US police. I was unable to gain access to original training materials due to their closely guarded proprietary nature. However, Iraqi trainers claimed to follow syllabi and other materials to the letter, and student questions as to why an act was performed in a certain way were often met with the answer ‘because Americans do it that way’.

Over 20 weeks of direct observation of training were conducted, covering the training of two cohorts,

consisting of roughly 150 students. Courses were attended four days a week for the entirety of the ‘theoretical’ training, usually between two and three hours per day. Ethnographic observations were supplemented by intensive interviews with trainers and students at the academy. In total, 48 interviews (37 with staff, 11 with students) were conducted, with an average of 37 minutes per interview. Finally, these were buttressed by surveys comprised of open-ended opinion questions centering on respondents’ views concerning democratic governance as well as the various roles of a police officer. Of the 110 students at the academy, 87 participated in the survey, giving a response rate of 79%.

Interviews and ethnographic observations were conducted with the assistance of a translator. While I am conversational in Arabic, for a variety of historical and political reasons, most respondents greatly preferred speaking in their particular dialect of Kurdish (*Sorani*). *Sorani* is exclusively spoken in this region of the nation and there are few, if any, English-to-*Sorani* texts or programs, necessitating the use of translators. To ensure accuracy in translation, randomly selected audio recordings and written materials were double-checked by a second translator.

## A neo-liberal dream, an underfunded reconstruction

While the fact that most Bush administration predictions regarding the ease of the invasion were swiftly proven wrong led many to contend there was no real plan, ‘at least in the economic realm, the USA did have a plan, and the plan centered on the sweeping and simultaneous liberalization of labor and capital markets’ (Yousif, 2006: 491). Iraq’s economy is now one of the most unregulated in the world, with economic policies representing a ‘wish list’ for international investors (Barbara, 2008; Klein, 2007; Schwartz, 2008). Yet constructing a viable state is ‘very difficult to solve with an ideology that pushes rigidly for a “free market” unencumbered by the state’ (Keen, 2005: 75), and the extremes to which economic liberalization has been pursued in Iraq have created a number of significant problems for both police and the larger state.

This neo-liberal model created an Iraqi police force which meets almost none of the basic criteria of democratic policing (Bayley, 2006; Goldsmith & Dinnen, 2007; Özerdem, 2010). Writing nearly 100 years ago, famed criminal justice pioneer August Vollmer (1922) outlined the basic necessities of democratic police, ideals which have changed little in the intervening years and

continue to inform police reconstruction efforts throughout the world. Among his prescriptions were that police need highly trained individuals with practical skills, to be seen as part of the community they are policing, and require the latest technology. Unfortunately, Iraqi police fall far short of these prescriptions: training is neither thorough nor in-depth and imparts little operational knowledge (Wozniak, 2017); the institution of the force involved no consultation with local populations (Schwartz, 2008); and as this article demonstrates, police face severe shortages of funding and basic equipment.

This is especially significant, as the police under Saddam Hussein were highly efficient in controlling crime and maintaining order, and prior to the invasion, the Iraqi people enjoyed one of the lowest rates of interpersonal crime in the world (Özerdem, 2010). It is difficult to overstate how novel and sudden Iraq's descent into chaos was for the average Iraqi long conditioned to expect a rigid, despotic order ensured by a strong police force. Indeed, even the participants in this study, who as Kurds bore the brunt of Saddam's brutality and are especially disdainful of the former dictator, expressed begrudging admiration for the capabilities of the previous force (Wozniak, 2017).

While the Department of Justice's pre-invasion assessment recommended 5,000 trainers and advisers be sent to reconstruct Iraq's police, National Security Council planners rejected these numbers, leading to a situation in the summer of 2003 wherein there were only a few dozen advisers to oversee the training of over 200,000 police officers (Bowen, 2009). As conditions worsened, the USA allocated \$3 billion to bring Iraqi security forces up to functionality, but due to contracting delays and a lack of personnel to oversee disbursement, follow-up audits found only a small percentage of this money actually went to training, with the vast majority used to fund security for other projects or lost to fraud and mismanagement (SIGIR, 2013).

A significant amount of this fraud and mismanagement is directly tied to the neo-liberal insistence on the use of private contractors with little to no oversight. As one of many such examples, the private firm DynCorp received over \$750 million in contracts to provide 1,000 police training advisers, yet delivered only 50 while continuing to receive further contracts (Hughes, 2007). This rampant subcontracting without oversight or consequence for failure to deliver means much of what is labeled 'corruption' is more properly understood as a part of the wider plan to reshape the Iraqi economy and destroy any remaining credibility of the public

sector (Whyte, 2007), to the point where the reconstruction 'became a new form of corporate welfare in which extracting profits from malfeasance was acceptable' (Chwastiak, 2011: 33). So while the United States has officially allocated roughly \$9 billion in total to the Iraqi police, loose accountability and virtually no oversight means only a small percentage of those funds was ever actually provided to the training and implementation of the force (SIGIR, 2013).

Of course, underfunding is not solely responsible for the on-going strife in Iraq; the similarly disastrous British invasion of the early 20th century, operating under an identical banner of introducing democracy to the region, paved the way for the eventual rise of Saddam and made 'democracy' a somewhat dirty word in Iraq (Ellison & Pino, 2012; Muttitt, 2012). Moreover, the idea that the reconstruction is more about the interests of the United States than about safeguarding democratic rights is not an uncommon thought among Iraqis (Muttitt, 2012). What little goodwill was engendered by the deposing of Saddam Hussein was almost immediately undercut by the USA backing questionable leaders with little popular support, from Achmad Chalabi and the largely discredited Iraqi National Congress to their ongoing support for former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, who has himself been criticized for seeking a new dictatorship and whose actions posed 'a direct threat to the country's nascent democratic institutions' (Dodge, 2013: 242).

US police training programs long ago shifted from promoting organizational efficiency and professionalization to instead employing indigenous police to serve 'key political and ideological functions in providing the internal security and order deemed necessary for the implementation of liberal-capitalist development plans' (Kuzmarov, 2009a: 193). Instead of instilling democratic police, these training programs were essentially modernizing the repressive apparatus in client states. A similar process is occurring in Iraq, in which a heavy reliance on privatized contractors, often with checkered pasts (Kuzmarov, 2009b; Muttitt, 2012), has led to a process in which what little practical training police officers receive centers exclusively on the violent suppression of subjects (Wozniak, 2017). The coalition's own report on police progress found them better trained in counter-insurgency tactics than civilian policing (Jones, 2007), despite consensus that using 'officers as second-tier soldiers works against every principle of democratic policing' (Wiatrowski & Goldstone, 2010: 87).

Yet it is important to remember the extent to which neo-liberal austerity dominated the reconstruction, and

how the resulting shortcomings greatly contributed to its lack of legitimacy, while neither the neo-liberal nor the reflexive model provides guidance for overcoming the predictably problematic outcomes of this austerity. Most notably, the starving of the state sector means there is no safety net for the large numbers that remain unemployed, and little reconstruction money is finding its way to the average Iraqi citizen (Cockburn, 2014; Muttitt, 2012; Yousif, 2006). The economic policies of the USA lead to waging counterinsurgency 'on the cheap' and present a 'human rights opportunity cost' (Keen, 2005) in which safety and security are sacrificed in the name of economic liberalization. The neo-liberal model privileges the civil and political participation of a narrow swath of society, 'undermining the importance of structures for full economic and social participation' (Nascimento, 2011: 45).

### **Life in an underfunded force**

#### *Budgetary issues at the academy*

The Sulaimaniyah academy was one of the most expensive projects in the region (ITAO, 2009), yet the budget shortfalls of the reconstruction are readily evident in academy dorms, facilities, and equipment. Buildings housing higher-ranking officers are simple one-story constructions of corrugated sheet metal, sweltering in the desert heat as air conditioners strain to make a difference. A few offices have threadbare rugs, while most are floored with simple tile in various states of disrepair. Classrooms are similar buildings, typically in even greater disrepair than the offices. Most have at least a working fan or air conditioner, but all feature broken wooden desks and warped walls, both covered in graffiti presumably etched by bored students during the many occasions they are left to wait for their instructor for a significant period of time.

Dormitories share a similar aesthetic, with rows of simple metal bunk beds periodically separated by metal footlockers. Although often complaining about the smell that accumulates when a large number of young men share a living space, students saved their true anger for the rest of the academy's amenities. A common complaint was that the food served in the academy cafeteria was making students sick, and that repeated requests for better food fell on deaf ears. More telling to the budgetary situation, recruits are required to bring their own drinking water, due to the academy's lack of potable water.

Under the cover of anonymity provided by the survey, students were even more loquacious in itemizing

difficulties they experienced due to the academy's limited budget. In response to a survey question asking what part of the training process most needs to be changed, nearly one-third of respondents identified the facilities themselves; as one respondent put it, the biggest problem in the training process is the 'provision of basic rights like accommodations, bath, and lavatory services. In this place, nothing is as required.' Such complaints about the bathrooms, showers, and general housing and dining areas were common, with facilities being described as 'unhygienic', 'disrespectful', and even 'a violation of our human rights'.

The academy's budget constraints were similarly evident in the clothing of both students and trainers; uniforms gave the impression they were recycled over several generations, as most were fraying at the seams, and many were missing buttons, clasps, or even the zippers on their fly. Boots showed signs of significant wear and tear, with soles in danger of falling off or toes peeking out through holes. When I ended my fieldwork during a course roughly halfway completed, multiple students were still wearing their own shoes, awaiting a pair of boots. In the early weeks of this course, small shipments of new boots arrived on a few occasions, prompting vociferous arguments from students as to why they were the most deserving recipient of a new pair.

More concerning was how these budget problems extended to training resources, as important equipment was often either not available, or in such small quantities as to become a serious impediment to lessons. For instance, there were 24 practice rifles for the entire academy. So during large classes, students would be divided into groups of roughly 40 apiece with each having only eight AKs with which to practice their salutes, firing stance, etc. There were even fewer handcuffs, so it was not uncommon for students to practice arresting each other by miming guns and handcuffs.

Finally, budgetary shortfalls, in conjunction with strong pressure to increase the number of officers as part of a questionable emphasis on 'force generation' (Jones, 2007), directly impact officer readiness by forcing a shortened training period. Recruits undergo seven to eight weeks of training consisting of only two to three hours of 'theoretical' training per day (their remaining time is spent on physical calisthenics and general academy duties). When interview respondents were asked to name one change they would make to the training process, the great majority identified either the content of training or the amount of time dedicated to it.

Many complained training time was too short, but proposed solutions ranged from a few more weeks to

several years. Speaking on behalf of trainers, Anwar,<sup>1</sup> a captain at the academy, explained ‘the duration of the course is not enough for [students] to be prepared well’. Haydar, a supervisor of security, goes further, arguing that the lack of time is the reason lessons are superficial, because ‘the duration is too little, it’s not enough for them. The students won’t get good or enough information. They only get a glimpse at things, not a deep understanding.’ Berham, a younger trainer, bluntly argues ‘lessons are too short to impart real lessons’. Finally, the director of defensive techniques training, Lawk, cited bureaucratic demands as the problem, arguing ‘if we had freedom in choosing time for [students], how long they will stay and learn from us, we would love that. But if they say we have a group of students and we have to teach them in one month, to finish the whole curriculum in that period of time, well [...] we wish for much more time.’

Most respondents cited a need for more time to expand the curriculum into other areas, especially more abstract facets of policing, like effective communication or understanding human and civil rights. Faizel, who manages the teaching department, gives a representative summation, expressing a desire for the academy to ‘pay a greater regard to the teaching department, rather than all the others [...] Also, lessons on human rights – we should make police literate about how they will treat people.’ Dukon, who oversees multiple departments, agrees, noting ‘I’m always saying that the duration of the teaching department should be more than the duration of the [physical] training department. But here it is not like that.’ Finally, several agreed with Berham, who expressed frustration with the fact that all police go through the same basic course regardless of previous experience. He notes ‘of police sent here, some have been police for twenty years. But trainers will teach him saluting, at ease, at attention. He clearly already knows all of this. What he needs is to be sent to a classroom and taught about the law and how to deal with people.’

### *Salary issues*

Another major consequence of the neo-liberal vision is drastically low pay. As the director of physical training, Kemman, explains, ‘new police here earn 500,000 dinars (US\$ 428.95) per month. They have to give 200,000 (US\$ 171.58) for the rent, and that’s a problem.’ These low salary levels led to multiple problems, most notably underqualified recruits drawn by promise of a feeble paycheck,

hostility toward other police perceived as receiving greater compensation, and predictable corruption problems.

Given high rates of unemployment, it is unsurprising that by far the most commonly stated reason for joining the police is a simple need for employment. This appears to be the norm, as outside of those joining to advance sectarian concerns (Kirkpatrick, 2014), most recruits are apolitical, viewing policing as a last resort for employment, granting little legitimacy to the central government and expressing at best a tenuous loyalty to the nascent state (Wozniak, 2017; Pianin, 2014). While those who participated in this study universally expressed approval of the ouster of Saddam and the intervention of the United States, 70% of survey respondents and every interview respondent cited a need for some form of income as either the primary or exclusive motivation for joining.

As Anwar explains, this is due to ‘the ratio of unemployment in the civilian ministries. In the Ministry of the Interior, there is more opportunity to be employed. Many graduated students are coming here and I’ve asked them why and they say it’s because of the joblessness and unemployment.’ Many police, both students and trainers, were clear they did not want to be police officers and are actively searching for other opportunities. Haydar, a young trainer, noted that while ‘the police field is not such an interesting job’, many join because ‘they are obliged to do so’ for financial reasons. Chamal underscored this point by relating a story of how in years past, policing was a common bit of advice to the unemployed; ‘those who were jobless, people said to them “go be police,” and they would be received’.

Despite having joined mainly for the chance of a steady paycheck, nearly all respondents felt the pay criminally low, especially considering the dangers facing police. Harman, a high-ranking commander, requested my assistance in righting this problem, imploring me ‘if you are going to meet our Minister or anyone else in a higher position [...] tell them to increase our salary. Because our salary is not even enough to rent a house and to bring up our children. [...] We are going to give our blood to protect our country and our hearts to protect and serve our country and make it safe everywhere. If we are going to die, let our children have good accommodations and a good life.’ Kumar, a young trainer, agreed, saying ‘there are no guarantees in our offices here. For example, if someone is going to become handicapped or lose their fingers or any part of his or her body, the government will not provide you with enough and will not give you your salary until you are going to finish 15 to 20 years of service.’

<sup>1</sup> All names of respondents have been changed to ensure anonymity.

In a similar vein, many felt the low pay and lack of general financial support made their jobs much more difficult than they would otherwise be. Soran, a member of the teaching department, argues ‘the government ignores the police. The government should fully support police and should fully provide for police in order to not have police thinking of another job [...] the government causes the police’s duty to be slow and passive.’ Director of academy security, Ramyar, agrees, noting ‘there are no necessary things. Police will not be provided with enough things. Yet at the same time, they will be asked to be regulated persons and to follow regulations.’

Finally, several respondents explicitly stated they would work harder if they were paid more. Majid, a student near graduation at the academy, sums it up saying ‘if they are going to increase our salary, maybe I’ll be more ready to serve and assist and defend your rights. If you run out of money, maybe you do not like to do anything and you hate everything and you are always fed up with everything. If the salary will be more, there is no need for you to do anything else or pay attention to another job or anything else. At that time you are going to sacrifice yourself and devote your life for protecting people.’ Perhaps unsurprisingly, these feeble salaries have led to significant performance problems for the young force, as poor morale and disinterest in the job have resulted in a highly ineffective force (Wozniak, 2017; Wiatrowski & Goldstone, 2010).

Importantly, many felt their low pay to be outside of the norm when compared to their colleagues throughout the rest of the nation. These twin perceptions of their own feeble pay and that Arab police elsewhere earn more clearly engendered resentment among Kurdish police. Dukon expressed a common sentiment in saying the biggest problem he faces is ‘the cost of life, in terms of salary. There’s a big difference between police here and police in the South.’ Kemman agrees, noting ‘the salary here is different from the South. Those in the South get more than here.’ A common survey response held that many of the current problems at the academy could be traced to the ‘great deal of difference in salaries between Baghdad and Sulaimaniyah.’

More than a few suggested somewhat bitterly that they don’t receive nearly as much financial support from the USA because they’re more successful than their Southern counterparts in maintaining order. This perception, along with the resentment it breeds, is an especially troubling sign for the future of Iraq, as material imbalances in a nation, especially between those already aligned with different ethnic groups (Collier et al, 2004;

Østby, 2013), ‘pose the most dangerous threat to the existence of a federation’ (Nuruzzaman, 2010).

Finally, material deprivations factor heavily into the corruption plaguing the police, leading to a majority of the Iraqi public viewing them as corrupt and untrustworthy (SIGIR, 2013). There have been investigations into officers at every level, and the force remains unable to consistently pay salaries or procure necessary equipment, leaving police to make up the gap through extortion, bribery, and other extralegal activities (Cockburn, 2014; Pianin, 2014). This should not be surprising, as widespread corruption was all but encouraged by the invasion’s architects as a way to shed what remained of the previous Iraqi state (Klein, 2007; Chwastiak, 2011). As a result, US and Iraqi officials have regulatory oversight into less than half of all police, and are not even aware of approximately how many police are currently serving (Pianin, 2014).

This widespread corruption is a barely contained secret among police, and respondents were open in discussing their personal experiences with it. While corruption takes many forms, the majority of complaints centered on nepotistic personnel decisions and the existence of ‘ghost payrolls’ (Pianin, 2014) in which police in name only collect a salary without doing any work. Birhat, one of the longest-tenured trainers at the academy, explains the process: ‘managers of some police stations will allow one or three of them to go home and work at home for themselves, and at the time of collecting salaries, they come in and collect their salaries and that is it’. Similarly, many spoke of unqualified individuals able to rise through the ranks or escape dismissal because of connection to higher-ranking officials. As one survey respondent explained, ‘I completed university and would like to be an officer but I do not have [connections],<sup>2</sup> while there are people who carry primary school certificates but are now commissioned officers, because they are related to [high-ranking official]’. Yet another survey respondent complains ‘there are members among us that have never attended training exercises because they have [connections]’.

Corruption on the force is seen as so rampant that many felt it pointless to fight it. Slightly over half of survey respondents identified corruption as the biggest challenge facing the police today, and interview respondents seemed at a loss to do anything about it. Firas, a

<sup>2</sup> Many respondents employed the Arabic term *واسطة* (*wasta*), which does not have a direct English translation, but roughly means unethical gains due to one’s social or familial ties.

young student, speaks about being on the protected side of corruption, saying 'I myself am a relative of [high-ranking official]. If I do anything wrong or bad, maybe everyone wants to report me, but it's useless because of my relationship.' Similarly, Berham argues it would not only be impossible to stop, but that the corruption of higher-ranking officials inspires corruption below, saying 'for example, my bosses. They are always going to do a lot of corruption, and we look at them and what they do, so let me do it like they do it. It has been left from them for us. They have done much corruption, so the smaller ones will do it, too.'

Furthermore, assistant academy director, Rizgar, points out that corruption and ghost payrolls significantly weaken police operations. He argues 'there are many police that are so-called police, they are only going to take their salaries, that's it. But practically, when the government needs police, there aren't enough.' He also identifies a serious impediment for fighting such corruption, as much of this happens 'because they are a relative or friends with the manager. Or maybe he is friends with the person above his manager, so if the manager writes anything bad about him, the manager will be a loser at that time. If he writes anything on him, maybe it will not be beneficial to him. So he is going to hold his tongue so he will not be thrown away by the wind.'

### **The consequences of ignoring material concerns**

Beyond the problems of a force comprised largely of people working down to their pay grade and experiencing corruption so endemic they feel nothing can be done, the lack of funding for Iraqi police has serious repercussions on the state writ large. The central needs of the democratic state are legitimacy and effectiveness (Call, 2011), and legitimacy is built directly upon the effective rendering of services (Bradford, Murphy & Jackson, 2014). Beset by material shortcomings, Iraqi police will not only have a difficult time achieving legitimacy, but will be hard-pressed to achieve basic effectiveness, whether in terms of crime control or public order maintenance.

States are expensive to maintain both economically and socially, and require 'a solid material foundation from which to support a Weberian infrastructure capable of maintaining order and building legitimacy' (Barbara, 2008: 310). In Iraq, much donor money and private investment has been withheld or lost to the rampant malfeasance of contractors (Yousif, 2006; Chwastiak, 2011), resulting in both logistical and

legitimacy constraints for police (Herbst, 2004). This has fueled ongoing violence and instability, greatly contributing to the lack of legitimacy of the Iraqi state, and aiding in the development of powerful non-state insurgent actors such as *D'aesh*, who exploit the vacuum of security and development to establish bases of power throughout the nation.

Prior to the first Gulf War, Iraq had one of the most educated, progressive, and prosperous populations in the Middle East (Byman, 2003), but the war and resulting decade-plus of crippling economic sanctions destroyed a significant portion of their economy, leading to crumbling infrastructure, lack of material goods, and reliance upon the Hussein regime (Muttitt, 2012). Yet even this era looks prosperous compared to post-invasion Iraq, as neo-liberal 'shock doctrine' (Klein, 2007) introduced 'sharp and arbitrary' changes in the distribution of income which 'magnified the sense of gain and loss in society at large, and delegitimized the reform process' (Yousif, 2006: 497). This is especially problematic for a precarious state like Iraq; a long line of literature demonstrates that such inequality is directly related to the length and intensity of violent conflict (Collier, Hoeffler & Rohner, 2008; Keen, 2005; Østby, 2013).

While previous research examines how economic inequality and lack of resources affect the citizens of a nation, this article demonstrates that such concerns are equally important for security forces. As Collier, Hoeffler & Rohner (2008) argue, there is support for the 'feasibility hypothesis'; that is, rebellion and ongoing conflict will occur when financially and militarily feasible, irrespective of particular motivation. In Iraq, the insurgency quickly became self-financed, raising hundreds of millions of dollars through oil smuggling and other illegal activities (Muttitt, 2012). The de-Ba'athification process made roughly 8% of the nation's labor force idle overnight (and these newly unemployed persons were not a cross-section of Iraqi society (Cockburn, 2014), but instead 'those most likely to riot or join militias'), a move which 'undoubtedly fueled insecurity' (Yousif, 2006: 498). The 'ideological blindness' of this move had three interrelated effects: 'it damaged the possibility of reconstruction by removing skilled people from their posts, it weakened the voice of secular Iraqis, and it fed the resistance with angry people' (Klein, 2007: 352).

The lack of attention to the material reality of the police seriously threatens the state's ability to achieve legitimacy not only with the Iraqi populace, but with the police officers themselves, a group which already expresses little support for the central government or shared Iraqi identity (Wozniak, 2017). This process has

played out in multiple previous attempts at police reconstruction; declining state expenditures damaged the ability to maintain the loyalty of security personnel in Sierra Leone (Keen, 2005), while the irregular and insufficient paychecks received by Afghani police led to many being more loyal to militia commanders than the state (Murray, 2011). A case like Iraq, in which poorly trained and underfunded police are pitted against better organized and funded rebel groups, has the 'predictable result of demoralized force whose members focus on protecting and enriching themselves, often via corruption and the abuse of civilians' (Wiatrowski & Goldstone, 2010: 87).

This corruption and abuse is highly damaging to legitimacy, especially in a case wherein the state is attempting to unite disparate groups of people with considerable skepticism toward both the state and the shared identity they would need to embrace for the reconstruction process to be successful. As Allen (2010: 423) reminds us, without legitimacy in the reconstruction process, 'there are no motivations for sub-state groups to shift allegiance and salience of identity to the national level', a process which can already be observed in the fact that most Iraqis turn to private militias, rather than police, when confronted with crime (Kirkpatrick, 2014).

Perhaps the most significant result of the insufficient attention paid to the material necessities of the police reconstruction effort in Iraq is the rise of powerful non-state actors who continue to destabilize the nascent state. As Baker argues, there will nearly always be a time gap between dismantling a regime and its forms of social control and the introduction of new substitutes, and the resulting law enforcement vacuum will 'be filled by non-state policing agencies that will only disappear when the state develops the capacity to cope with the problems' (2007: 378).

In Iraq, this inevitable vacuum was compounded by a mistaken assumption that the ouster of Saddam would garner the support of the populace, despite the fact that 'overthrowing a dictatorship, however repressive or violent, is not enough to establish legitimacy for a reform process' (Yousif, 2006: 503). The simultaneous mistaken assumption that the previous police would remain on duty and maintain crime control led to Iraq quickly developing one of the highest crime rates in the world (Özerdem, 2010). Combined with high levels of unemployment, the Iraqi populace faces severe shortages of basic necessities while facing unprecedented levels of interpersonal crime.

This stands in stark contrast to the experience of the Iraqi people under Saddam Hussein, as he conspicuously invested heavily in infrastructure, industry, and

an elaborate welfare system to buy loyalty (Muttitt, 2012). Of particular interest to this study, Hussein employed a large, professional police force capable of maintaining strict order. However, the occupation has proven unwilling to continue even minimal levels of funding for public goods, leaving large stretches of the nation essentially a 'no man's land' served by neither the KRG nor central government, but instead local militias. While eventually comprising the bases of the insurgency, these militias initially formed to restore order in these lawless regions (Schwartz, 2008). As Klein (2007: 359) argues, had the reconstruction provided security and services to the populace, these militias 'would have been deprived of both [their] mission and many of [their] newfound followers'.

Instead, such security vacuums opened the way for *D'aesh* to 'deliver locally what would resemble a state's core functions – security, welfare and representation' (Wennmann, 2009: 1133). This parallels the process in Afghanistan, as the behavior of police there is often cited as a central reason for citizens tolerating Taliban activity (Braithwaite & Wardak, 2013; Wiatrowski & Goldstone, 2010; Rubin, 2006). These non-state groups run a 'parallel administration' in many areas, levying taxes, providing material necessities, and dispensing their form of justice (Yousif, 2006; Klein, 2007).

The rapid rise of *D'aesh*, from a small offshoot of *Al Qaeda* to an organization controlling large swaths of Iraq and commanding a material fortune estimated to be nearly US\$ 2 billion (Chulov, 2014), stands as testament to the argument that a parallel administration will arise when material realities are not sufficiently addressed. The rise of *D'aesh* is undoubtedly tied to many factors, notably anger toward the Shia-led government and its cooperation with the United States (Mahmood, 2015). Importantly, much of its early success occurred because the group was advancing mainly through sympathetic Sunni-dominated areas (Cockburn, 2014). Yet evidence suggests material concerns are prominent in explaining the rise of *D'aesh*, as anger over unemployment and material shortages have fueled support for the group, while understaffed and underfunded security forces have proven no match for *D'aesh*, whether on the battlefield or in providing safety and security for Iraqi citizens (Schwartz, 2008).

Indeed, *D'aesh* members have consciously used their ability to fill the security and capital vacuum on their rise to power, as when they 'could not win support, [they] would buy it' (Malik et al., 2015). This strategy has been applied both to recruiting individuals to the organization itself and to building support among

communities it captures. While 'recruits are drawn by its extreme ideology [...] others are lured by the high salaries' and status conferred by membership (Cambanis, 2014). *D'aesh* has achieved success by operating in areas in which 'all authority was predatory and nothing was safe; it offered certainty, sincerity, and the promise of reliability' (Wood, 2015). It has done so both through providing public services and living stipends (Mahmood, 2015) and through establishing the crime control Iraqi police cannot (Cockburn, 2014; Malik et al., 2015).

## Conclusion

While 'western policymakers have come to view the public security apparatus as critical to domestic and regional stability, as well as to deeper democratization' (Call & Barnett, 1999: 47), scholarly literature on post-conflict reconstruction typically tries to identify best practices, but often 'without asking for whom they are best' (Rubin, 2006: 184). The currently dominant neo-liberal model is ill-equipped to handle the many challenges of state reconstruction, treating the myriad political and social concerns of reconstruction as simple technical problems to be overcome by better skills (Goldsmith & Dinnen, 2007; Nascimento, 2011; Richmond & Mitchell, 2011; Roberts, 2011). This narrow view of reconstruction often has the effect of delegitimizing the effort in the eyes of the very people it purports to assist (Barbara, 2008; Yousif, 2006).

In response to the neo-liberal model, scholars have developed an alternative reflexive approach, arguing for a contextual understanding of reconstruction, emphasizing incorporation of local knowledge, and privileging indigenous autonomy with respect to establishing goals and priorities (Goldsmith & Dinnen, 2007; Keen, 2005; Richmond & Mitchell, 2011; Roberts, 2011). While a marked improvement over the neo-liberal, this perspective similarly suffers from scant attention paid to the material reality of reconstruction efforts.

Necessity of the material is evinced by the effects a lack of funding has on the Sulaimaniyah training center, which faces severe shortages significantly impacting the academy's ability to train recruits. This impact is felt in both immaterial ways, such as not having enough time for proper instruction, and materially, in not having enough equipment to complete training exercises and offering demoralizingly low salaries, making it likely that police turn to abuses of authority such as ransom kidnappings or extortion (Kirkpatrick, 2014; Pianin, 2014).

This is not to argue for material determinism or to ignore the complexity of the causes behind Iraq's slide into chaos, but rather to echo the argument of Call & Barnett (1999: 64) that 'if the legitimacy of government is largely shaped by whether and how it provides order, then the international community must channel more resources to confront an issue which has become central to international peace and security'. The resource deficits encountered by the Iraqi state not only diminished the ability of the police to provide law and order, but also created a situation in which 'Iraq's government had none of the resources needed to exercise sovereignty' (Schwartz, 2008: 253). Thus, even if the prescriptions of the reflexive model had been followed faithfully, evidence suggests the outcome would not have been terribly different due to the lack of funding to enact meaningful reforms.

The neo-liberal model has led to an Iraqi police force which meets almost none of the basic criteria of democratic policing (Bayley, 2006; Goldsmith & Dinnen, 2007; Vollmer, 1922), instead operating as a highly militarized, oppressive force (Wozniak, 2017; Kuzmarov, 2009a). Further compounding this inappropriate militarism is the fundamental problem of asking underpaid and undertrained police to risk their lives combating crime and insurgency, and the resultant effect such an impossible and demoralizing charge has on the legitimacy of the state itself (Keen, 2005). Without a legitimated state providing material necessities and protection, both police and citizens are moved to shift allegiances to non-state actors capable of providing these, a reality exploited by *D'aesh* to build their organization.

While it was not the intention to aid the creation of *D'aesh*, there is much to suggest this starving of the state, and resultant chaos, was less a bug than a feature of the reconstruction. As Klein (2007) argues, the similarly disastrous response of the US government to Hurricane Katrina should dispel notions that the 'occupation was merely a string of mishaps and mistakes marked by incompetence and lack of oversight. When the same mistakes are repeated over and over again, it's time to consider the possibility that they are not mistakes at all' (Klein, 2007: 411). Indeed, there is much to suggest that in line with Kuzmarov's (2009a) argument of police reconstruction as a means to modernize repression, the reconstruction of the Iraqi police force is best understood as helping to secure a client state in the 'informal empire' of the USA (Wozniak, 2017; Go, 2011).

While the neo-liberal model can be implemented in part in democratic societies, 'authoritarian conditions are required for the implementation of its true vision' (Klein, 2007: 11). Indeed, the reconstruction of Iraq

can be understood 'as a *decivilization*: a hollowing out of public institutions such that the desires and opinions of Iraqis would be unattainable and the parliament and even the government in crucial respects irrelevant' (Mutitt, 2012: 157). The extensive reliance on private contractors and foreign experts in the reconstruction effort all but assures that 'even after Iraqi units were fully trained (and presumably delivered to Iraqi command), they could not function without the continued flow of US funding and logistics' (Schwartz, 2008: 201).

In combination with evidence that the USA wants to use Iraq to transform the Middle East and establish a string of friendly proto-democracies ensuring access for both oil and military interests (Dobbins, 2004; Go, 2011), this helps explain why police are so starved of resources while what little practical training they receive focuses on militaristic counterinsurgency practices (Jones, 2007; SIGIR, 2013). While constructing a genuinely democratic police force would require massive expenditures of time and resources, a client state 'does not need a police force that ensures or even understands democratic rights, but rather one strong enough to deter major disruptions to the social order' (Wozniak, 2017).

This speaks to a fundamental lacuna of the reflexive model; it requires not just an *ideological* shift from neo-liberal austerity to allowing for government intervention and consultation with indigenous populations, but requires a simultaneous shift in the *material* practices of police and state reconstruction. As the security and order provided by publicly accountable police are essential to the viability of a democratic state (Ellison & Pino, 2012; Herbst, 2004; Nascimento, 2011), reconstruction programs need to better prioritize the material needs necessary to train and equip police who are able to implement security and order in a democratic manner.

### Replication data

The interview guide, survey questions, and anonymized transcripts and survey responses for the empirical analysis in this article can be found at <http://www.prio.org/jpr/datasets>.

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