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Published online: 21 Sep 2022.

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Locating the local police in Iraq's security arena: community policing, the 'three Ps' and trust in Ninawa Province

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ABSTRACT

Post-2003, the Iraqi Police Service (IPS) has undergone a series of over-hauls that have prioritised building institutional capacities ('statebuilding') above socio-political cohesion ('nation-building'). Following the defeat of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), however, a community policing initiative premised on improving state–society relations has gained momentum. But while community policing is conceived in the Global North as a trust-building mechanism, how do Iraqi stakeholders locally perceive it, when the legacy of regime change has been to entrench a highly militarised police force beholden to patronage networks and heavily outnumbered by other security and justice providers? This paper considers policing in two diverse districts in Ninawa province: a rundown Sunni tribal neighbourhood in Mosul, and a predominantly Christian town in a multi-ethnic district. Drawing on qualitative interviews with 37 figures representing a spectrum of local interests, we explore how Iraqis understand three commonly touted characteristics of community policing: police–public partnerships; problem-solving; and preventing crime. Our findings suggest that while police conduct does impact how stakeholders view them, public trust in the police is at least as much a function of who the police are as of what they actually do, underscoring that police professionalism cannot substitute for political legitimacy more broadly.

Introduction

The establishment of an operational police force is generally a priority in post-conflict states, and increasingly amongst western donors and multilateral organisations, a community-oriented police service is seen as the ultimate goal (Hills 2020). In the aftermath of Iraq's regime change in 2003, police reform was at the forefront of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA)'s strategy to establish a modern state. Yet the Iraqi Police Service (IPS, or 'local police') has attracted surprisingly little scholarly attention.

International statebuilding efforts in Iraq, as in other post-Cold War, post-conflict settings, have tended to prioritise strengthening state institutions above political legitimacy: ie

'statebuilding' above 'nation-building' (Lemay-Hébert 2009, 22). Implicitly, and often explic-itly, the institutional approach invokes a Weberian understanding of the state as 'a human community that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory' (Weber 1919, 506). In this context, the capacities of the security sector are a key concern. In theory, however, community policing (CP) represents an oppor-tunity to combine an institutional approach with one focused on socio-political cohesion. It is a theory that warrants investigation in the context of the donor community's broader attempts to foster political legitimacy.

In Iraq, the Coalition's core contribution to political legitimacy was to institute the frame-work for a competitive democracy. Producing legitimacy, however, requires more than the mere promulgation of a formally democratic system. The CPA's formation of the Provisional Governing Council was based on an informal consociational arrangement whereby seats were distributed largely along ethno-sectarian lines to actors supposedly representing the Shi'a, Sunni and Kurdish components of the population, reflecting the Coalition's (partial) understanding of Iraqi society. The CPA's de-Ba'athification policy marginalised Sunnis (who were disproportionately highly represented within the party) in the emerging political pro-cess. Sunnis mostly voted against the new 2005 constitution and many boycotted parlia-mentary elections that year. Over the next decade, sectarianism became increasingly entrenched in the rules and practices of the political process in an informal quota system known as the *muhasasa ta'ifiya* (Dodge 2021, 459). This system pervades both political office and state institutions, including the security apparatus.

Since assuming formal control over the state, the Iraqi government has continued to pursue capacity-building within the IPS. Official communiqués and roadmaps emanating from the Iraqi Ministry of Interior (MoI), often in tandem with external donor agencies, have consistently suggested that the government is pursuing a coherent, professional police institution that acts by common consent.[1] Yet, amidst renewed cycles of violence across the country, these capacities have never been fully realised, and in fact have been undermined by the emergence of multiple non- and quasi-state armed groups defined along ethno-sec-tarian lines, some of which are aligned with key political actors; others, including the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), emerged partly as a result of the composition and (mis) conduct of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF).

Following ISIL's defeat in 2017, the federal government and international donor agencies identified the local police as a key area for institutional improvement. In November 2018, the Iraqi Police Affairs Agency, with United Nations advisory support, took advantage of renewed donor interest and inaugurated the Local Police Service Roadmap. The document was designed to oversee the transition of security arrangements from the ISF to local police, and to build greater trust between the IPS and the public. Key objectives included improving service effectiveness and developing CP. The MoI, working with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), expanded a CP programme launched in 2012. The community police are a numerically marginal component of the IPS. Nonetheless, the programme has grown through training selected members of the local police and establishing community police forums (CPFs) and centres in over 100 sub-districts. The community police have become most closely associated with their work on sensitive cases involving electronic blackmail, harassment and domestic abuse, but their work covers a spectrum of public relations. They are unarmed and lack powers of arrest but are administratively attached to provincial police stations, and act jointly in cases requiring coercive intervention. CPFs, meanwhile, are

explicitly designed to increase interactions with respected, influential members of the local community, and, following IOM priorities, they focus on the rights of women and minorities.

CP is a notoriously fluid concept. In the Global North, however, it is almost invariably posited as a mechanism for enhancing public trust, and international actors have increasingly pursued CP within post-conflict societies on the same basis. Yet how CP programmes are received by constituencies within post-conflict societies is inevitably conditioned by the underlying political and security environment, and the respective roles played by the state and other actors in addressing popular grievances.

This paper explores the roles that Iraqi communities afflicted by violence actually want and expect their local police to fulfil, and how they perceive the idea of community-oriented policing. We do not explicitly evaluate Iraq's CP programme, which is still in its infancy. Rather, through a case-study method, we explore how local stakeholders in areas earmarked for the introduction or increase of CP activities understand the feasibility of three practices commonly associated with CP in the Global North: police–public partnerships; problem-solving; and preventing crime (the three Ps). Their views on how the local police (including community police units) pursue these practices collectively provide insights into the extent to which trust between police and public can be developed. Our case studies are two 'liberated' areas of Ninawa province in northern Iraq, a microcosm of the country's ethno-sectarian diversity, in which there is considerable external support for extending CP initiatives. One is the neighbourhood of Hay al-Tanak, a Sunni tribal slum-district of western Mosul, the provincial capital, which has been largely overlooked by international donors in the post-ISIL period; the other is Qaraqosh, a predominantly Assyrian Christian town within the ethnically/confessionally mixed district of Hamdaniya which has attracted a wealth of reconstruction initiatives. We chose these areas because both were exposed to extreme violence in the recent past and now play host to several security actors with varied levels of affiliation to the Iraqi state, and because they were relatively accessible to the researchers compared with other parts of the province.

Findings are based on 20 semi-structured qualitative interviews in Qaraqosh and 17 interviews and one focus group in Hay al-Tanak conducted over three months in 2020–2021 by one British and two well-connected locally based Iraqi researchers, one of whom is a former Ninawa police officer, the other a civil society organisation (CSO) trainer and researcher. The local researchers identified interviewees, in consultation with other local researchers, officials and CSOs, as individuals who would feasibly play a role in the localised implementation of CP initiatives, or whose societal roles might complement or compete with those initiatives, hence referred to as 'local stakeholders'. They included police officers, local government officials and advisors, civil society activists, academics, *mokhatir*,[2] and tribal and religious figures. They also included several other security actors in the area, although in view of the manifest hostility of particular actors to external (Western) researchers, we did not seek interviews with the full spectrum of security actors in either locale. To minimise potential sensitivities, interviewees are not named in the paper, but with their consent, we recorded and transcribed interviews for qualitative analysis. While we cannot guarantee their views represent the majority, they do represent a spectrum of diverse interests within their communities.

The paper is divided into four parts. The first part reviews how precepts commonly associated with Western-centric CP apply to the operational realities of post-conflict states and assesses its potential role in community/nation-building. The second part situates the IPS

post-regime change in an environment characterised by high levels of ethno-sectarian political patronage and militarisation, by the proliferation of armed groups in what can best understood as a 'security arena', and by the prevalence of legal pluralism. The third part provides a contextual background to the two case studies, mapping the provincial police vis-à-vis other actors in those locales; and the fourth part unpacks findings from our qualitative interviews regarding police–public partnerships, problem-solving and prevention of crime. The conclusion reflects on the extent to which the three Ps, as opposed to other identarian factors, reflect on citizens' trust in the IPS.

CP post-conflict: premises and problems

Even in the Global North, where CP has been immensely popular since the 1980s, there has never been a definitive consensus over its core components or effectiveness. Police commissioners across Europe and North America have promoted CP as a remedy for numerous perceived and/or actual police shortcomings, including rising crime rates; police militarisation; the public sense of alienation resulting from replacing 'bobbies on the beat' with remote surveillance; the social exclusion of minorities; and, post-9/11, the rise of violent extremism. CP programmes take diverse forms, including increasing foot patrols; monitoring repeat offenders; delivering lectures on public safety; establishing neighbourhood watches or forums for community representatives to liaise with the police; and providing mediatory services to dissuade antisocial behaviour or safeguard vulnerable individuals. Nonetheless, programmes billed as CP generally share an emphasis on the three Ps. William Bratton, a New York police commissioner in the 1990s, coined the terms, identifying them as proactive strategies, juxtaposed to the 'three Rs' that had characterised the North American policing style in the 1970s (ie rapid response rates to a growing number of emergency calls; random police car patrols across a broad terrain; and reactive investigations after crimes occurred). While conceived to deal with elevated crime rates, the three Rs reduced direct contact (and trust) between police and public (Bratton 1995, 782). By contrast, CP is invariably associated with building public trust. As a philosophy synonymous with democratic policing, CP was conceived as something that could be incorporated into every aspect of policing. In practice, however, it often refers to distinct initiatives designed to offset the inevitably more militant, less public-facing aspects of police work.

Over the past 25 years, international donors have sponsored CP programmes in South Africa, Liberia, Timor Leste, Nigeria, the DRC, Jordan and Lebanon, amongst other countries, within broader bids to promote democratisation. Such initiatives are generally implemented through national (host) governments, which in most cases are the primary partners of international actors, even where the local police are in practice administered at the provincial level and below. In this sense, CP can be construed as advancing state–society relations through promoting community at both micro (district, or even neighbourhood) and macro (national) levels.

In fragile and post-conflict settings, where trust is in particularly short supply, it is easy to see why international donors have viewed CP initiatives as opportunities to strengthen socio-political cohesion. Evaluations of the effectiveness of such programmes have, however, been at best inconclusive. Critics claim that in non-democratic or post-conflict contexts, CP has been used to intensify surveillance or turn citizens into informants (eg Berksoy 2010), or to 'decentralize repression' by increasing the numbers of corrupt, predatory police on the

ground (Ruteere and Pommerolle 2003). Brogden scornfully refers to CP as 'a Panacea from the West' that international actors blithely attempt to export, demonstrating 'a combination of arrogance and incompetence in the application of a generalized policing model, with little operational relevance to the local context' (Brogden 2004, 635).

A recurring observation in studies of donor-sponsored post-conflict police reform is that attempted organisational transformations are shaped by underlying security and political conditions that dictate how police behave in practice (eg Detzner 2017). Often, systemic corruption and ethno-sectarian cleavages within fragile political systems filter into how the police operate and consequently how the public views them in relation to other security actors (Blair and Morse 2021). Quantitative research indicates that when citizens believe the composition of the police to be non-inclusive and unrepresentative of their own in-group, they are less likely to share information with them. This is particularly the case in societies divided along ethnic and sectarian lines (see eg Nanes 2020; Haim, Nanes, and Davidson 2021). Ruling regimes in which sect/ethnicity is a determining feature may well have vested interests in manning their internal security forces with 'co-ethnics', but in doing so, they reduce the likelihood of out-groups cooperating with those forces (Curtice 2018).

In short, we should expect that the success of attempts to introduce a professional, trust-building CP service will be associated with the nature and composition of the pre-existing police institutions onto which CP initiatives are superimposed, and the ways in which the population views those institutions.

The IPS post 2003

In the years following regime change, the IPS has embodied several trends characteristic of post-conflict settings, which have stymied reform efforts.

First, while the Iraqi police formally exists to represent the state's enforcement of law and order, it has come to function primarily as an outlet for political patronage. Among the prevailing parties, a system of bargaining over state revenues and privileges led to police posts being commonly allocated to affiliates of local and national power brokers. Commanders are beholden to whichever political faction enabled them to take command. At the federal level, Shi'a Islamist parties, particularly the Badr Organisation, Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq, and followers of Moqtada al-Sadr, have dominated the MoI post-2003. At the provincial level, local agendas similarly influence police recruitment and career advancement. In 2014, Al-Qarawee noted that '[t]he state apparatus is dominated by Shias, and institutions are fiefdoms of conflicting parties competing for power, resources, and status' (Al-Qarawee 2014, 1). Police employment also affords incumbents opportunities to engage in corruption.[3] Since 2003, the number of serving police officers has increased tenfold (on paper at least), from 58,000 to 600,000. Amongst them are a significant number of salary-drawing 'ghosts'. Nonetheless, numbers have vastly exceeded the initial CPA-proposed figure of 135,000, particularly after a recruiting boost in 2015 to support the counter-ISIL campaign.

Second, the IPS is highly militarised (more so even than police in other post-colonial states in the region). While police forces in Europe and North America display varying levels of militarisation, in Iraq, the police post 2003 was specifically developed to fight an insurgency. Unlike the Iraqi Army, which the CPA dissolved and re-established, the Iraqi police remained officially operational post regime change. Still, most officers who served under the Ba'ath regime deserted or were dismissed, and Coalition Forces reconstituted the police virtually

from scratch. Because the army was unprepared to fight the anti-Coalition insurgency, the police were often expected to perform military roles. The police were subsequently split into the centrally deployed and commanded Federal Police, a gendarmerie-type force, and the provincially raised IPS, our focus here.[4] While the IPS are responsible for everyday law and order, their commanders are predominantly drawn from the military; most were trained primarily for counterinsurgency (first against Al-Qai'da and other Sunni and Shi'a Islamist paramilitant groups, and latterly against ISIL); and the majority pertain to emergency battalions rather than the specialised offices that deal with different crimes, passports, traffic, or the police stations. At times the army and police have been deployed almost interchangeably. In predominantly Sunni provinces occupied by ISIL between 2014 and 2017, those police who did not abandon their posts joined a collection of other state and non-state security actors to defeat ISIL, and subsequently police functions in many areas have overlapped with those of the army, federal police, counter-terrorist forces, National Security Agency, Popular Mobilization Forces and other tribal and ethnically defined groups.

In light of the proliferation of armed forces, the police do not exercise a monopoly over the use of force (legitimate or otherwise). Rather than belonging to a strictly defined security sector, they have come to form part of what Hills (2014a) calls a 'security arena', in which the boundaries between state and non-state actors are amorphous, in terms of civil law and of popular legitimacy. Because Iraq's post-2003 ISF were characterised largely by political appointments, they were not recognised as legitimate by large sections of the Iraqi population (Al-Marashi 2021). In the early years after regime change, the exclusion of many Sunnis from the ISF promoted the formation of multiple Sunni armed groups including al-Qa'ida. Over time, some of these groups, including the Anbar tribal 'Sons of Iraq', shifted allegiances to the government, whilst remaining outside the folds of the ISF. But even key Shi'a players within Iraq's political mainstream have been closely associated with armed groups outside, or partially outside, the ISF, including the Badr Organisation (trained in exile in Iran in the 1980s/1990s by the Quds Force), and the Jaysh al-Mahdi, a populist paramilitant group loosely formed initially to confront the Coalition. Other anti-Coalition, and in some cases anti-Sunni, paramilitant groups identifying as Shi'a Islamists remained on the fringes of the political process. In 2015, the ISF's inability to counter ISIL's territory grab led Iraq's senior religious authority, Ayatollah Sistani, to appeal for volunteers to fight Da'esh. His appeal gave moral authority to the formation of dozens of predominantly Shi'a Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMFs, known as the *Hashd al-Sha'abi*). In November 2016, the Iraqi parliament legally recognised the PMF Commission, linking it as an 'independent' military formation to the ISF. In July 2019, the PMF were formally integrated into the ISF, although in practice, some units continued to operate almost entirely autonomously and some have now broken away. PMF allegiances are varied, and among their number are Sunni tribal and other ethnic (eg Christian and Shabak) groups who operate solely within their own communities and enjoy strong local support bases. But some of the most powerful PMFs are those associated with Iranian backing, including the longstanding Badr Organisation, as well as *Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq* and *Kata'ib Hezbollah* (whose leader, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, was the vice chair of the PMF commission until his assassination in a US drone attack in January 2020). Despite being implicated in acts of sectarian violence during the counter-ISIL campaign, the latter groups have been able to embed themselves into the governance of several 'liberated' Sunni provinces, especially after the 2018 national elections, when the Fatah political coalition representing those groups won a chunk of the seats (Mansour 2018). As a result, whilst memories

of Ba'athist authoritarian rule still imbue the police with popular impressions of 'stateness',[5] the police co-exist and/or compete with numerous other security actors who enjoy fluctuating levels of public support.

The prevalence of paramilitary groups and the circumstances that enabled their emergence underpin an environment of legal pluralism that the police must navigate. Though present to some extent in every society, legal pluralism is particularly pronounced in contexts where the state does not exercise a monopoly of violence (eg Baker 2008). Owing to their role in imposing the law, the police belong to the justice as well as the security sphere, and indeed, where might equals right, security providers often double up as justice providers or establish themselves as 'brokers' of justice, elevating particular figures to prime positions in the dispensation of justice. Periods of prolonged violent conflict seriously undermined Iraq's civil justice system (particularly during the 2005–2008 sectarian civil war and during ISIL's predominance between 2013 and 2017 when Shi'a elements of the ISF were implicated in sect-motivated violence). This in turn promoted widespread recourse to alternative dispute-resolution mechanisms, and Iraq's Ministry of Justice as well as the IPS often cooperate with figures acting in a tribal or religious capacity to find resolutions to particular grievances. In doing so, however, they may consciously or inadvertently further undermine the rule of state law.

These factors combined shape how CP can be developed in practice, although how they take effect differs across Iraq. In the following sections, we turn to the particular conditions affecting local police work in two districts in Ninawa.

Mapping Ninawa's security arena

Ninawa's security dynamics since the regime change, and particularly since ISIL's defeat, epitomise a crowded security arena. Located in northern Iraq on the borders of the Iraqi Kurdish Region, Ninawa is one of Iraq's most ethnically and confessionally diverse provinces. In the aftermath of regime change, even before ISIL's onslaught, the accumulative effects of the *muhasasa ta'ifiya* on inter-communal relations also made Ninawa one of Iraq's most violently contested provinces. While the majority of its population are Sunni Arab, there is a large Kurdish minority and, in the province's disputed borderlands, notable Shi'a, Christian, Turkman, Yazidi, Shabak, Kaka'i and Mandaen minorities. Between 2003 and 2014, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) vied with local Sunni actors for political control. Sunni politicians boycotted the 2005 provincial elections, enabling the KDP to dominate the provincial council until 2009, albeit with a pro-KDP Sunni candidate installed as governor. In 2009, Sunnis rallied for provincial elections and Hadbaa, led by Atheel Nujaifi, took control of the council. Hadbaa subsequently became progressively factionalised as some members were coopted by Nouri al-Maliki (then Prime Minister), and others by the KDP, which established a rival administration in the Ninawa Plains.

Complex politics mirror the security environment. Prior to ISIL's campaign, the IPS operated under MoI authority, but numerous Kurdish intelligence operatives also operated in Christian areas. The Maliki government, to outmanouevre Sunni and Kurdish political rivals, was quietly funding Shabak militias, whilst the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) financially backed several Christian militias, and the resident Iraqi army garrison primarily comprised Kurdish troops answering to KRG leadership (Knights and Kalian 2017). From 2015, however, thousands of PMF volunteers from predominantly Shi'a provinces headed to

Ninawa to combat ISIL alongside the ISF and other locally mobilised volunteer forces. ISIL's defeat, and the subsequent national and provincial elections, reconfigured Ninawa's power dynamics. A handful of Shi'a and Sunni national parties as well as the KDP co-opted local Sunni political factions in Mosul and minority groups in the Ninawa Plains. The dominant political/paramilitary factions are now Shi'a groups associated with Iran (the Badr Organisation, Asa'ib al-Ahl Haq and Kata'ib Hezbollah), as well the Atta party and the KDP (Skelton and Saleem 2000).

Security agencies' activities are now officially coordinated by the Government of Iraq (GOI)'s Ninawa Operations Command, some jointly with the Bahgdad-based PMF command. The National Security Agency operates autonomously, and in practice, several PMFs operate autonomously outside their allocated areas. Kurdish Peshmerga and Zerevani (gendarmerie) operate around disputed plains towns including Tal Kayf, Bashiqa and Bartella; Iraqi Army 16th Division troops control checkpoints on the Mosul–Erbil highway and on the outskirts of Mosul; the 1000-strong Babylon Brigade, commanded by a local Christian but composed mostly of Shi'a and Shabak from elsewhere, is a Badr-allied PMF that operates mostly around Tal Kayf; the 1000–2000 strong 30th Brigade, also allied with Badr, is a Shabak PMF comprising volunteers from the region, headquartered in the predominantly Christian town of Bartalla. The 500-strong, predominantly Assyrian Christian Ninawa Plains Protection Units (NPUs), formed (with US training support) to protect the Assyrian community in 2014 after the Kurdish Peshmerga reneged on a commitment to protect the region's minorities from ISIL, undertakes checkpoint security in several Christian areas (Kruczek 2019). The 1500-strong Ninawa Plains Guards (a Kurdish-backed force connected to the Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council) and the roughly 500-strong Ninawa Plains Forces (NPF), another Kurdish-backed group aligned with the Bet-Nahrain Democratic Party, focus on the northern area from Bashiqa to al-Qosh (Knights and Kalian 2017).

The IPS in the province number around 13,000–15,000: less than half the figure serving pre-ISIL, due to a budgetary freeze on recruitment post-2017 (Ahn, Campbell, and Knoetgen 2018). Dedicated community police units were established in Ninawa in 2017. While their activities are diverse, as of early 2021 they numbered only four officers and 53 men, and their impact is necessarily limited. In addition, 19 CPFs representing parts of society desig-nated vulnerable have been established to facilitate public cooperation with CP.[6] The specifics of our two case studies are presented below.

Hay al-Tanak

Officially named al-Rafidain, Hay al-Tanak is a densely populated rundown neighbourhood of north-western Mosul, Ninawa's capital. Al-Tanak lies south of Yarmouk neighbourhood. The residents, who are Sunni, originally set up homes illegally, and the district was historically deprived of basic services (although it now has electricity and water provision). Illiteracy and unemployment are high. Iraq's Department of Statistics has no estimates of al-Tanak's population, and local *mokhatir* estimations vary widely, since movement in and out of the neighbourhood is frequent, but suggest there may be around 60,000 residents.

The district is divided into eight areas occupied by different tribal groupings. Each is represented before the authorities by a *mokhtar*. Tribal elders and religious scholars are influential in managing disputes. However, poverty has given rise to relatively high crime levels. The neighbourhood was previously a recruiting ground for ISIL and while there have

been no reported terrorist activities since 2017, there have been attacks against families associated with ISIL. Common crimes include theft, fraud, assault, suicide, begging, traffic offences and domestic abuse. Many of these issues are handled informally and not reported to the police (authors' interview with local academic, August 2020).

Al-Tanak falls under Yarmouk Police Station's administration, which has an attached CP unit comprising six police, although it is relatively inactive in al-Tanak. The community police have formed a forum in Hay al-Aslah al-Zara'i under the direction of a local school headmistress, which also covers Hay Tanak. Other security agencies active in Tanak are two squads of the 9th emergency regiment police company; the Ninawa Guard Mobilization (a Sunni PMF around 2500 strong belonging to Osama and Athil al-Nujaifi formed in 2014 with Turkish support in the Kurdish region, commanded by a retired army brigadier general and comprising numerous former Iraqi army officers); and the tribal mobilisation affiliated with a prominent local personality, Sheikh Jamil al-Jubouri.

Qaraqosh

Qaraqosh is the urban centre of Hamdaniya, one of 30 districts in Ninawa. Qaraqosh is a predominantly Assyrian Christian town, but the district also has sizeable Shabak (Sunni and Shi'a) and Sunni Arab populations and small Kaka'i (Shi'a Kurd) and Turkman populations. These minorities are also present in Qaraqosh. The official language is Aramaic, the common dialect Swuaddia-Sureth; but residents also speak Arabic and in some cases, several other languages. The population pre-ISIL was around 58,000, but it has dropped to an estimated 22,000–23,000 due to displacement. Many of the displaced fear to return due to the prevailing security situation.[7]

In the city centre, the main security actors are the IPS (who have a station as well as criminal investigation and intelligence departments), and two NPU battalions. The police and NPU jointly man checkpoints around the city centre. Outside the city, the (Shabak) 30th Brigade PMF mans a secondary checkpoint at the southern entrance. The Facilities Protection Forces and National Security Agency are also active in the city.

The ISIL campaign and counter-campaign caused devastation in Qaraqosh and since 2017, the town, previously an important agricultural and mercantile centre, has attracted extensive international support for reconstruction, livelihood, civil society and peacebuilding activities. Crime levels are overall low, and most issues are managed within the community or with PMF assistance without being taken to the police or the courts. The Church has taken a leading role in governance post-ISIL and manages social grievances of all kinds. Other influential actors in this regard are the district mayor, the elders' council and six *mokhatir*.

Post-ISIL, the police composition in Hamdaniya has been modified to include more Christians and Assyrians to better reflect the population. There is currently a forum in Qaraqosh, run by a Christian women's rights activist, that liaises with the provincial community police command, but there is no CP unit there, although their international sponsors and provincial actors have expressed interest in establishing one.

Perceptions of the three Ps

The influence of Global North support for Iraq's CP programme was evident from the language used by the CP officers we spoke to in Ninawa, who reiterated that successful CP was

about the 'three Ps'. Nonetheless, with respect to the role and conduct of the local police more broadly, these themes evoked different reactions amongst the participants, as examined below.

Police–public partnerships

Police–public partnerships can be variously interpreted. Clearly, they hint at citizens working with police. In both sites, respondents broadly agreed that cooperation between police and public increased post-ISIL but could be much improved. Some, particularly in al-Tanak, put the onus of responsibility on the police, suggesting they should offer more public-awareness training and media campaigns, and attend religious gatherings and other public events; others emphasised that individuals among the public had a responsibility to provide the police with information and report crimes. The following quotations are representative of these attitudes:

> Citizens should be encouraged to deal with the police in the event of a grievance or assault. Likewise, the police must develop a reputation for dealing with complainants honestly and maintaining confidentiality. (Hamdaniya Christian politician, 20 January 2021, online interview)

> ***

> We need an organisation to set up meetings between civil society and the local police so we can see their role, because many people don't know the difference between the local police and community police or the Hashd. There should be some activity to improve peace and trust between them and people. We could sign a statement of co-operation between them and local police…. (female civil society activist, Hamdaniya, 10 December 2020)

> ***

> We are a tribal society, and the word 'police' has a negative character, especially for women. When one hears about the police, it produces a kind of fear…. Awareness must be raised among citizens and women through lectures and workshops to introduce community policing, especially on social media pages.… (gender expert resident close to Al-Tanak, 13 December 2020, Mosul)

> ***

> We [the *mokhatir* in al-Tanak] have no contact with the community police because their staff is small and so is their work. We are the ones that fulfil the role of the community police by helping the poor and needy and solving problems. They have virtually no role and most people are not aware of their existence in al-Tanak. They only helped distribute aid in the area once. They should be motivated to take on bigger roles, to communicate more with the *mokhatir* and citizens, and to make field and inspection visits to the area. (Hay al-Tanak *mokhtar*, 8 January 2021, Mosul)

However, since working with 'the public' en masse is in practice an amorphous goal, partnerships often invoke particular societal actors that represent the public. But who does represent the public? In the Global North, CSOs are assumed to be suitable partners for the police, and indeed, in Hamdaniya, where international agencies and non-governmental organisations have been particularly active post-2017, several participants indicated that civil society groups should more actively engage with the police. Local police commanders

are routinely asked to attend the local peace committees formed in more problematic 'liberated' parts of the country. CPFs were established (with IOM guidance) specifically to represent 'vulnerable' sectors of the population. The police themselves are instrumental in picking forum members and, consequently, their activities are closely coordinated. Based on our interviews, however, most citizens remain unaware of the forums.

In Global South contexts, 'partners' may equally refer to non-state security providers. The commander of the tribal *hashd* in Hay al-Tanak outlined the nature of their 'partnership' with the local police:

> The first ring around the area is the second emergency [police] battalion, then the joint one is the Ninawa Guard, who are affiliated with the tribal *hashd*. The third ring, the blocking line, is the Popular Mobilization Regiment of about 200 people. When there's a problem in al-Tanak, people come to me because we treat them well and our members come from the area. Usually problems are solved before the emergency regiment intervenes. I usually help in resolving tribal conflicts and we help in providing services to the region…. The police are only present in Yarmouk police station, and they only intervene in the event of a crime. They come with the emergency battalion's protection, but they aren't out patrolling the street. (Commander of the Tribal Hashd in Al-Tanak, 20 December 2020, Mosul)

Similarly, in Hamdaniya, the police now conduct joint checkpoints outside the city with NPU. This type of partnership is not necessarily an equal one, or indeed one in which the police take a leading role. A Christian civil society activist in Hamdaniya noted:

> The NPU are the ones who assume responsibility in Qaraqosh mainly, and then the local police in support, especially in legal matters…. The NPU are closest to the residents of Qaraqosh and are more aware of the problems that are occurring, and there is a faster intervention by them. There are more of them than there are local police in Hamdaniya (Hamdaniya female civil society activist, 20 November 2020, online interview)

Another civil society activist similarly maintained:

> The relationship between citizens and the police in Hamdaniya is good …. But the relationship of citizens to the NPU is stronger, because all their members are Christian and come from the district, and they all have family relations with the residents. This exists with the local police, but to a lesser extent. (Hamdaniya civil society activist, 17 December 2020, online interview)

On the other hand, one priest we spoke with indicated that rather than the police working in partnership with the various PMFs, it would be better to dissolve the latter.

> In Hamdaniya, there are multiple forces, including the *hashd*. Their presence was a response to an emergency situation, but in my opinion, the need for these forces has ceased: we can unify them within one force – ie the police. (Priest active in Hamdaniya, 18 January 2021, Mosul)

In addition to their relationships with other security actors, however, the police work alongside traditional brokers of dispute resolution, with varying levels of cooperation. This issue touches on the second 'core' component of CP: that of problem-solving.

Problem-solving

The requirement for the police to 'problem-solve' presented similar ambiguities in our case studies. 'Problems' are often taken to mean social grievances that may escalate into crime,

and in this respect, CP is akin to social work. A few of our interviewees indicated that the police have sought to fulfil this role post-ISIL. Referring to al-Tanak, one interviewee said:

> After the liberation …, there was more awareness, especially in areas that suffered the most from ISIL gangs, because youth councils emerged and worked side by side with tribal sheikhs [and the police] to solve problems. Problems that occur in these areas are initially tackled by tribal notables. (Gender expert resident close to al-Tanak, 13 December 2020, Mosul)

Nonetheless, the idea that citizens might choose to take their grievances to the police as a first option is dubious: in both sites, dispute resolution was primarily the function of other actors: tribal elders religious figures, the tribal *hashd* in al-Tanak, and members of the clergy and the NPU (at least for the Christian/Assyrian majority) in Hamdaniya. It is only if matters escalate and/or a legal solution is required that the police become involved, for instance to raise a lawsuit requesting compensation connected to ISIL's campaign.

> People rarely resort to police. The local police in these areas are considered reliable, but there is a kind of social detraction for people who go to the police and bypass the tribe; it's seen as a kind of cowardice, ie you couldn't get your rights yourself. (Iraqi academic knowledgeable about Hay al-Tanak, 28 November 2020, Mosul)
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> Problems [in al-Tanak] are limited, and when quarrels occur, we try to solve them directly, and not to take them to the judiciary. (Hay al-Tanak *mokhtar*, 8 January 2021, Mosul)
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> In the event of a crime … people go first to the tribal *hashd* in these areas, by virtue of their proximity to the citizens, and then to the local police. (Islamic preacher (*Khatib*) active in Hay al-Tanak, 19 December 2020, Mosul)
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> In the event of family or societal problems, people in Qaraqosh go to the priest to solve these problems through the church. They do not go to the police or security authorities unless the complaint is a civil or criminal legal case. (Hamdaniya female civil society activist, 10 December 2020, online interview)
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> Solutions to problems are divided between the church and the local police. Legal matters and complaints are handled by the local police; social problems are solved by the church … I think a community police presence here may be redundant: not an absolute necessity given the presence of the church. (Hamdaniya civil society activist, 17 December 2020, online interview)

In practice, the difference between 'problems' (*moshakil*) and interpersonal 'crimes' (*jara'im*) is often merely a function of which agency deals with them: the same grievance might be treated as a problem by a tribal leader, and as a crime by a policeman, who is more likely to use the law to solve the problem. The creation of CP units represents a bid to challenge that mentality, and to give the police (or at least a small part of it) a greater role in informal dispute resolution. The CP officers we spoke to provided examples of where they sought to do this, alongside local forums, for instance by seeking to facilitate the reintegration of displaced/socially ostracised individuals into community life, and 'amicably' solving 'problems' related to domestic abuse.

Nonetheless, as in every society, confronting domestic abuse is sensitive, and the role of public authorities in dealing with it is often contested. Interviewees active in al-Tanak agreed that overall, women would find it difficult to seek help from the community police, even though the latter seek to deal with such cases discreetly.

> It's impossible for a woman of [al-Tanak] to contact the local police. People will consider her amoral, which might lead to her being murdered, especially since people gossip about such matters and they cannot be concealed. Likewise, residents avoid contacting police stations with matters pertaining to harassment, lest the issue disgrace the family. So they punish the girl, prevent her from going out and studying, and leave the harasser unpunished. (Gender affairs expert, resident of area neighbouring al-Tanak, 13 December 2020, Mosul)

In Qaraqosh, the primary agency dealing with family disputes including domestic abuse (after the family itself) is the church. Several women interviewed indicated that divorce was not an option, so raising domestic abuse cases with the police was likely to aggravate the matter. Nonetheless, the CPF operating there maintained that it had resolved a number of family disputes. A priest we interviewed noted:

> There may not be a significant role for the community police in Hamdaniya because there aren't too many problems there. Still, in my opinion, there is no objection to their presence. (Priest active in Qaraqosh, 18 January 2021, Mosul)

Preventing crime

A common assumption of CP proponents is that proactively preventing crime, as opposed to retrospectively pursuing it, is a 'natural' outcome of partnerships and problem-solving. In that sense, the theme appears to require little explanation, although it is worth recalling that bids to treat offences as 'mere' disputes or problems can serve as a political means of 'preventing' crime. One interviewee speculated that problems between families and neighbours might be allocated to the community police in order to reduce the number of criminal offences formally reported by the local police to the MoI (Interview with gender advisor to the provincial governor, Mosul, 06 January 2021).

Distinctly, the type of 'terrorist' crime that has afflicted Iraq since regime change is often assumed to be qualitatively different from mundane crimes, due to its assumed ideological nature (although it arguably reflects underlying socio-economic conditions). In al-Tanak, a former ISIL recruiting ground, several respondents suggested that pre-ISIL, the neighbourhood considered the police hostile agents of the central government (specifically, the Maliki government). The police, for their part, were increasingly afraid of being targeted by ISIL affiliates. They interacted with the populace as little as possible, and when they did, their presence was highly militarised. Overall, a mutual lack of trust contributed towards radicalisation in the area and increased acts of terror. A Ninawa CP officer confirmed the rationale behind the CP initiative:

> The main goal of establishing a community police is to get closer to the citizen. What happened in the hot spots [including Ninawa] was due to the gap between citizens and security forces. There was no coordination and no consensus, so it was necessary to create an agency close to the citizen that deals with the citizen …, shares their concerns and seeks to solve their problems in all forms …. (Community Policing Officer, 15 January 2021, Mosul)

His observation acknowledges that the police were part of the problem to be solved. He went on to highlight the necessary professional qualities of the community police: their vocational and academic skills and temperament, and the fact that they did not carry weapons. Other interviewees similarly noted that the predominance of militarised policing – even post-ISIL when the terrorist threat had dramatically receded – reduced public trust. A religious figure in Hay al-Tanak who was unaware of the community police initiative commented:

> We hear about community policing in foreign countries, but we have not seen it in our cities. We hope it exists .… the security forces consider their role authoritarian because they carry weapons …. This must change so that they serve citizens rather than oppress them. (religious elder active in al-Tanak, 19 December 2020, Mosul)

Yet it is equally worth considering that preventing crime has as much to do with *who* the police are as with *what* they actually do, and in the Iraqi case, this factor underlies the basis of trust between the police and the people.

CP and the identitarian basis of trust

A core objective of effective CP, whether conducted by dedicated CP units or by police more broadly, is cultivating public trust and thereby the perception of police legitimacy. Admittedly, trust and police legitimacy are complex currencies that operate on multiple intersecting levels (Radburn et al. 2018). Yet in the Global North, the three Ps are widely regarded as a means of garnering trust. In Iraq, the basis for trusting police has been impeded by reactive policing in the past as well as by police militarisation and corruption; but, fundamentally, it has been influenced by what the police institution represents: a mechanism of patronage that determines the identity of its personnel. While individuals inhabit multiple identities, the violent conflicts engendered by the post-2003 political settlement have propelled specific components to the fore. As a highly patriarchal mechanism, it is unsurprising that the Iraqi police has very few women members – something that drastically reduces women's likelihood of resorting to police stations for any reason, let alone reasons concerning family life. In Ninawa, two women are employed as social workers with the community police, but this figure is negligible given that most cases the latter deal with involve women. Our interviewees, including some of the more stereotypically conservative members of the community, broadly recognised that the police needs women's involvement in order to be trustworthy and capable, even if recruiting women would likely initially meet societal pushback.

> I support the presence of women in the police force. Women are half of society, and we need women police to gain the confidence of other women …. Society needs their presence just as they need female doctors. (*Khatib* active in Hay al-Tanak, 19 December 2020, Mosul)
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> I visited the police chief and discussed this matter [of women joining the police] with him and requested that women be allowed to volunteer, but it was rejected because of the financial crisis the country is experiencing. There were many young women asking to volunteer for the police …. We need to recruit women for easy practices such as searches, passports, and traffic. (Advisor to the provincial governor on women's affairs, 12 December 2020, Mosul)

Yet while gender remains a fundamental source of inequality in Iraq, sect and ethnicity have become even more salient markers of identity. This is reflected in debates over the social composition of the police.

In Ninawa, the GoI has learned from previous mistakes over the composition of the security services, in the sense that post-ISIL, it has (with international backing) cultivated a multi-ethnic force (Ahn, Campbell, and Knoetgen 2018). Our interviewees in both sites recognised that this *had* improved relations between police and residents. Still, in Hamdaniya it was also observed that the appearance of appropriate ethno-sectarian representation within the police was something of a façade. A member of the Kaka'i community (which is not represented in Iraq's parliament and, probably as a result, is not represented in the local police) observed:

> after 2003 the police profession became a means of earning a living, and since the political parties in Baghdad controlled decisions, the ranks of the police are for those who follow these political or religious parties, whilst other components are neglected …. (representative of the Kaka'i community, 3 January 2021, online interview)

He also hinted at the undue influence of the Shabak (many of whom are allied with the powerful Badr party and who also comprise the 30th Brigade which operates outside Qaraqosh) in the district's police. By comparison, several Assyrian Christians in Hamdaniya, while acknowledging that the quota of Christians in the local police had increased, suggested it was not enough.

> In honesty, in order for Hamdaniya residents to have the kind of trust in the local police that they have in the NPU, they would [all] have to be Christian so they could deal with them in the same way. (female civil society activist from Qaraqosh, 10 December 2020, online interview)

In al-Tanak, interviewees perceived the need for representation not merely on a generic sectarian and/or ethnic basis, but on an explicitly local basis. They agreed that whilst the tribal *hashd* was composed of local residents, there was scarcely any neighbourhood representation in the police (due to a budgetary-related freeze on recruitment post-ISIL). This was a major obstacle to increasing public trust:

> the tribal *hashd* are all from the district. As for the police, their representation is small because the police were established pre-Daesh. At that time the region faced security threats, and those belonging to or linked to the police risked being killed. A few years before Daesh, a delegate from the Prime Minister's office came to offer 250 spaces to the people in al-Tanak, but no one volunteered and these opportunities went to the villages. (*Khatib* active in al-Tanak, 19 December 2020, Mosul)

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> There is a strong desire in the region to volunteer in the police, and we ask that the door for recruitment be opened. (Hay al-Tanak *mokhtar*, 8 January 2021, Mosul)

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> Unfortunately, there are very few [policemen from al-Tanak], and we blame police leadership for not nominating members from these areas …. It's preferable for members to be drawn from the neighbourhood because they are more familiar with the social situation, especially since this neighbourhood is a large popular [ie deprived] area. (Hay al-Tanak youth worker, 27 January 2021, Mosul)

In both areas, respondents seemed to accord greatest trust to the security agency whose members were uniformly drawn from their neighbourhood, irrespective of how well it was integrated into the state apparatus. In Hay al-Tanak, this was the tribal mobilisation force; in Qaraqosh, it was the NPU. The police came second in the rankings, whilst other PMFs from elsewhere were unsurprisingly last. This observation does not indicate that locals cared nothing for the trappings of 'stateness': virtually all of our respondents showed acute awareness of what an 'ideal' police force might look like, and it bore a close resemblance to police institutions touted in the Global North. Nonetheless, they wanted the state's apparatus to be more closely aligned with the aspects of their own identities that they considered most salient.

Given the partial nature of our interview sample, these impressions cannot be taken as definitive. On a national scale, the post-ISIL IPS seemed, at least for a time, to enjoy greater confidence than other security actors. Countrywide polling by the National Democratic Institute in October 2018 that asked how responsive Iraqis felt various security actors would be if they needed help put the local police on top: 81% thought they would be somewhat or very responsive. The Iraqi army came a close second with 78%; PMFs from respondents' own governorates came third with 71%; and PMFs from outside their governorates were fourth with 68%. The federal police trailed with 49% (NDI 2019, 41). Our case study communities are distinguished within Iraq by the extent to which they have come under threat from various paramilitary groups over recent years, and this may well account for relatively higher levels of trust in 'home-grown' security actors. When it comes to the local police, the pursuit of the three Ps does seem to have a bearing on public trust. But in parts of Iraq still deeply divided along intercommunal lines, what seems to matter most is that the police are 'one of us'.

Reflecting on what these observations mean for the current CP programme, and for CP as part of the 'toolkit' of statebuilding more generally, several points arise. If the primary denominator of public trust in the police post-conflict is their identitarian composition, then CP, with its focus on police practice, can only ever play a secondary role in that regard. This does not necessarily prevent CP units from achieving certain objectives: for instance, the IOM utilises them (as opposed to the wider IPS) to reach women and minorities in particular conflict-prone areas. However, unsurprisingly, CP cannot address underlying grievances that citizens feel towards the political settlement. In other words, police professionalism cannot substitute for equitable governance. Realistically, this means that public receptiveness to individual CP units will be conditioned by hyper-local demographics and power dynamics, which international actors, whose key contributions are generally technical, are rarely equipped to address. Our interviews indicated that 'in-groups' are not determined by gender/sect/ethnicity alone but also by a complex interplay of local and national factors reflecting recent conflict dynamics. It follows that international contributions to 'nation-building' through CP are necessarily restricted. CP may establish formal channels for cooperation between the state (via its law enforcement agents) and society, but in practice, so long as its core strategies pertain to the 'how' of policing, as opposed to the 'who', the institutional approach to statebuilding will continue to trump the promotion of socio-political cohesion.

Acknowledgements

Disclosure statement

Funding

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Notes

1. Statements issued by the Police Affairs Agency within the MoI on its Facebook page are indicative of this institutional goal. See https://www.facebook.com/A.POLICEiraq/, accessed 17 August 2013.
2. The post of *mokhtar* or 'headman' was established in Ottoman times to act as an intermediary between the authorities and the community and still exists in several Arab countries. In Iraq, the *mokhtar* must hold a middle school certificate, be nominated by at least 200 people in his neighbourhood, and be approved by the MoI.
3. In 2013 Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer indicated that a third of Iraqi households believed the police was corrupt; the same percentage reported having paid a bribe for police services. 'Iraq Corruption Report', 2013. https://www.ganintegrity.com/portal/country-profiles/iraq/, accessed 17 August 2022.
4. The MoI controls IPS funding, granting it significant de facto control, but the 2005 constitution and 2008 Law of Governorates Not Organised in a Region grant the governor, with provincial council aid, powers to command the police and choose provincial police chiefs. Amendments

5. 'Stateness' is a term applied by Christian Lund (2006) to refer to the state's image as ascribed to organisations and people, generally in contexts of state failure. Hills (2014b) and Beek (2016) apply the concept to police work to understand how people experience the state from below through everyday police practices.
6. The researchers spoke with community police in Ninawa but were unable to directly interview other members of the local police, due to the timing of a Prime Ministerial directive to Security Sector personnel advising against giving media or research-related interviews. However, one of the researchers is a former police officer, well informed on how the local police operate.
7. These figures are from the Director of Hamdaniya Nationality and other local figures; the Iraqi Ministry of Planning's Department of Statistics in Ninawa put the current number of residents at 48,000.

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