Security Dialogue

The Unavoidable Ghettoization of Security In Iraq
Alice Hills

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What is This?

The Unavoidable Ghettoization of Security In Iraq

ALICE HILLS*

School of Politics and International Studies, University of Leeds, UK

Post-conflict cities represent a laboratory in which to explore the sub-state orientation of security. Based on an analysis of developments in Baghdad, Basra and Falluja since 2003, this article argues not only that security is inherently selective, but also that the exclusionary actions of local or sectarian groups are more influential than those of state-based agents or projects based on security for the individual. The notion of security can accommodate multiple interpretations, but in practice a dominant discourse controls its meaning, and negotiation soon develops into patterns of domination and exclusion. This typically leads to a 'ghettoization' of security, whereby specific groups are secure only in specific areas. Security thus reflects the sum of myriad local arrangements. The key issue, therefore, is not whether there can be security for all, but the nature of the concessions made by substate and state-based types of security, and the contrast between them and models based on security for the individual.

Keywords security · insecurity · human security · violence · conflict – Iraq

MANY POST-CONFLICT CITIES offer documented case studies of who provides security and how, as well as whose needs are prioritized, but developments in Iraq's cities since the US-led invasion of 2003 are particularly significant because they suggest that not only is post-conflict security inherently selective, it also has a distinctive substate orientation. Cities such as Baghdad, Basra and Falluja display an exclusionary form of group-driven security that is in tension with state-based and people-centred approaches to security; the actions of local or sectarian groups are more influential than those of state agents or projects based on security for the individual. In other words, Iraq's cities represent a laboratory in which to explore the substate orientation of post-conflict security.[1] Even so, the issue

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[1] 'Post-conflict' is used here because it is the term most commonly applied to the period after conventional war. However, the exceptionally high levels of violence experienced in the years after the formal conclusion of the 2003 war suggest that Iraq was actually *in* conflict.

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to be addressed is not whether there can be security for all (this is probably impossible), but the nature of the concessions made by substate and state-based types of security, and the contrast between them and models based on security for the individual.

Security is a dynamic rather than a static process, so emphasizing the concessions underpinning it, rather than the ways in which it is provided, makes analytical and policy-relevant sense. After all, security is a multifaceted social phenomenon, incorporating individual and public aspects and spaces, and its meaning can accommodate multiple interpretations. It is 'a means of modelling . . . society around a particular vision' (Neocleous, 2008: 4), too, and this applies as much to substate actors such as sectarian leaders as to governors and warlords acting on behalf of state and substate interests. Witness the response of the governor of Afghanistan's Kandahar province at a meeting with UN officials in December 2002: the officials spoke of building a civil society and a stable and secure state, but the governor talked only of securing personal power in a continuing conflict (*Financial Times*, 2002).

Additionally, security is always defined situationally, and its meaning changes to reflect contingencies. This happened in Baghdad as the focus of people's fears shifted from their inability to access emergency medical treatment when injured by car bombs to the dangers of venturing out to look for employment. Indeed, similar dynamics are evident in most war-torn cities, as Gaza City showed in June 2007. After Hamas overran Fatah's strongholds, Gazans' concerns about physical safety were quickly replaced by worries about food supplies, and people began stockpiling food after Israel closed Gaza's supply lines, only for fears to swing back at the first sign of renewed fighting. Above all, security is understood in a pragmatic fashion, and its critical characteristic is its physical dimension: security means that individuals and groups are not forcibly displaced, raped, robbed, kidnapped, mutilated, tortured or killed.

Definitions of security are now commonly stretched beyond this to incorporate food, water, health and environmental issues, and while this has value, it detracts from the realities of post-conflict security. The multiple meanings of security are not themselves problematic (military and/or individual security often have separate dimensions), but they are politically and practically significant, for understanding is linked to production and provision. The principal political weapons in post-conflict cities are intimidation and violence, so personalities, politics and contingencies determine how and when security is understood, produced and expressed. Security is as much a means to power and aggrandisement as it is to personal safety, conflict prevention or democratization, and it cannot be understood in isolation from the context in which it is to be employed. It is a project intended to solve immediate rather than future issues and problems.

Based on an analysis of developments in Iraq since 2003, this article proposes that the multifaceted nature of security, reinforced by social realities,

places a premium on pragmatic modes of negotiation and accommodation. These soon develop into patterns of domination, selection, manipulation and concession, which typically lead to a 'ghettoization' of security, whereby specific groups or types of people are secure only in restricted areas. Security is in this way physical, localized and often temporary. It reflects the sum of myriad local arrangements, and is best understood as a process and a variable within the broader picture of a city's overarching empirical forms of political and social order (Hills, 2009).

Exploring the substate orientation of security in cities makes theoretical and analytical sense. Not only are cities laboratories for security in an urbanizing century, but also their experience brings substate security back into a debate that has for too long been dominated by the theories and concerns associated with international security.[2] Indeed, the provision of security in strategically significant cities such as Baghdad, Basra and Falluja provides specific and realistic illustrations of significant trends from several perspectives. First, security in all three was ghettoized, which I take to mean an exclusionary dynamic, rather than an urban concentration of the oppressed or dispossessed. For just as Baghdad's districts were purged, divided into isolated neighbourhoods by barriers and checkpoints, and policed by factional militia and gunmen, so the US-led Coalition authorities were walled off in Baghdad's so-called Green Zone. Similar trends are identifiable in Basra, just as they are in Falluja. Second, ghettoization was a facet of security's physical dimension. It was a sign and a signal that had sense at many levels and referred to different things, but it was always an empirical issue in which scale and visibility mattered. Third, security (both for those who provided it and often for those who wanted it) meant whatever powerful actors made of it.

None of these observations are new, or unique to Iraq. Iraq is exceptional in terms of its strategic significance vis-à-vis the USA and its allies, and for the ways in which local developments fed into transnational security challenges. But the complexity, scale, intensity and brutality of its situation is similar to that found in cities such as Beirut during the Lebanese civil war of 1975–90, and Grozny once the second Chechen war ended in 2002, and can therefore aid identification of the constant features influencing the security situations described here. Substate actors, such as militia, played a strong role in all three cases, too, which raises the possibility that the quest for substate security in Iraq's cities is a relatively constant feature of Iraq and other non-Western societies, rather than an outcome of the US-led invasion.

Similarly, ghettoization, which is about asserting control over specific localities in order to expand a dominant group's space or restrict that of an adversary, shapes and defines security in many cities in many regions (see, for example, Caldeira, 2000; Davies, 1998; Hoffman, 2007; Seekings, 2001).

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[2] This is separate from the post-2001 redomestication of security and the European-based discussion of the internal and external security policy nexus (e.g. Bigo, 2001).

Also, as Baghdad's Green Zone shows, it may be a feature of both state and substate security, and of elite and socially excluded sectors of a society. Similar considerations apply to the predatory behaviour of Iraq's substate actors, which appears to have much in common with events in, say, Bosnia (Mueller, 2000), and which is addressed by the literature on the drivers of conflict (e.g. Ballentine and Sherman, 2003). However, my purpose here is not to advance the research agenda associated with spatiality, urbanization or otherization as a means for classifying identity, or to discuss the role of militia in fragile societies. Rather, it is to explore the concessions made by, and to, substate security in a specific type of environment, while emphasizing the physical dimension and functional utility of security. In other words, I offer an explanation of the dynamics of security in the aftermath of war and regime change that provides an alternative to abstract theory or models based on international security, as well as to the critical approaches associated with human security, with its broad social, normative, ecological and political agenda (Burgess & Owen, 2004).

My explanation of post-conflict security, which is based on case instances exemplifying the above themes, is developed in four stages. First, the tensions underpinning post-conflict security are noted, along with the negotiations and concessions typically moulding security provision. Second, the dominant strategies pursued by state, substate and community actors are indicated by reference to developments in Baghdad, Basra and Falluja. Third, key features of the strategies adopted are identified. Fourth, I conclude that security is best understood in terms of short-term empirical and spatial concerns, and concessions are an integral element in its production and provision. In other words, I argue that security is a selective project that is typically understood, produced and expressed in terms of differentiation and exclusion even as concessions are made by and to state and substate security. Commentators based in Northern cities may argue that security is a public good to which all are entitled (e.g. Crawford, 2006; Loader and Walker, 2007), but, judging from the words of those who dealt with them (e.g. Etherington, 2005), strongmen in Iraq, as in Gaza or Kandahar, think only in terms of power struggles. Typically, they concede points in order to achieve tactical advantage.

Hard data are difficult to obtain in this area, not least because we do not know 'how "natives" think' (Sahlins, 1995).[3] The evidence base for what follows therefore draws on personal accounts, narrative histories, secondary news reports and policy-relevant analyses written during or soon after the events they describe (for an indicative bibliography, see Hills, 2009). These important, if partial, sources of information are supplemented by anecdotal evidence collected during my informal discussions with serving and retired

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[3] Compare the warning by Major General Michael T. Flynn (head of NATO intelligence in Afghanistan) that US military intelligence officials and analysts in Afghanistan are 'hazy about who the power brokers are and how they might be influenced' (*Financial Times*, 2010).

UK and US officers and officials (including Mark Etherington in 2008), all of whom spoke informally or under Chatham House rules. This approach is not ideal in that it does not, for example, clarify how Iraqi police officers articulate and supervise the interface between indigenous and international security, or the brokering involved when identities clash. However, it offers insight into Western assessments of the social dynamics affecting security.

Exclusionary Tendencies

The destitute and unprotected may long for physical protection, food and shelter, and security may or may not be a public good, but security projects that can be extended to all are probably impossible, especially in post-conflict cities. At best, most people are secure in some places for some of the time. The reasons for this include the following, each of which reflects security's physical dimension, the resource its provision represents, and the factors consistently underpinning security in situations where an established political order has been destroyed.

First, security's uneven provision and unequal distribution may be the result of long-term social, economic or political factors, rather than political contingencies, but, whatever the case, security threats in post-conflict cities are usually physical, and are based on the possibility or probability of violence. This is a constant feature in accounts from across a range of cities, regions and decades. Consequently, security has more to do with the elusive notion of survival than societal disadvantage: threats require an immediate practical response, rather than long-term promises. This is especially so when the city concerned is divided into ethnic or sectarian areas, or when security's referent object is an identity or group (compare Ayoob, 1995; Krause, 1998: 25). And this is often the case. Even in peaceful conditions, cities act as catalysts through which existing inequalities are exacerbated or ameliorated, because they introduce 'a set of characteristics – proximate ethnic neighbourhoods, territoriality, economic interdependency, symbolism, and centrality – not present to such an extent on wider geographic scales' (Bollens, 2000: 326).

Second, patterns of domination and exclusion soon emerge, or, more typically, re-emerge. This phenomenon is as common in rural Afghanistan and Chechnya as it is in urban Iraq, but the dynamics underpinning security provision are especially marked in cities, because urbanization implies social relationships. Security emerges from, and is reproduced in, interaction, and its use or abuse is typically understood as involving the exercise of power. Further, the power that accrues to certain individuals or groups is exercised, accumulated, invested, traded or lost. This is critical in cities, because they are places 'occupied and used by many actors' (Marcuse and van Kempen,

2000: 265), which makes them the site of turf wars over desirable resources such as security and security agents. It also suggests that power and security often concern resources *and* identity; hence the frequency with which strongmen in Iraq (as in Gaza and Lebanon) claim to provide both to their constituencies. In other words, security is a central point around which debate and competition take place, and its provision expresses the power relations that structure cities, and enforces the exclusionary practices that result.

Thus, the distribution of security reflects power networks and relationships that exist at a number of levels, each of which influences security provision. These may be vertical or horizontal, contradictory or reinforcing, but all are ultimately based on the coercive (usually military or paramilitary) capabilities at the heart of post-conflict security, though referring also to non-military elements such as religious authority. Also, power, like security, is about resources, rather than rules, and it is essentially an empirical matter; it is about the capacity or ability to carry out one's will in a social relationship (Goverde et al., 2000: 17–22; Goehler, 2000: 41–42).

At its most basic, power refers to the ability to influence others in some way, and to bring about significant change by real or potential action. Weber's (1962) definition encapsulates this understanding, for it emphasizes that power represents the opportunities existing in social relationships, which allow actors to carry out their will regardless of the circumstances concerned. That is, power is about the socially structured and culturally patterned behaviour of groups, and – this is key – it is always a relational phenomenon (Goverde and van Tatenhove, 2000: 106–107). Power, like security, is always located somewhere and never exists in isolation: 'Power refers to the capacity of agents, agencies or institutions to maintain or transform their environment, social or physical; and it concerns the resources which underpin this capacity and the forces that shape and influence its exercise' (Held, 1995: 170).

This suggests that unless one party to a conflict has won an outright victory, or gains independence, the patterns of security provision that result, and the overarching empirical order that emerges, depend on an understanding of, or agreement on, certain basic rules. This involves negotiation, bargaining and concessions between strongmen, factional leaders, and international militaries and officials, only some of whom understand or manipulate the cultural rules guiding their adversaries' behaviour (and its outcome). And each actor pursues its own agenda. The key topic for post-conflict security therefore concerns the bargaining and trade-offs that take place between state security and substate security.

A number of issues arise from this interpretation. It is necessary, for instance, to identify the formal and informal actors who are most influential in promoting security, and to ascertain their knowledge, resources and capabilities. It is also desirable to know how they understand security and the resource it expresses, how they measure success (no one doubts the meaning of failure),

and how they relate to one another. Additionally, localized forms of security must be placed within the broader political and cultural context of the city concerned. This implies that the most effective actors have tacit knowledge of the rules governing life in the city, and of the relational and structural phenomena underpinning it.

Baghdad, Basra and Falluja

Baghdad, Iraq's capital, and Basra, its strategically important second city, illustrate these issues from several perspectives. So too does Falluja, where in 2004 the limits of negotiation and concession were made explicit.

In all three cities, security was a signal and a symbol that had sense at many levels and referred to different things, but it was always understood in a brutally pragmatic fashion. Anecdotal evidence from almost any UK broadsheet from 2003 or 2004 emphasizes that the US-led Coalition forces, like Greater Baghdad's estimated seven million inhabitants, Basra's one million and Falluja's 284,000, understood security to mean the physical safety of themselves and their property. It could not be otherwise when 3,907 US service personnel died in the four years after the end of major combat operations in May 2003, three million Iraqis were internally displaced, thousands were murdered each month, and many more were subject to kidnapping, rape, extortion and robbery (for an overview of these years, see Cordesman & Davies, 2008). Sectarian tensions between Iraq's minority (and formerly dominant) Sunni and majority Shia Arabs intensified the insecurity. Meanwhile, the Iraqi Police Service, which was responsible for everyday policing and street-level security, and which had received a large proportion of the $194 million the USA gave for rebuilding the police and military during the first year of occupation (*Financial Times*, 2007), was little more than a sectarian militia in uniform, some of whose members were responsible for torture and extrajudicial killings.

The key fact about security in Iraq (as in all post-conflict societies) is that it is a hard-headed business. Thus, US troops treated Iraq's policing with a mix of ideology and practicality. The creation of a new police force may have been part of the Coalition's strategy to bring democratic security to the 'Iraqi people', but the impassive and taciturn troops concerned combined casual acceptance of US military power with inexperience and a lack of interest in the region that dehumanized Iraqis in their eyes (Etherington, 2005: 196, 208, 219). At the same time, Coalition authorities consistently misunderstood the populace's concerns. Under Saddam Hussein, security had been enforced by special units, heavy armour, checkpoints, arbitrary mass arrests, blackmail, torture and execution by repressive security forces. In contrast, the Coalition

Provisional Authority (CPA) implemented programmes on human rights, free markets, feminism and constitutional reform (Stewart, 2007: 82). But Iraqis talked only of insecurity, which was made worse by the CPA's inability to control carjackings, kidnappings and the gangs smuggling diesel, and by young urban elites rejecting the sheiks that tried to reassert traditional means of social control (Stewart, 2007: 7).

It is easy to overstate the significance of this, however, for one thing US troops shared with Iraqis was a no-nonsense understanding of security and policing. Indeed, as Etherington notes, Iraqis were unfazed by the Abu Ghraib scandal, because that is how they thought the West always behaved. At the same time, many Iraqis failed to see advantages in democracy, because it did not provide physical safety and stability. Further, their assessments were governed by 'economic, social and local considerations' (Etherington, 2005: 85) that diverged from those of the USA and the UK. Almost all Iraqis thought that the biggest economic problem – and a major source of insecurity in that addressing it required them to venture out into unsafe streets – was unemployment: at least half of working-age men were out of work. But this did not amount to endorsing the new security agenda. Witness the standard Iraqi response to insecurity: 'Employ five times as many new policemen. Get heavier weapons. Impose curfews. Set up checkpoints . . . Establish secret services . . . Be more brutal' (Stewart, 2007: 87).

The manipulation, negotiation and accommodation among and between the various international forces, factional leaders and followers providing security soon developed into identifiable patterns of domination and exclusion. This led to a literal ghettoization of security. Indeed, city-wide security was impossible, because security (which was localized and often temporary) was essentially the sum of innumerable local arrangements decided by mutually suspicious interactions between indigenous strong men, external agents and influential sections of the populace (Stewart, 2007). It was a web composed of myriad groups, some of which understood the cultural rules guiding Iraqi (or American) behaviour and outcomes, and some of which did not.

Ghetto Security in Baghdad

Journalists such as the *New Yorker*'s Jon Lee Anderson provide the best overview of how exclusionary security emerged immediately after the end of the war, and what it meant in Baghdad, which is used here to illustrate the trend towards ghettoization.

No soldiers or police were visible as US forces advanced into central Baghdad on 9 April 2003. No one observed traffic regulations, everyone was in a great hurry, buildings burned, and bombs and gunshot could be heard as gangs staked out their turf (Anderson, 2006: 294, 315). Less than 24 hours later, most of the eastern side of central Baghdad had been looted. There

were pockets of heavy fighting, and it 'was not entirely clear which parts of Baghdad were in American hands and which were not' (Anderson, 2006: 311), but ghettoization began early, with armed vigilantes stopping cars, and residential streets barricaded and guarded. Localized security was quickly enforced, as when neighbourhoods, acting on the instructions of the Shia religious leader Ayatollah Ali Sistani, set up roadblocks to stop looters and reclaim stolen property. Anderson (2006: 317) records how he went through a checkpoint manned by US marines on the outskirts of Saddam City, a slum of 2.5 million, before driving into areas defended by roadblocks formed from oil drums, furniture and cement blocks, which were guarded by 'rough-looking youths . . . holding iron bars'.

By 14 April, Baghdad was divided into 55 to 60 zones, of which some 40 were under Coalition control, and Iraqi police were (according to US calculations) due to start patrolling. But such arrangements proved to be a veneer overlaying an increasingly localized and fragmented order, and when Anderson returned in the third week of July it was no longer safe to walk around. Increasingly, security provision reflected Baghdad's web of insecurity and violence as the relationship between state and non-state actors deteriorated, even as distinctions between the two blurred. The USA resisted calls to re-employ most police because it suspected their loyalties, while police wishing to return to work distanced themselves from the occupiers: 'We came to protect the people, not to work with America' (*Financial Times*, 2003).

That the situation deteriorated so quickly suggests that the quest for sub-security is a constant factor underpinning Iraqi society, albeit one that can be displaced by a strong regime: Washington's failure to provide a credible or coherent alternative to Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist system ensured the emergence of sectarian provision. The handover of sovereignty in June 2004 made little difference to this situation. The new Allawi government was under pressure to ensure security, but its claim to do so was rapidly undermined by innumerable assassinations, kidnappings and explosions, many of which targeted the police who were theoretically responsible for ensuring local security. On 28 July 2004, for example, a massive car bomb exploded near a line of would-be police recruits in a centre of anti-government opposition north of Baghdad, killing 68. The government increased police patrols and checkpoints, and mounted periodic crackdowns on crime, but internal politics meant that it failed to activate the emergency powers it had assumed after the transfer. The substate orientation of security provision was accordingly entrenched as rival militia competed for territory and revenue sources such as oil and weapons smuggling, and by the murderous activities of self-appointed militia, which quickly escalated into systematic sectarian cleansing (for an example from a poor Shia neighbourhood in Baghdad, see Rosen, 2006). Later, US forces formalized ghettoization, as when in April 2007 they built a barrier 4.8 km (3 miles) long and 3.7 m (12 feet) high to separate the

Sunni district of Adhamiyah from nearby Shia neighbourhoods. In this way, they legitimized and conceded the rationality of what was essentially ethnic cleansing, albeit for tactical reasons (*Jane's Defence Weekly*, 2008: 50).

The exclusionary substate orientation of security provision was reinforced by the blurring of boundaries between sectarianism and criminality. Control of the black market and access to protection money helped to finance sectarian turf wars (*Financial Times*, 2004b), with petrol stations a particularly desirable prize because they made money, were symbols of territorial dominance, and acted as recruiting stations – they were gathering points for youths. But, by 2006, most killings were done by a small number of armed groups vying for turf control, or by gangs kidnapping members of other sects for profit (*Economist*, 2006, 51; *Guardian*, 2007a). Some groups were members of Sunni insurgency groups or the Shi'ite paramilitary Mahdi Army, but others were essentially street gangs. Iraqi police said that the most dangerous in the suburb of Adhamiya, for example, comprised teenagers or men in their early 20s looking for thrills and status. Significantly, the gangs were safe in their own districts and had powerful protectors outside. This was evident from the way in which local Sunnis avoided using Baghdad's largest hospital complex a few kilometres to the south even though their own district had few resources. The reason was that the health minister was a radical Sadrist, and the medical complex used hundreds of Mahdi Army militants as security guards.

In fact, the role played by politically active groups of young, unemployed urban slum dwellers in providing or obstructing substate security was significant (40% of Iraqis are under 15), the 10,000-strong Mahdi Army being the most noteworthy organization. Created by the Shi'ite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr in June 2003, the Mahdi Army originated as a small group in Sadr City (formerly Saddam City), where it provided security and welfare services, dispensed aid and prevented looting; Mahdi fighters patrolled on foot and in commandeered police vehicles. These activities suggest that, in addition to guaranteeing his community's physical security, al-Sadr, like many other substate actors, wanted to provide some form of communal, or identity-related, security (Rosen, 2006).

Negotiating from Weakness in Basra

Similar dynamics are evident in Basra, 250 miles southeast of Baghdad, where the UK, which was the responsible power, misunderstood the realities of security in Iraq. British commanders tried – and failed – to cut deals with local Shi'ite leaders, but did so from a position of weakness, thereby facilitating a sectarian infiltration of the police that reinforced the substate nature of security provision.

British forces never intended that security provision should fragment to the benefit of substate actors (Ashraf, 2007), but they were too few to enforce an

assertive strategy against Basra's Shia militia, let alone protect its inhabitants or impose the UK's vision of security provision. By July 2003, the number of British troops in Iraq had dropped from May's 26,000 to 9,000, which meant that the ratio of troops to Iraqis was approximately 1:370, whereas the ratio for Kosovo, for instance, had been 1:50 (Knights and Williams, 2007: 9; Betz and Cormack, 2009: 328). Initially, this did not seem critical, for the UK's 'softly softly' approach appeared to work. But this situation actually owed more to the initial weakness of Shi'ite militia than to British proficiency: if militia failed to challenge British forces, 'this was due to their temporary weakness or because they were able to achieve their objectives without fighting' (Mansoor, 2009: 12).

Few British officers developed more than a superficial knowledge of Basra (or Arabic) during their short tours of duty, but arguably this did not matter because their inability to hold areas meant that the clearance tactics underpinning their anti-militia operations were futile. Further, the conduct of British troops was never a determining factor, because failure was largely attributable to the inability or unwillingness of 'senior British civilian and military leaders to understand the political dynamics at play' (Mansoor, 2009: 14). As a result, the end of 2006 saw British troops under siege in Basra's palace and airport, and militia in control of much of the city. The British withdrawal in 2007 left Shi'ite militia (rather than Iraqi Army battalions) in control of the streets.

The inaccuracy of the British authorities' assessment of Basra's cultural dynamics is evident from their dealings with local police. By early 2006, the British approach was to combine the prospect of improved training with the threat of arrest in an attempt to create a non-sectarian police. This was an unrealistic aspiration, however, for by then Basra belonged to sectarian militia, death squads and organized crime, and the British were merely one faction among many. Indeed, the temporary nature of their stay made them one of the weakest. Militia had seized the initiative in April 2003, when, immediately after the invasion, Sadrist mosques (in a move that is common to a range of substate actors in conflict environments) organized lorries to bring in water and employed vigilantes to patrol the streets against looters. They then exploited the Allawi government's efforts to increase police numbers to embed militiamen into the police. Their success was soon evident: by October 2006, some 20 security and police groups (ranging from a dozen religious militia and the governor's 200 armed guards, to the directorate of education police and the justice police; see *Guardian*, 2007b) operated with impunity. Indeed, the appearance of a public police was illusory, because the police comprised militiamen, and, in any confrontation between political parties, officers splintered according to party lines and fought one another. By May 2007, no one could be appointed to the police without a letter of support from a militia or political party. There was a rule of law, but it was militia law, the main characteristics of which were sectarian division and brutality.

The nature of sectarian security is evident in the activities of the so-called Jameat, a group of officers drawn from police intelligence departments and representing all the major factions. It was named after the police station its members were alleged to use as a base. When 1,000 British forces demolished the station in December 2006, they discovered 127 prisoners in the basement. Some had had their kneecaps shot off, while others had electrical or cigarette burns, or crushed hands or feet. But most Iraqi police thought that they should be allowed to violate rights if they were to ensure security; torture was justified as a way of obtaining confessions and deterring retribution (*Financial Times*, 2005; Stewart, 2007).

Contestation in Falluja

If Baghdad exemplifies ghettoization and Basra negotiating from weakness, then Falluja, a city in the so-called Sunni triangle to the northwest of Baghdad, represents an intersection at which state and substate versions of arms-based security competed at the expense of individual security – with, it appears, community approval.

Falluja was known for its religious and social conservatism, as well as its nationalist fervour, and was the scene of some of the first serious incidents between Iraqis and Americans: US operations were conducted without assistance from Coalition allies, and 'each new level in the Iraq insurgency seems to be tested first in Falluja' (*FT Magazine*, 2004). Provocation levels were high, partly because both sides misunderstood or inaccurately assessed the other's intent. Thus, Falluja (which had benefited from Saddam's patronage) had not been on the invasion path to Baghdad, so it had not directly experienced US military power. But also it is clear that US forces' use of heavy-handed tactics quickly alienated Falluja's more moderate inhabitants. By January 2004, troops entered Falluja only in platoon-sized forces of six vehicles with air support. They never stayed in one place inside the city for longer than an hour, because, as a soldier admitted, 'we are fighting the local population' (*Financial Times*, 2004a).

It was in such circumstances that four American guards from Blackwater Security Consulting were killed by a mob when they accidentally drove into the city on 31 March 2004. It appears that the USA's consequent decision to storm (i.e. punish) Falluja was taken in the White House, against the wishes of General James Conway, the US Marine Corps general in charge of western Iraq, who later said that he had 'resisted calls for revenge, and instead advocated . . . continued engagement with municipal leaders' (*Washington Post,* 2004). There was much to be said for Conway's stance, for a robust response would play into the insurgents' hands by enraging the population and would endanger the physical security of those cooperating with the USA. On the other hand, the USA could not afford to be seen as weak, and Falluja's record

suggested that its inhabitants saw limited military responses as signs of weakness. Also, Falluja's fighters challenged the Marines' military capabilities, rather than their authority as the tool of the CPA, so a military response was arguably appropriate. Paul Bremer, the US civilian administrator in Iraq, therefore had little choice but to state that the contractors' deaths would be punished; he could not afford for Falluja to become a no-go area, because US forces were simultaneously dealing with violence in Baghdad and Najaf, as well as a hostage crisis. There was no possibility of negotiation or concession on either side.

Operation Vigilant Justice, which began on or about 5 April, was explicitly designed to punish Falluja's inhabitants, influence their behaviour and shape their security environment, while destroying the city as an insurgent sanctuary (for a description of US operations in the period 2003–05, see West, 2005). In the event, it displaced, rather than destroyed, the insurgents while alienating the Iraqis on whom Washington's political strategy depended. This mattered because the USA was intent on handing over many of its responsibilities to Iraqis in June, ten weeks after the operation began. Ironically, once the operation ended, concessions were made by US authorities, and Falluja was handed over to the so-called Falluja Brigade, a contingent of former Iraqi soldiers. But the latter soon lost control, and a second assault seven months later left the city without water or electricity, and with approximately 70% of its buildings damaged or destroyed. Those who could fled. However, 'rubble-ization' achieved Washington's goal, and by December 2006 Falluja was sufficiently calm for US forces to transfer operational control to the 1st Iraqi Army Division.

One of the most noteworthy aspects of this situation is the extent to which power in Iraq is a matter of relationships between state and substate agents. Washington's overall strategic objective was reconstruction and exit, which required the acquiescence or support of Iraqis, but US actions in Falluja were authorized and justified in terms of the USA's ability to pursue and destroy enemies. A comparable rationale was offered by the insurgents, for whom intimidation was a major weapon (West, 2005: 323) and who evidently acted with the support, or toleration, of many of the city's inhabitants. The Bush administration evidently believed that the totality of US military, political, economic and cultural power could be exercised independently of the relationship its political objectives required (Clarke, 2004; Daalder and Lindsay, 2003; Woodward, 2004), and the insurgents appear to have adopted a similarly closed perspective. Both acted provocatively.

It is, perhaps, easy to be overly critical of the Bush administration's determination to impose its state-based model of security, not least because it was often difficult to identify substate adversaries such as insurgents. The groups involved appeared to be local, urban-based, highly motivated and capable, even if US authorities invariably resorted to blanket condemnations

of terrorists, foreign fighters or criminals acting against the wishes of 'the Iraqi people'. Arguably, the rhetoric used by US authorities did not matter, since the insurgents militarily challenged the USA. On the other hand, inaccurate categorization reinforced the administration's flawed understanding of the substate orientation of the power struggle. It encouraged the USA to dismiss circumstances where the importance of intimidation was secondary to exploitation of the disaffected, or to a more generalized societal move towards a united front in the face of US aggression.[4] In the end it was unclear whether the insurgents were represented in the talks held in Falluja after Operation Vigilant Resolve or whether they respected any deals reached with US representatives. Some of their number were, however, included in the Falluja Brigade, which effectively straddled the state/substate divide.

Falluja shows that power and security cannot be treated as entities or possessions independent of the actors and environment in which they are employed, least of all in a political or ideological war in which the objective is control. Further, developments in Falluja suggest that both may even be a matter of leverage, as when the USA sought to coerce the city's civic leaders, who were then expected to influence or control the insurgents. This broader understanding is supported by the critical importance of human intelligence and personal relationships in counterinsurgency. Paradoxically, this is something that Falluja's insurgents were evidently aware of. They understood that hierarchical structures of domination in and of a society depend on, and operate through, local low-level 'capillary' circuits of power relationships, which in turn offer, or withhold, security. Certainly, the radical Islamists elsewhere in Iraq were more successful at using alternative or soft forms of power than the USA; witness the welfare networks of al-Sadr's militia in Baghdad and Najaf (compare Nye, 2004).

The situation in Iraq is unique, and what happened in Falluja did not necessarily happen elsewhere in the country, but Falluja provides a perspective that complements those offered by Baghdad and Basra. In all three, Coalition operations involved the exercise of specific types of state-based security that were consistently – and successfully – challenged or subverted by resilient and agile substate actors. The US authorities in particular initially understood their relations with Iraqis in terms of the USA's ability to mould conduct and identity, but Iraqi intransigence and Washington's own preconceptions ensured that the relationship quickly reverted to confrontational relations based on coercion and intimidation.

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4 Iraqi insurgents targeted those cooperating with coalition forces, but the unreliability of the Iraqi police and military suggests that the problem was more fundamental. Compare the rebellion instigated by al-Sadr in Najaf. This was 'less a political movement than . . . [a manifestation of] the flocking of disenfranchised young men to charismatic leaders who promise them some power and a place in society' (*Christian Science Monitor*, 2004).

Analysis of Strategies

These case instances emphasize that while differing security logics of state and non-state actors led to markedly different approaches to security provision, at some stage even the most influential or best-resourced actors (which could be Coalition forces or groups such as the Mahdi Army) recognized their need to negotiate or make concessions in order to ensure the survival of their personnel or agenda. Developments offering insight into the strategies and concessionary tactics typically used by state, substate and community groups include those outlined below.

The first concerns the accommodation by US forces of some of the concerns associated with substate and community security. Although the fears and aspirations of individual civilians were to all intents and purposes politically meaningless – except, perhaps, when politicians and factional leaders could exploit them – a perceptible shift took place on the part of Coalition forces in the four years following April 2003. In particular, the failure of US counter-insurgency operations resulted in a fundamental reassessment of US military doctrine (US Army and US Marine Corps, 2006), as well as the introduction in 2007 of a new strategy of a 'surge' of forces, both of which were influenced by a popular general, David Petraeus, who built on his successful experience as head of the Multi-National Force–Iraq to accommodate broader concerns. Petraeus argued that it was not enough for Coalition forces to provide a sustained military presence in volatile neighbourhoods, destroy insurgent sanctuaries and hold cleared areas. They must also increase the capacity of the Iraqi government to create employment projects, support tribal militia such as the 'Sons of Iraq' (a Sunni tribal militia that had turned against the jihadists linked to al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia) and improve life for ordinary Iraqis (*New York Times*, 2007). Combining intimidation with inducement appeared to work, though the decline in violence in Baghdad that was seen as evidence of success may have owed more to the emergence of ethnically homogenous neighbourhoods. Iraq's security remains fragile, so the long-term significance of this remains unclear.

Comparable trends emerged in southern Iraq after US forces assumed control in March 2009. Bombings and assassinations remain common, insurgents continue to operate in the provinces of Diyala and Ninevah, the Mahdi Army remains a potential threat, yet Basra is relatively peaceful. Indeed, in September 2009, the USA announced the acceleration of its withdrawal from Iraq. Whether this situation is a direct result of the USA's revised strategy is difficult to judge; in January 2009, for example, a coalition of parties had won landslide victories at the expense of the Badr Brigade, a Shia militia that, despite its ties to Iran, British forces had tolerated. No matter, the USA's supervisory role has shifted into an advisory mode that opens up the possibility of

negotiation. Significantly, short-term stability depends, in Basra as elsewhere in Iraq, on whether provincial councils can improve the public services that would make a major improvement to everyday life for the populace – that is, provide electricity, potable water, sewage treatment, employment and education, with electricity the priority.

The second notable development relates to tactical concessions. Those made to state forces by the Mahdi Army in particular show how security provision was manipulated. Inspired by Sadrist themes of political marginalization, unequal suffering and exploitation, members of the Mahdi Army claimed that it was a group of pious youths supporting their religion and clergy, rather than a military structure. In fact, by June 2003, it amounted to a shadow government in some areas of Baghdad. Armed with assault rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, mortars and Strela anti-air missiles, and using improvised explosive devices (IEDs), it seized control of public buildings and police stations in its territory. More significantly, its activities illustrate the role of security as a means to a political goal, as when, in June 2004, al-Sadr declared an end to operations in Sadr City and sought to turn the Mahdi Army into a political party capable of contesting the 2005 election. Although al-Sadr was seemingly co-opted by the authorities, agreeing to a truce spared him from intrusive US raids while allowing his militiamen to act as roughly as ever in the suburbs.

The third development concerns the British strategy of concessions to Basra's substate groups, and, more importantly, the ambiguous boundaries between state and substate agents to which it draws attention. Depending on one's viewpoint, Britain's strategy was either a pragmatic accommodation of Iraqi realities or a sign of weakness. The situation, however, was never clearcut. In much of Iraq, as in many post-conflict cities, militia provide protection and basic services (for a price) in the absence of Western-style state provision. In contrast, not only did Basra have a statist police and substate militia groups, but the police were also the equivalent of a sectarian militia, reinforcing the selective nature of security provision. By 2006, the ability of the 24-strong team of British police advisers who, supported by 70 civilian private security staff employed by Armor Holdings, sought to influence them was minimal.

The police were out of the control of British, Iraqi and sectarian authorities. As a senior general in Iraq's interior ministry said, 'Most of the police force is divided between Fadhila which controls the TSU [the tactical support unit, the force's best-trained unit] and Moqtada which controls the regular police' (*Guardian*, 2007b). This meant that 'Fadhila control the oil terminals, so they control the oil protection force . . . Moqtada controls the ports and customs, so they control the customs, police and its intelligence. Commandos are under the control of Badr Brigade'. Inevitably, officers who were not otherwise part of a militia joined in order to protect themselves, blurring the boundaries between state and substate actors still further. As a police commander noted,

once a policeman 'affiliated with a militia then as a commander you can't change him . . . because then you are confronting a political party' (*Guardian*, 2007b; Knights and Williams, 2007). A further complication arose from the fluid relationship between militias and the units they infiltrated. Whenever there was a clash between militia, the police split and units fought other units, switching identities according to whoever paid the most. By the time British forces withdrew from Basra in late 2007, the main substate factions had shared out Basra's state-based resources – that is, running the police and controlling the revenues from oil smuggling, as well as the distribution of political power in the city.

A fourth point arises from security provision as an expression of the power networks underpinning cities such as Falluja. The USA, for instance, sought to use military power to punish Falluja's inhabitants and to shape their security environment, even though historical experience suggests that military capabilities have only a limited capacity to mould the conduct and self-awareness of a populace. In fact, power in Iraq's cities concerns the ability to provide or withhold security, as well as to punish; as al-Sadr clearly recognized, it is about the ability to influence and protect, as well as to coerce, constrain, destroy or intimidate (Hills, 2006). In other words, power and security cannot be understood in isolation from the networks of social structures underpinning the relationships that must be influenced for security to result (Findley and Edwards, 2007).

Conclusion

Developments in Baghdad, Basra and Falluja underscore that security (both for those who provide it and often for those who want it) has a strong physical and exclusionary dimension, which has yet to be accurately assessed by general theory, and which challenges the normative ideals of liberal democracies.

Iraq's cities, like those in other conflict-ridden societies, support definitions of security based on the vulnerabilities (and ability to bring about change) of strongmen, but undermine those addressing the concerns of the unprotected or unconnected. Elevating the individual as a person to be the ultimate actor may be desirable, but it is usually unrealistic. For cities show how notions such as human security are possible only in the absence of wide-scale coercion or violence, and whether the unprotected are treated as individuals, rather than citizens, is to all intents and purposes irrelevant. At best, the individual's concerns are a means to a military or statist end. Hence the US troops who in 2003 drove around Baghdad 'announcing in a loudspeaker "security for us in return for electricity for you"' (BBC, 2003). Individual security is merely one

element among the many affecting military calculations, as when in 2008 a US commander in one of Baghdad's more volatile neighbourhoods sought to enhance the value of stabilization operations. He suggested taking the area's increased security (which was measured in terms of explosive devices and US casualties) as an opportunity to provide micro-power generation capable of addressing the populace's main complaint: the lack of electricity (*Jane's Defence Weekly*, 2008: 50). As Partha Chatterjee notes, even in peacetime, cities comprise 'heterogeneous populations to be managed' on a cost-benefit analysis based on a populace's capacity for violence (cited in Hoffman, 2007: 407). And this is in the nature of security, which, while accommodating multiple interpretations, concerns pragmatic relationships based on today's power relations, rather than longer-term disadvantage.

Common security projects, or projects that can be extended to all inhabitants, are accordingly rare. On the one hand, security can be enjoyed by a few in isolation in the short term, even if this creates the conditions for insecurity in the long term. On the other hand, most city inhabitants – from ministers down to poor widows – do not think in the long term. Strongmen and sectarian militia fight in order to gain access to city (that is, state) resources today, and they consciously use (in)security to shape the conduct of individuals, groups and communities in furtherance of specific personal or group objectives.

While casualty figures in Iraq suggest that thinking about the meaning and implications of common security is of more, rather than less, importance, it may be that security can be meaningfully defined only in terms of the system of political competition that has grown up inside the city or country concerned (Lee, 1968: 9; compare Allen, 2008). Further, the gulf between traditional state-based national interpretations and people-focused approaches is arguably a diversion from the more pressing analytical and policy-relevant concern of locating where the critical points of interface between state and substate security are. Hence the significance of the concessions made by state and substate actors.

Three last points warrant recognition. First, as the record of both Coalition forces and Baghdad's neighbourhoods emphasize, selective provision may be rooted in prudence and rational decisionmaking as well as selfishness or brutality. Its consequences may be unattractive or morally unjustifiable, but this does not necessarily threaten the legitimacy of those responsible (compare the case of the UN Security Council, as discussed by Roberts & Zaum, 2008) or the rationalities shaping security provision. Human Rights Watch recorded an extreme example in Basra when a Christian woman begged British soldiers for protection after religious militia threatened to kill her: 'Tell her it's not our jurisdiction,' they said (*Economist*, 2003: 56). Such incidents may have undermined British authority, yet they did not destroy its legitimacy (such as it was), and troops remained in Basra for another four years.

Second, the catalytic nature of cities, with their characteristic density and

inequality, suggests that common security projects will be as infrequent in the future as they have been in the past. And in the absence of city-wide security, factional groups will continue to provide localized arrangements. In fact, there is little evidence to suggest that institutional state security structures (such as public police) can ever provide security for all. Consequently, the provision of security depends on myriad environmental factors, and is often little more than a reconfigured complex of existing relationships, only some of which are revised and reoriented by new pressures or modified contexts.

Finally, security is a tool or technology for managing cities, rather than a right. The overall empirical order that results may be al-Sadr's version of a Shia Basra, or it may be the CPA's market economy, but it does not make a fundamental difference to security's essentially functional nature. There is no clear, coherent or common understanding of what security means that is shared by North and South, but, based on their response to looting, theft and robbery in the early days of the occupation, Iraqis know that it is ultimately a matter of physical assurance, and the safety of themselves and their property. More importantly, cities such as Baghdad, Basra and Falluja emphasize that security requires not just coercive resources, but also agreements on rules, behaviour and predictability, and both security and the empirical order of which it is part are managed by coercion, manipulation and exclusion, as much as by negotiation and concession.

* Alice Hills is Professor of Conflict and Security at the University of Leeds, where her specialist area is security governance in fragile states. Her research focuses on why public police evolve as they do, and what explains the interactions among the police, governments and militaries in sub-Saharan Africa. E-mail: a.e.hills@leeds.ac.uk.

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