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BENJAMIN SOVACOOOL and SAUL HALFON

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Reconstructing Iraq: merging discourses of security and development

BENJAMIN SOVACOO AND SAUL HALFON

Abstract. This article argues that reconstruction is an emerging discourse of international politics that merges security and development discourses in powerful and troubling ways. We focus on Iraq as a site for articulating and institutionalising a particular version of reconstruction, uncovering five narratives that constitute Iraqi reconstruction discourse. We conclude by suggesting that reconstruction repackages security and development into a singular, technical, and bureaucratic worldview. This view obscures working and reliable solutions to poverty and instability by treating development as a central justification for war, and war as a promising way to develop a state and society.

Introduction

Few would argue with the assertion that Iraq is currently in a state of turmoil – facing endemic violence, a shattered state, a nonfunctioning economy, and a decimated infrastructure – and thus the search for blame is on.¹ Proponents of the recent war suggest that Saddam Hussein himself brought this crisis on Iraq through his militancy, disregard for his own country, and unwillingness to abide by international will. Critics, on the other hand, have argued that the military intervention itself was illegitimate and the security justifications provided by the United States to the public were heightened and exaggerated.² Indeed, many of the best selling books focusing on the Bush Administration and contemporary Iraq – works by Richard Clarke, Hans Blix, and Scott Ritter – provide a good summary and critique of the security rhetoric deployed by politicians to justify military intervention. L. Paul Bremer, Director of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance for postwar Iraq and former Director of the Coalition Provisional Authority, has gone so far as to publicly

¹ Larry Diamond, 'What Went Wrong in Iraq', *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2004, pp. 34–56.

² For example, Anthony Shadid, *Night Draws Near: Iraq's People in The Shadow of America's War* (New York: Henry Holt, 2005); Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory: The American Occupation and the Bungled Effort to Bring Democracy to Iraq* (New York: Times Books, 2005); Andrew Fillbert, 'After Saddam: Regional Insecurity, Weapons of Mass Destruction, and Proliferation Pressures in Postwar Iraq', in *American Hegemony: Preventative War, Iraq, and Imposing Democracy* (New York: American Academy of Political Science, 2004); Louis Fisher, 'Deciding on War Against Iraq: Institutional Failures', *ibid.*; Kevin Russell, 'The Subjectivity of Intelligence Analysis and Implications for the US National Security Strategy', *SAIS Review*, Winter/Spring 2004, pp. 147–63; Chaim Kaufmann, 'Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas', *International Security*, 29 (2004), pp. 5–48; Gregory R. Copley, 'The Iraq WMD Debate', *Defense & Foreign Affairs' Strategic Policy*, February 2004, pp. 4–16.

admit that 'the United States has become the worst of all things in Iraq – an ineffective occupier.'³

Yet while many of the original 'miscalculations' and 'early blunders' of the Bush administration are becoming well known by scholars and citizens, an analysis of how such efforts relate to the historical production of reconstruction discourse has yet to occur. A focus on security rhetoric raises crucial questions about the political strategy involved in invading Iraq a second time, but does not adequately capture the range of justifications for such an invasion or help us to understand the ways in which the Bush administration's approach to the invasion was structured and made meaningful for security and development practitioners. Our focus on Iraq highlights that, even though the United States devoted nine months to planning the war and only twenty-eight days to planning the reconstruction,⁴ the intervention in Iraq is not simply a military conquest, but also remains a significant *development* project. And, as a development project, intervention in Iraq relies on a convergence of economic, social, and political justifications that expand beyond the confines of conventional notions of security. Condoleezza Rice almost admitted as much when she recently stated that 'it is impossible to draw neat, clear lines between our security interests, our development efforts and our democratic ideals'.⁵ While such thinking is certainly not a unique feature of the discourse surrounding the Iraqi reconstruction, we argue that it finds particularly robust expression in this context.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) planned to spend over \$3.2 bn during 2004 on projects related to energy infrastructure and power, water and sanitation, telephone communications, rehabilitation of the educational system, establishment of a health care system, agricultural development, and the construction of ports, bridges, airports, and rails.⁶ Andrew Natsios, the director of USAID, commented that:

I can tell you that [reconstruction in Iraq] is the largest [project] that AID has ever undertaken in one year in its history. And I'm unaware of anything on this scale since the Marshall Plan.⁷

A 2004 Congressional Budget Office (CBO) report estimated the cost of postwar reconstruction in Iraq to range from \$1 bn to \$4 bn per month; several other estimates put the overall cost as higher than \$100 bn.⁸ By the end of 2005, the \$18.4 bn Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Fund, established by the US Congress in

³ Paul Bremer, *My Year in Iraq: The Struggle to Build a Future of Hope* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2006), p. 13.

⁴ Dawn Brancati, 'Can Federalism Stabilize Iraq?' *The Washington Quarterly*, 17 (2004), pp. 7–21.

⁵ In *The Economist*, 'American Aid Policy: Speak Softly and Carry a Big Wallet', 378:8462 (28 January 2006), p. 75.

⁶ Andrew Natsios, 'Press Briefing on White House Interagency Humanitarian Reconstruction Issues in Iraq', 24 February 2004, retrieved from: (<http://www.usaid.gov/press/speeches/2003/sp030224.html>). (Subsequently made unavailable.) Subsequent budget projections fell short of this, with 2004 total USAID/Iraq expenditures currently listed as \$2.2 bn. (USAID Budget, retrieved from: (<http://www.usaid.gov/policy/budget/cbj2006/ane/iq.html>)). The total USAID 'reconstruction' expenditures from 2003–06, as of January 2006, are estimated at \$5 bn. Retrieved from: (http://www.usaid.gov/iraq/updates/jan06/iraq_sum15_012706.pdf).

⁷ Andrew Natsios, 'Roundtable Media Briefing: USAID Humanitarian and Reconstruction Assistance to Iraq', 20 March 2004, retrieved from: (<http://www.usaid.gov/press/speeches/2003/sp030320.html>).

⁸ In Daniel Byman, 'Constructing a Democratic Iraq: Challenges and Opportunities', *International Security*, 28 (2004), pp. 47–78. See also CBO, 'Paying for Iraq's Reconstruction', 2005, available at: (<http://www.cbo.gov/showdoc.cfm?index=4983&sequence=0>).

2003, and used for both stabilisation and development projects, had been largely depleted.⁹ To make broader sense of the military intervention in Iraq, then, one must investigate both the security and development discourses at work within and beyond the Administration that justified the war and has increasingly stabilised an emerging discourse on *reconstruction*.

Thus, while this article is very much about the Iraq conflict, it primarily treats that conflict as a site for struggle over the form and character of an ascendant discourse on reconstruction. While security, development, and reconstruction efforts have certainly been used to support each other before, it is in the crucible of Iraq that modern reconstruction discourse is being most clearly rearticulated and solidified. And, it is this discourse that threatens to become one of the more lasting outcomes of this conflict – productive of a US foreign policy that deeply reconceives and reintegrates the relation between security and development. Our central thesis, then, has three components: (1) Iraq serves as a crucial site for articulating an emerging discourse of reconstruction that merges security and development discourses in new and powerful ways; (2) this discourse has become institutionalised in the practices of senior government officials, security analysts, academics, development experts, and military commanders; and (3) the structure of this discourse helps explain why reconstruction continues to bring about ‘instrument-effects’ of violence and conflict.

Situating reconstruction discourse

In the complex world of international relations, ‘security’, ‘development’, and ‘reconstruction’ are much less particular goals than historically situated discourses. By the term ‘discourse’, we refer to a historically emergent system of objects, concepts, categories and theories that mutually reinforce each other, thereby stabilising meaning and identity. Discourses bound the range of the possible, of reality, and as such ‘frame certain problems’, simultaneously forming the context in which phenomena are understood and presenting solutions to the problems that result.¹⁰ Karen Litfin puts it this way:

As determinants of what can and cannot be thought, discourses delimit the range of policy options, thereby functioning as precursors to policy outcomes . . . The supreme power is the power to delineate the boundaries of thought – an attribute not so much of specific agents as it is of discursive practices.¹¹

Discourses thus serve to explain the stabilising and coherent practices of language and action without recourse to deep structures like truth, ideology, or intent. While discourses facilitate agency and can be shaped and refashioned over time, discourses themselves, located as they are at the intersection of mutually supporting elements, transcend the intentionality and ideologies of particular actors. Meaning is thus a

⁹ US Department of State, ‘Section 2207 Report on Iraq Relief and Reconstruction’. Available at: <http://www.state.gov/s/d/rm/rls/2207/>.

¹⁰ See Maarten A. Hajer, ‘Discourse Coalitions and the Institutionalization of Practice: The Case of Acid Rain in Britain’, in Frank Fischer and John Forester (eds.), *The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 45–6.

¹¹ In Ronnie Lipschutz, *On Security* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 8–9.

'social rather than an individual or collective phenomenon: it is not that everyone has the same ideas in their heads, but rather that meaning inheres in the practices and categories through which people engage with each other and the natural world'.¹² And, in moving away from a focus on intent, discourse theory reimagines 'strategy' as an emergent system of, not 'side effects', but rather 'instrument-effects'; that is, latent and often counter-intuitive effects that consequently extend and reproduce that discourse. The paradigmatic example is policy 'failure', which rather than undermining a discourse, is normalised and provides justification for continued and extended action.¹³

While multiple discourses can work against each other, and individual discourses are themselves fluid and malleable (providing 'grids of intelligibility'¹⁴ rather than firm structures of thought), certain discourses do achieve dominance over time. Such 'hegemonic' discourses are successfully naturalised: 'internalized in language, school curricula, political institutions, moral discourses, and the like, their mythical origin appears more and more real until the ensuing worldview, and the conflicts that they generate, seem inevitable, even natural.'¹⁵ Discourses are removed from the everyday domain of politics by becoming represented as immutable and necessary, subject neither to change nor external authority. Security and development have long had such hegemonic status in international politics, and reconstruction, we claim, is becoming increasingly so.

Furthermore, discourses do not merely 'float' in the world but are tied to specific actors and organisations, thus becoming institutionalised into practices and ways of reasoning. Such institutionalised discourses frequently function as knowledge industries – with their own organisations and experts – that generate coherent policy narratives and conceptualise, plan, and implement projects.¹⁶ To analyse the discourse(s) of a particular institution, then, is to examine the 'argumentative structure in documents and other written or spoken statements' which provide insight into the interplay of language, identity, and policy.¹⁷ Or, as political theorist David Campbell clarifies:

If we assume that the state has no ontological status apart from the many and varied practices that bring it into being, then the state is an artifact of a continual process of reproduction that performatively constitutes its identity. The inscription of boundaries, the articulation of coherence, and the identification of threats to its sense of self can be located in and driven by official discourses of government.¹⁸

Emphasising the 'official discourses of government', as we do below, reveals how certain relations of dominance are structured and reproduced.

¹² Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics', *International Organization*, 46:2 (Spring, 1992), pp. 396–7.

¹³ James A. Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), ch. 9; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

¹⁴ Jennifer Milliken, 'The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods', *European Journal of International Relations*, 5:2 (1999), p. 229.

¹⁵ Roland Bleiker, *Divided Korea: Toward a Culture of Reconciliation* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. 116.

¹⁶ Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*, p. 67.

¹⁷ Hajer, 'Discourse Coalitions', p. 44.

¹⁸ David Campbell, 'Cultural Governance and Pictorial Resistance: Reflections on the Imaging of War', *International Security*, 28 (2003), p. 57.

These official discourses are constituted as policy narratives that give rise to actual policies and procedures. Such narratives, or story lines, conceal the complexities and ambiguities of discourses by establishing specific causal chains of meaning. Their relative stability, in turn, helps to delimit the possibilities found within a discourse. However, as such narratives are more clearly associated with particular individuals, organisations, and activities than are discourses, they are more readily subject to visible political struggle. Thus, while reconstruction discourse itself has not been widely challenged, the Bush Administration's specific approach to reconstruction in Iraq has been.

Ultimately, the point is that, while discourses are quite real and powerful in their effects, they are nevertheless socially constructed, immaterial, and constantly changing; a result of the clash of different representations.¹⁹ Tracing the representations located within discourse, then, helps to denaturalise and repoliticise them.

One of the central contributions of this article is to open up reconstruction as a major, re-emerging discourse of international relations – in a sense, as a new 'doctrine' of the sort articulated by Robert Packenham.²⁰ The language of postwar reconstruction reaches back to the American Civil War, and had a major rearticulation in the post-World War II Marshall Plan, but we can see this discourse as reforming once again since the end of the Cold War.²¹ Recent conflict areas such as Bosnia, Somalia, and Afghanistan were subjected to reconstruction, but as we argue, it is through the Iraq war that this discourse is taking a more fully articulated and institutionalised form. Through Iraq, the Bush administration is attempting to produce a particular version of reconstruction; that is, to weave together a specific set of relations between security and development, between Iraqi and American identity, and between the present and the past. As emergent, the discourse is not fully sutured, and is still very much involved in struggle. In a sense, we can think of the Bush administration as the public face of a powerful 'discourse coalition' on reconstruction. Unlike Maarten Hajer's initial use of this term, however, this coalition is involved in struggles, not to elevate one discourse over another, but to elevate one version of the discourse over another.

We thus explore the characteristics of the Iraq conflict and the reconstruction of Iraq that extend beyond this particular conflict and this particular administration. It is too early to know how reconstruction will take shape, what will survive past the neo-conservative resurgence in US national politics, or how the Iraqi reconstruction will proceed, but we can watch how aspects of reconstruction discourse in Iraq crystallise into development and security practices. To the extent that reconstruction can be understood as a reintegration of development and security, as a remilitarisation of development and a concomitant expansion of the domain of security, it is useful to briefly explore these two constituent discourses.

¹⁹ Roland Bleiker, *Divided Korea: Toward a Culture of Reconciliation* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), pp. xxxvii–ix.

²⁰ See Robert A. Packenham, *Liberal America and the Third World: Political Development Ideas in Foreign Aid and Social Science* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973).

²¹ Williams notes that the notion of reconstruction has itself undergone significant reinterpretation throughout its history. Andrew J. Williams, '“Reconstruction” before the Marshall Plan', *Review of International Studies*, 31 (2005), pp. 541–58.

Security discourse

The classic work on security discourse is David Campbell's *Writing Security*, which turns the gaze of the security analyst from what is going on 'out there' to what is going on 'back here'.²² He addresses security as a construct that shapes and is shaped by domestic struggles over national (political) identities. Mirroring the arguments of William Connolly's *Identity/Difference*, he suggests that identity is a construct of difference – separating the self from others.²³ The nature of the particular other, while historically and materially meaningful, does not fundamentally structure the discourses of security that predominate within a country. Instead, he traces American security discourse as a historically consistent means of imagining America and structuring dissent. Political scientist Ronnie Lipschutz makes a similar argument when he states that:

Conceptualizations of security – from which follow policy and practice – are to be found in discourses of security. These are neither strictly objective assessments nor analytical constructs of threat, but rather the products of historical structures and processes, of struggles for power within the state, of conflicts between the societal groupings that inhabit states and the interests that besiege them. Hence, they are not only struggles over security among nations, but also struggles over security among notions.²⁴

As a dominant discourse of international relations, security discourse tends to hide its own construction by naturalising dangers, threats and the actors who produce them.²⁵ Neither pre-given, nor inevitable, nor ontologically separate entities, insecurities are instead 'mutually constituted cultural and social constructions: insecurity is itself the product of processes of identity construction in which the self and the other, or multiple others, are constructed'.²⁶ The challenge is to make this naturalisation visible, thereby demonstrating ways that the state and its insecurities and actors are continually and culturally produced. Michael Shapiro describes the task as to 'disclose the operation of power in places which the familiar, social, administrative, and political discourses tend to disguise and naturalize it'.²⁷

Furthermore, viewing security as a discourse suggests that failures of security regimes only serve to perpetuate the system. For Jef Huysman, security as a 'signifier has a performative rather than a descriptive force. Rather than describing or picturing a condition, it organises social relations into security relations . . . It positions people in their relations to themselves, to nature and to other human beings within a particular discursive, symbolic order'.²⁸ The result is a cruel paradox: 'Our political identity relies on the threatening force of the other; nevertheless security

²² David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

²³ William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

²⁴ Lipschutz, *On Security*, p. 8.

²⁵ Jutta Weldes et al., 'Introduction', in Jutta Weldes, Mark Laffey, Hugh Gusterson and Raymond Duvall (eds.), *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities, and the Production of Danger* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 9.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁷ Michael J. Shapiro, *Reading the Postmodern Polity: Political Theory as Textual Practice* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), p. 1.

²⁸ Jef Huysmans, 'Security! What do you Mean? From Concept to Thick Signifier', *European Journal of International Relations*, 4:2 (1998), pp. 244–6.

policy aims ideally at eliminating this threat'.²⁹ Failures to eliminate insecurity within such a system thus only serve as further justification for the system. Or, as David Campbell put it, 'should the state project of security be successful in the terms in which it is articulated, the state would cease to exist. Security as the absence of movement would result in death via stasis. Ironically, then, the inability of the state project of security to succeed is the guarantor of the state's continued success as an impelling identity.'³⁰

Viewing security as discourse reverses the usual causal narrative between domestic policies and international threats, suggesting that the latter is conceptualised through the lens of the former, or more fundamentally, that the international/domestic border is itself constituted in this struggle.³¹ This allows us to make new sense of both domestic and international affairs. It also denaturalises the real, suggesting that what is said about self and other needs to be understood as a historical unfolding and enfolding within a process of political struggle. Finally, it allows us to explore new and more obscure relations between security and its related discourses, such as that between military intervention and development.

Security discourse over the past half century has taken the Cold War and the post-Cold War 'new world order' as its major themes. That is, until the real and metaphorical fall of the Berlin Wall, security was primarily articulated as a multi-sided struggle between the free and the communist worlds. Since then, security has been a more amorphous articulation of concerns about various rogue actors, post-Cold War disintegrations, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the rise of (Islamic) fundamentalists pulled increasingly together under the rubric of 'terrorist threats'.³² This duality suggests strong ruptures in regimes of security – what we fear and how we should respond.

Central to this new regime of security has been an expansion to encompass issues previously regarded as humanitarian, criminal, and environmental. As Michael Renner suggests, 'the cold war's rigid bipolarity has fallen by the wayside, making room for a more multi-polar world in which countries do not automatically rally behind a leader, in which constellations of power and interest seem more transient'.³³ In response, American security institutions expanded their role in tackling issues like crime, the spread of disease, transnational pollution, human trafficking, population growth, and illicit narcotics.³⁴ For example, Maarten A. Hajer suggests that the

²⁹ Ibid., p. 239.

³⁰ Campbell, *Writing Security*, p. 12.

³¹ Richard K. Ashley, 'Living on Border Lines: Man, Poststructuralism, and War', in James Der Derian and Michael Shapiro (eds.), *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1989).

³² On suggesting that the primary mode of articulating policy coherence in this new era is through the discourse of 'peacekeeping', see Francois Debrix, *Re-Envisioning Peacekeeping: The United Nations and the Mobilization of Ideology* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999). Similarly, we want to make a case for the emerging and clearly related discourse of 'reconstruction'.

³³ Michael Renner, *Fighting for Survival* (Washington, DC: Worldwatch Institute, 1996), p. 12.

³⁴ For discussions on how security institutions have expanded to incorporate environmental concerns into their threat assessments, see Miram R. Lowi and Brian R. Shaw, *Environment and Security: Discourses and Practices* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000); Jon Barnett, *The Meaning of Environmental Security: Ecological Politics and Policy in the New Security Era* (New York: Zed Books, 2001); Thomas F. Homer-Dixon, 'Environmental Scarcities and Violent Conflict: Evidence from Cases', *International Security*, 19:1 (Summer 1994), pp. 5–40; Marc A. Levy, 'Is the Environment a National Security Issue', *International Security*, 20:2 (Autumn 1995), pp. 35–62; and Simon Dalby, *Environmental Security* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002). For

transnational threats of acid rain, global warming, and depletion of the ozone layer represent international problems frequently conceptualised by states as security issues.³⁵ Theorist Michael Thompson holds that security institutions have broadened their focus to include environmental issues such as soil erosion, population dynamics, and resource scarcity, some authors going so far as to claim that environmental issues are 'more important for preserving international security than conventional military forces.'³⁶ And Karen Liftin, in *Ozone Discourses*, argues that the emergence of new challenges to national security at the end of the Cold War have produced a shift in the way that security analysts conceptualise security. According to her:

A host of new issues, including the AIDS epidemic, drug trafficking, and the environment, require cooperative endeavors among states while simultaneously involving a diffusion of power away from states to non-state actors.³⁷

This means that post-Cold War security discourse has transformed from one based on competing sovereignties to a discourse founded on protecting the traditional nation state from external and internal threats. Security discourse, then, has become a system of knowledge production that has expanded to include issues previously regarded as *humanitarian* or *development* oriented.

Overall, we suggest, US security discourse revolves around three interrelated concepts: (1) Identity, or what it means to be an American; (2) Threat assessment, or the identification and construction of threats and representations of danger that justify military policy and intervention; and (3) Naturalisation of security threats, or erasure of historical processes of insecurity production.

Development discourse

The crux of the discursive approach to development, as laid out in Arturo Escobar's widely synthetic *Encountering Development*, is as follows: 'development' names a series of approaches to First-World/Third-World relations that produce and reinscribe the Third World as underdeveloped and needing assistance.³⁸ Development serves as a regime of representation that reserves a key role for the advanced capitalist states of the West in defining, knowing, and meeting the needs of the underdeveloped. Based on progressive theories of modernisation, it establishes a hierarchy of societies and cultures. Based on ideas of scientific rationality and technology, it establishes a

work on how security institutions have widened their focus on issues of development, see Robin Luckham, 'Democratic Strategies for Security in Transition and Conflict', *Governing Insecurity: Democratic Control of Military and Security Establishments in Transitional Democracies* (New York: Zed Books, 2003); Benjamin Sovacool and Saul Halfon, 'Security, Development, and Reconstruction: Imagining a New Iraq', Presentation at the Science and Technology Studies (R)evolutions Conference, 18 March 2005, p. 5.

³⁵ Maarten A. Hajer, *The Politics of Environmental Discourse: Ecological Modernization and the Policy Process* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1997), p. 2.

³⁶ Michael Thompson, 'Security and Solidarity: An Anti-Reductionist Analysis of Environmental Policy', in Maarten A. Hajer and Frank Fisher, *Living With Nature: Environmental Politics as Cultural Discourse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999), p. 135.

³⁷ Karen T. Liftin, *Ozone Discourses: Science and Politics in Global Environmental Cooperation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 19.

³⁸ Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

hierarchy of knowledge systems. Development has thus produced and reinforced an infantilising approach to much of the rest of the world, consistently treating the Third World as lesser, stagnant, or in some way underdeveloped relative to the West. The basic construct has been one of difference. And, while development actions and thought are internally intelligible, their systematic erasure of lived experience has produced a long history of outcomes destructive to the poor.

Because development has become professionalised as a field of its own, Escobar argues, certain structures of representation and power remain stable in development discourse: Western standards of knowledge and progress combined with technocratic and top-down decision-making; a depoliticising ethic of planning and implementation rather than mobilisation; homogenisation of subjects and societies; and a powerful institutional bureaucracy. The political motivations behind development remain obscure because the system itself becomes constrained by its own knowledge. According to Escobar, 'much of an institution's effectiveness in producing power relations is the result of practices that are often invisible, precisely because they are seen as rational.'³⁹ This bureaucracy has essentially straddled two different disciplinary domains, those of economics (which prioritises the importance of tools such as structural adjustment, democratic labour standards, and the construction of western-like market systems) and those of agriculture (which prioritises the importance of agricultural technology, crop yields, and nutritional standards). Development proposals appear apolitical because they empower practitioners to reduce development problems to merely technical dilemmas such as repairing infrastructure and distributing food.

Development discourse gained a particular resonance among policymakers in the post-World War II era, as the Third World partner to reconstruction efforts in Western Europe. Classic development discourse initially combined modernisation theory with fears about the spread of communism to suggest an urgent need for Third World economic modernisation. The early emphasis on macroeconomic modernisation in the face of a pervasive security threat was the hallmark of development thinking and policy through the 1960s, when challenges to this framing started to be articulated. Subsequent development work has largely decoupled development from security discourse, and has increasingly eschewed the teleology inherent in modernisation theory.

Over the past 60 years, the focus of development experts has alternated between the economy and increasingly broader social domains. Yet despite such constantly shifting topics of concern, development agencies have maintained a largely technocratic approach, relying on centrally conceived projects run by development experts accountable to narrowly defined, quantitative indicators. While theories of participatory or reflexive development have gained ground in academic and some policy institutions, where successful, these projects usually take place outside development institutions or merely provide cover for the much larger centralised projects and are thus not relevant to the development constructs that help make up reconstruction efforts.⁴⁰

³⁹ Ibid., p. 135.

⁴⁰ On participatory development, see Nici Nelson and Susan Wright, *Power and Participatory Development: Theory and Practice* (London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1995), and Harmut Schneider and Marie-Hélène Libercier (eds.), *Participatory Development: From Advocacy to Action* (Paris: OECD, 1995). See also the critique by Sarah C. White, 'Depoliticizing Development:

Consistent with what Pakenham calls 'the liberal tradition' in American foreign policy,⁴¹ the collective features of development discourse thus include four interconnected themes. They: (1) Homogenise those in need of development; (2) Depoliticise development projects, which are framed as benevolent and neutral; (3) Use Western standards of technology, progress, and administrative structure; and (4) Implement top-down, inherently centralised and bureaucratic decision-making.

Making 'this kind of commitment' in Iraq: security and development into reconstruction

The reconstruction discourse being articulated in Iraq threads together elements of security and development discourses, simultaneously merging their components and changing their functional relation to each other. More specifically, reconstruction combines the moral compulsion to democratise, internal and external threat assessments, the homogenisation of the Iraqi people, and the purported benevolence of military intervention. While development is often conceived as a way to maintain a stable and secure world, and thus *avoid* conflict, reconstruction discourse increasingly posits military action as a crucial way to achieve political and economic development.

In this section, we grapple with the articulation of reconstruction discourse in the Iraqi conflict. Conceptualising reconstruction as an emerging discourse, and not just an Iraq strategy (although it is manifested as one), allows us to situate Iraq-oriented political and policy rhetoric in relation to statements and actions made in other contexts. Reconstruction discourse is constructed and reinforced by statements from numerous policy analysts and security scholars working in different organisations and institutions. These statements have force because they were uttered by many within powerful and authoritative institutions, are supported by practices of scholarship and intelligence gathering, and articulate a coherent relation between dominant Western narratives about Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi people, American identity, and international legitimacy.

Narrating Saddam Hussein

An influential report conducted before the war by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) – a powerful think-tank with wide appeal to the corporate community and close connections to the Central Intelligence Agency and National Security Agency – noted that Saddam Hussein had the 'potential to use chemical and biological weapons against US troops, as well as attempt to lob over Israel a couple of Scud missiles with a chemical or biological warhead.'⁴² Daniel

The Uses and Abuses of Participation', *Development in Practice*, 6:1 (February 1996), pp 6–15. On reflexive development, see Jan Pieterse, *Development Theory: Deconstructions/Reconstructions* (London: Sage, 2001).

⁴¹ Pakenham, *Liberal America*, p. 33.

⁴² Arnaud de Borchgrave and Thomas Sanderson, 'Iraq and Transnational Terrorism', *Center for Strategic and International Studies Threat Initiative*, 18 November 2002, pp. 1–14.

Benjamin, a senior scholar at CSIS, argued that Iraq had ‘hundreds of tons of chemical weapons and precursors and thousands of liters of biological agents’, many of which could be deployed through ‘mobile biological weapons labs that can move around the country as needed, leaving no trace and having virtually no signature that Western intelligence can detect’.⁴³ A similar report from the Heritage Foundation – a large, influential, conservative think-tank with ties to the Bush Administration – suggested that ‘Iraq is one of the foremost state sponsors of terrorism,’ and that ‘any war against terrorism that leaves Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein in power will be judged a failure.’⁴⁴ The same report later claimed that:

Iraq poses a much greater threat to US national security than does Osama bin Laden. Its clandestine programs to build nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons of mass destruction have proceeded without outside interference . . . Iraq could have a nuclear weapon within a year.⁴⁵

Similar claims were echoed by President Bush during a speech in Grand Rapids, Michigan:

The war on terror is not confined strictly to the al Qaeda that we’re chasing. The war on terror extends beyond just a shadowy terrorist network. The war on terror involves Saddam Hussein because of the nature of Saddam Hussein, the history of Saddam Hussein and his willingness to terrorize himself. Saddam Hussein has terrorized his own people. He’s terrorized his own neighborhood. He is a danger not only to countries in the region, but as I explained last night, because of al Qaeda connections, because of his history, he’s a danger to the American people. And we’ve got to deal with him. We’ve got to deal with him before it is too late.⁴⁶

These sentiments were quickly entrenched in the popular media. In February 2003 we found over 1,000 different articles in popular newspapers, magazines, and journals, from the previous five years, that gave voice to constructions of Iraq as an urgent security threat to the United States requiring military intervention.⁴⁷ Moreover, these arguments appeared in a wide variety of sources including *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, *Political Science Quarterly*, *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *Economist*, and *Newsweek*, suggesting that the construction of Iraq as a significant security threat transcended the different political ideologies of these sources.

The language of terrorism has increasingly become the generic signifier of threat within reconstruction discourse, effective for its visceral meaning, plausibility for Americans since 9/11, and the convenient (and often purposeful) slippage between terrorism as a generic term and its close association with Osama bin Laden in American political narratives. Following September 11th, 2001, this articulation of Hussein as state sponsor of terror, and thus a direct threat to the security of the American ‘homeland’, displaced the older construct of him as a murderous dictator

⁴³ Daniel Benjamin, ‘In the Fog of War, A Greater Threat’, *The Washington Post*, 31 October 2002, p. 12.

⁴⁴ James A. Phillips, ‘A Strong Case Against Iraq’, *Heritage Foundation Memorandum # 154*, 18 October 2002, p. 1.

⁴⁵ Phillips, ‘A Strong Case’, p. 1–2.

⁴⁶ George W. Bush, ‘Statement of the Atlantic Summit: A Vision for Iraq and its People’, 29 January 2003, retrieved from: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030316-1.html>.

⁴⁷ Using ArticleFirst and Lexis/Nexis – online academic databases – we searched for articles mentioning the terms ‘Iraq’ and ‘military intervention’ or ‘war’ in 50 of the country’s most widely read newspapers and top 100 magazines and journals. We then excluded articles dealing with previous Iraqi conflicts. A wide sampling of the resulting articles suggested that the majority included some construction of Iraq as an imminent threat to US security.

who threatened regional stability.⁴⁸ That Saddam Hussein no longer just presented the vague security threat of a rogue state, but the more specific threat of a terrorist, helped cement Iraq as the central site for reconstruction efforts.

Narrating Iraqi helplessness

Along with inflating Iraq as a security threat, the people of Iraq were often labelled and discussed as one helpless and monolithic entity. When addressing the nation at the start of the war on 17 March 2003, President Bush stated that:

Many Iraqis can hear me tonight in a translated radio broadcast. And I have a message for them. If we must begin a military campaign, it will be directed against the lawless men who rule your country and not against you. As our coalition takes away their power we will deliver the food and medicine you need. We will tear down the apparatus of terror. And we will help you build a new Iraq that is prosperous and free.⁴⁹

In a speech given later at the US Institute of Peace, Colin Powell, then US Secretary of State, remarked that the goal in Iraq was to establish a 'free representative government that serves its people and fights on their behalf,' to liberate Iraq by 'ending a dangerous, evil regime' and 'restoring sovereign self-rule to the Iraqi people.'⁵⁰ Similar comments were made at the University of California Los Angeles during a Brookings Institute seminar, where Martin Indyk explained that intervention in Iraq was necessary to 'stabilize the situation in Iraq and give the Iraqi people a chance to establish "institutions of liberty"' and 'to rebuild their country in freedom'.⁵¹ And, according to a later speech given by Bush at the Atlantic Summit:

Iraq's talented people, rich culture, and tremendous potential have been hijacked by Saddam Hussein. His brutal regime has reduced a country with a long and proud history to an international pariah that oppresses its citizens. . . . In these circumstances, we would undertake a solemn obligation to help the Iraqi people build a new Iraq at peace with itself and its neighbors. The Iraqi people deserve to be lifted from insecurity and tyranny, and freed to determine for themselves the future of their country.⁵²

Such statements portray the Iraqi population as homogenous and monolithic, universally lacking food, medicine, and individual autonomy. Collectively opposed to Hussein and his regime. Equally threatened and oppressed by his apparatus of terror. In short, Iraqi citizens are viewed as uniformly helpless, unanimously in need of freedom, and requiring Western development. Thus, the situation in Iraq necessitates an intervention that is both military and civil: military to overcome the powerful hold that Saddam Hussein has over his people, illustrated by their willingness to act as

⁴⁸ A search on Lexis/Nexis of 'Iraq' and 'Terrorism' between September 11th, 2001 and the start of the second Gulf War (18 months) turned up 528 references in the *New York Times*, compared to 29 in the previous five years; 183 versus 18 from the Associated Press Wire Services; and 22 versus 3 for the *Economist*.

⁴⁹ George W. Bush, 'The War Begins: The Tyrant Will Be Gone', in Shams C. Inati (ed.), *Iraq: Its History, People, and Politics* (New York: Humanity Books, 2003), pp. 503-5.

⁵⁰ Colin L. Powell, 'From Fear to Freedom', 13 December 2002, retrieved from: <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2002/15939.htm>.

⁵¹ Martin S. Indyk, 'U.S. Victory in Iraq Opens Possibility of Palestinian-Israeli Settlement', *Ronald W. Burke Forum at UCLA*, 9 April 2003, retrieved from: <http://www.brookings.edu/views/speeches/indyk/20030409.htm>.

⁵² Bush, 'Statement of the Atlantic Summit', pp. 1-2.

human shields during both invasions; civil to provide the Iraqis what they cannot provide themselves: food, sanitation, shelter, and justice.

Narrating American identity

These two features – the construction of Iraq as a security threat and the inability of the Iraqi population to do anything about it – brought together with narratives of compassion, aid, democracy, and liberalisation, craft the necessity for American military intervention in Iraq. In his work on the historical precedence for the military campaigns undertaken in the name of the war on terror, David Gibbs suggests that the ‘threat of terrorism’ has been used to create a favourable political climate in which the Bush Administration can ‘sell’ policies of militarisation and external expansion to the public.⁵³ Reconstruction discourse merely expands this justification for military intervention to security/development projects. When asked why the United States should intervene in Iraq, Andrew Natsios remarked that:

I mean, it’s a damaged society psychologically from 35 years of the Baathist Party and the atrocities that have been committed. Ken Pollack estimates that 2 million Iraqis have died unnatural deaths since Saddam took power. And it’s a brutal regime. This is not a typical garden variety dictator. This is more like Stalinist Russia or North Korea. Their food system, for example, is comparable to North Korea’s prior to the last few years. The North Koreans even changed their system. It’s a totalitarian society.⁵⁴

President Bush, in a speech given in Michigan, noted that Iraqi intervention was about democracy and freedom:

We go into Iraq to disarm the country. We will also go in to make sure that those who are hungry are fed, those who need health care will have health care, those youngsters who need education will get education. But most of all, we will uphold our values. And the biggest value we hold dear is the value of freedom.⁵⁵

Joe Collins, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Stability Operations, framed American humanitarian intervention in moral terms, noting the military action in Iraq would be ‘not occupation’ but ‘liberation’ and the establishment of democracy necessary to repair ‘excessive damage done to the civilian population.’⁵⁶ Robin Cleveland, Associate Director for National Security Programs, argued before the war that since the Iraqi regime failed to provide ‘health, education, water and sanitation, finance, telecommunications, and infrastructure’ for its people, the responsibility should fall on the United States.⁵⁷

⁵³ For an investigation of how the war in Iraq parallels US military campaigns in Korea and Afghanistan, see David Gibbs, ‘Pretexts and U.S. Foreign Policy: The War on Terrorism in Historical Perspective’, *New Political Science*, 26 (2004), pp. 323–5.

⁵⁴ Natsios, ‘Press Briefing’, p. 3.

⁵⁵ George W. Bush, ‘Excerpts from Grand Rapids Speech’, 29 January 2003, retrieved from: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/01/20030129.html>.

⁵⁶ Joe Collins, ‘Press Briefing on White House Interagency Humanitarian Reconstruction Issues in Iraq’, 24 February 2004, retrieved from: <http://www.usaid.gov/press/speeches/2003/sp030224.html>.

⁵⁷ Robin Cleveland, ‘Press Briefing on White House Interagency Humanitarian Reconstruction Issues in Iraq’, 24 February 2004, retrieved from: <http://www.usaid.gov/press/speeches/2003/sp030224.html>.

These ideas culminated in a speech given at the American Enterprise Institute by George Bush on the eve of the war. The President remarked that should the United States go to war:

We will seek to protect Iraq's natural resources from sabotage by a dying regime, and ensure those resources are used for the benefit of the owners – the Iraqi people . . . Rebuilding Iraq will require a sustained commitment from many nations, including our own; we will remain in Iraq as long as necessary, and not a day more.⁵⁸

Bush even referenced the Marshall Plan, arguing that 'America has made and kept this kind of commitment before'.⁵⁹ Here we see a highly undifferentiated, 'iconic' reading of past reconstruction efforts – not only associating Iraqi reconstruction with the Marshall Plan, but also suggesting the Iraq war as similar to World War II in America's effort to quash tyranny, fight oppression, and (re)establish strong commercial and military allies.⁶⁰

Narrating international legitimacy

Coupled with the idea that America has the moral authority to intervene is the notion that intervention is therefore apolitical, and done for the good of humanity (or the Iraqis themselves). In the same speech at the American Enterprise Institute, Bush clarified that:

America's interests in security, and America's belief in liberty, both lead in the same direction: to a free and peaceful Iraq. The first to benefit from a free Iraq would be the people, themselves. Today they live in scarcity and fear, under a dictator who has brought them nothing but war, and misery, and torture. Their lives and their freedom matter little to Saddam Hussein – but Iraqi lives and freedom matter greatly to us.⁶¹

Such articulations about the inability of the Iraqi people to acquire freedom themselves are not limited to speeches and comments made by the President. In another influential brief put out by CSIS – widely distributed and used by the Administration before the war when discussing reconstruction – the authors argue that one of the primary justifications for war is to 'provide a safe, secure, and non-intimidating environment for Iraq's people, while protecting Iraq's borders and securing oil production facilities.'⁶² In his discussion about the many reasons to intervene in Iraq before the war, Andrew Natsios remarked that it is the job of the United States – particularly USAID – to provide those 'basic humanitarian requirements that keep people alive' such as 'health and medicine,' 'water and sanitation,' 'food and nutrition,' and 'shelter.'⁶³ Gene Dewey, Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, went further by arguing that the

⁵⁸ George W. Bush, 'Speech Before the American Enterprise Institute', 23 February 2003, retrieved from: (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/02/20030226-11.html>).

⁵⁹ Bush, 'Speech Before the American Enterprise Institute', p. 2.

⁶⁰ 'Politicians, as one commentator points out, have no hesitation in appealing to the collective memory – in a carefully selective way – in order to justify their present conduct by the past'. Bleiker, *Divided Korea*, p. 116.

⁶¹ Bush, 'Speech Before the American Enterprise Institute', p. 1.

⁶² Frederick D. Barton and Bathsbeba Crocker, *A Wiser Peace: An Action Strategy for Post-Conflict Iraq* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2003), p. 9.

⁶³ Natsios, 'Roundtable Media Briefing', p. 6.

United States has a 'moral obligation' to repair the Iraqi infrastructure to provide water, food, sanitation, and health care.⁶⁴ Ron Adams, the Deputy Director of the Pentagon Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance, similarly noted that the primary goal of the United States should be to provide health care infrastructure, water and sanitation systems, food distribution and agriculture to help the people in Iraq.⁶⁵

The attempt to legitimise United States intervention in Iraq was enhanced by the use of Western standards and technology when describing and intervening in the Iraqi economy. For example, when suggesting the need for Iraqi market reform, Alan P. Larson, the Undersecretary for Economic, Business, and Agricultural Affairs, stated that:

GDP fell from almost \$180 bn in 1979 when Saddam took power to around \$50 bn in 2001. Twenty-five years ago per capita income was approximately \$17,000 – on a par with Italy – based on purchasing power. Today, per capita income is around \$2,000, comparable to El Salvador. Moreover, the United Nations Development Programme's Arab Development Report 2002 ranked Iraq in 110th place among 111 countries on its Alternative Human Development Index, which measures such things as life expectancy at birth, educational attainment and enjoyment of civil and political liberties.⁶⁶

Barton and Crocker, senior fellows at CSIS, explain that the primary task of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) – the 18 month transitional body responsible for governing Iraq until the transfer of sovereignty – was to rebuild the economy, restart the flow of oil, reopen schools, and administer Western development assistance programmes. Significant problem areas, Barton and Crocker note, included the need for Western-style judicial reform, the establishment of local democratic governance, and the reopening of the Iraqi airport.⁶⁷ CPA administrator Paul Bremer's stated goal of 'rebuilding the Iraqi economy based on free market principles' more immediately involved reforming state employee rights and benefits, auctioning infrastructure projects to foreign companies, eliminating international tariffs, cutting public subsidies, eliminating taxes, opening markets to foreign capital, and restructuring Iraqi debt subject to IMF austerity measures, with no local input or interim government control – what Naomi Klein in *The Nation* calls 'privatization without representation'.⁶⁸

In addition, the administration of reconstruction programs was inherently centralised and hierarchical. Elliott Abrams, National Security Council Director for Near East and North Africa, makes this obvious when he stated:

And we've been planning, therefore, over the last several months, an inter-agency [development] effort [in Iraq] to prevent or at least mitigate any such humanitarian

⁶⁴ Gene Dewey, 'Press Briefing on White House Interagency Humanitarian Reconstruction Issues in Iraq', 24 February 2004, retrieved from: (<http://www.usaid.gov/press/speeches/2003/sp030224.html>).

⁶⁵ Ron Adams, 'Press Briefing on White House Interagency Humanitarian Reconstruction Issues in Iraq', 24 February 2004, retrieved from (<http://www.usaid.gov/press/speeches/2003/sp030224.html>).

⁶⁶ Alan P. Larson, 'The Future of Iraq', *Hearing Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, 4 June 2003, retrieved from: (<http://www.state.gov/e/rls/rm/2003/21267.htm>).

⁶⁷ Barton and Crocker, *A Wiser Peace*, p. 3–10.

⁶⁸ Gordon Lafer, 'Neoliberalism by Other Means: The War on Terror at Home and Abroad', *New Political Science*, 26 (2004), pp. 327–8. Naomi Klein, 'Privatization in Disguise', *The Nation*, 28 April 2003. Martin A. Weiss, 'Iraq: Debt Relief', *Congressional Research Service Report*, received through the CRS Web, Order Code RS21765, updated 11 March 2005.

consequences. We're going into a situation where there are a number of humanitarian problems. . . . We hope to discourage population displacement through [the provision of] electricity, water supply, [and] the Oil for Food Program.⁶⁹

The Pentagon gained effective control of planning and running the postwar transitional administration of Iraq and maintained this power by establishing the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Affairs, headed by retired Army Lt. Gen. Jay M. Garner. Garner was commanded to work only with current and former US officials, who then delegated tasks to Iraqi delegates. Everyone involved in the postwar civilian effort, including all other US agencies, international organisations and non-governmental aid groups, were strictly subordinated under Garner's administration.⁷⁰

This centralising was justified as a necessary 'security precaution' which subjugated the Iraqis under United States corporate and military authority. The ongoing security crisis in Iraq served as a justification for extending the military hierarchy and chain of command over development projects. As a result, security and development concerns were merged to form the justification for reconstruction. The stated reconstruction goals for the Bush Administration merge security and development by calling for the securing of Iraqi oil production facilities, elimination of Iraq's WMD, creation of the democracy, establishment of rule of law, and the creation of a self sustaining capitalist economy.⁷¹ This helps explain why the CPA had a US military commander paired with a civilian administrator charged with 'developing Iraqi infrastructure.' James B. Steinberg, director of the foreign policy studies program at the Brookings Institute, explained that because democracy in Iraq would not come easily or overnight, 'decades of repression and violence' had to be overcome which required a 'sustained military presence to provide the secure conditions that permit humanitarian assistance and reconstruction to go forward.'⁷² A similar Brookings report suggested that 'one reason, of course, [that Iraqis are so impoverished] is the generally poor security environment, which impedes efforts to rebuild and reconstruct.'⁷³

Narrating Iraqi deconstruction

Each of the four previous narratives – the evilness of Saddam Hussein, the helplessness of the Iraqi population, America as protector, and the international legitimacy of Iraqi reconstruction – is conditioned by one overarching theme: historical erasure. They reinforce a broader narrative of the deconstruction of Iraq, based on a construction of difference between malevolent Third World leaders, benevolent Western nations, and oppressed Third World people. The picture crafted here of a society in a self-inflicted downward spiral requires the Bush Administration to ignore three previous deconstructive practices: the decision of the United States to withhold

⁶⁹ Elliott Abrams, 'Press Briefing on White House Interagency Humanitarian Reconstruction Issues in Iraq', 24 February 2004, retrieved from: (<http://www.usaid.gov/press/speeches/2003/sp030224.html>).

⁷⁰ Ivo H. Daadler, 'Internationalize Post-War Iraq', *Brookings Institute Daily War Report*, 7 April 2003, pp. 3–11.

⁷¹ See Frederick D. Barton and Bathsheba Crocker, 'Winning the Peace in Iraq', *The Washington Quarterly*, 26 (2003), pp. 7–8; Byman, 'Constructing a Democratic Iraq', pp. 49–50.

⁷² James B. Steinberg, 'What Will it Take to Truly Win the War', *Brookings Institute Daily War Report*, 27 March 2003, pp. 1–3.

⁷³ Roberta Cohen and Michael O'Hanlon, 'The Priority in Iraq: Forestalling a Humanitarian Crisis', *Brookings Institute Daily War Report*, 14 April 2003, p. 1.

dual-use items under its sanctions regime; the continued reliance on such a sanctions regime even after the Iraqi economy collapsed; and previous choices by the United States in its warfare practices.

First, the downward spiral narrative completely obscures the role that withholding dual-use items under the US/UN multilateral sanctions regime had on Iraqi infrastructure, health, and standard of living. Items such as pencils, medicine, water, electric generators, sewage treatment facilities, and water purification systems were barred from entering Iraq for over a decade. Out of fear that anthrax, chlorine gas, or nuclear weapons could be fashioned out of imported items, disinfectants, X-ray machines, plastic blood transfusion bags, syringes, surgical gloves, sutures, and electronic medical equipment were all banned.⁷⁴ The compounded result was massive outbreaks of diseases such as cholera, typhoid fever, and gastroenteritis among toddlers, infants, and the elderly, as well as difficulty diagnosing or treating a wide range of other ailments.⁷⁵ In addition to sanitation and medical equipment, scholars have argued that the sanctions denied the importation of fertiliser, pesticides, and insecticides necessary for sustained agricultural production. One Iraqi farmer stated that, 'ludicrously, the sanctions cover seed, livestock, farm implements, industrial machinery – and all the other ingredients of self sufficiency.'⁷⁶

Second, this erasure is augmented by ignoring the United State's own sanctions policy toward Iraq between 1991–2004, which included the Iraq Sanctions Act of 1990, Foreign Appropriations Act of 1996, Trading With the Enemy Act, and a host of other policies which prohibited all United States imports from and exports to Iraq, foreign military and commercial arms sales, and most US foreign assistance.⁷⁷ The international response was to condemn the United States – and its consequent backing of United Nations sanctions – for creating a humanitarian disaster within Iraq. Multiple studies conducted by the United Nations Children Fund, Amnesty International, the World Food Programme, and the FAO argued that US sanctions dropped indigenous Iraqi oil production by 85 per cent, created significant shortages of foodstuffs, drugs, and medical supplies, induced hyperinflation on items such as wheat and flour, and resulted in exceptionally high mortality rates among infants and children.⁷⁸ While hotly disputed, some scholars estimated that up to 4,500 children under the age of five in Iraq were dying every month as the direct result of economic sanctions.⁷⁹ An article in the usually conservative *Foreign Affairs* argued that:

⁷⁴ See John Mueller and Karl Mueller, 'Sanctions of Mass Destruction', *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 1999), pp. 43–51; George E. Bisharat, 'International Sanctions Against Iraq: Where Are We After Ten Years?' *Transnational Law & Contemporary Problems*, 11 (2001), pp. 379–423; Liam Anderson and Gareth Stansfield, *The Future of Iraq: Dictatorship, Democracy, or Division?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

⁷⁵ Phoebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (New York: Westview Press, 2004), p. 201; Joy Gordon, 'Economic Sanctions and the Accusation of Genocide', *Yale Human Rights & Development Law Journal*, 5 (2002), pp. 57–83.

⁷⁶ Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurdish Predicament in Iraq: A Political Analysis* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), p. 136.

⁷⁷ Barton and Crocker, 'Winning the Peace', pp. 7–10.

⁷⁸ See Anderson and Stansfield, *The Future of Iraq*, pp. 92–3; Bisharat, 'International Sanctions Against Iraq', p. 381; Mueller and Mueller, 'Sanctions of Mass Destruction', pp. 44–6; Gordon, 'Economic Sanctions', pp. 61–3; Abbas Alnasrawi, 'Sanctions and the Iraqi Economy', in Shams C. Inati (ed.), *Iraq: Its History, People, and Politics* (New York: Humanity Books, 2003), p. 219; Judith S. Yahpe, 'Iraq: The Exception to the Rule', *The Washington Quarterly*, 24 (2001), pp. 125–37.

⁷⁹ Luis Mesa Delmonte, 'Economic Sanctions, Iraq, and US Foreign Policy', *Transnational Law & Contemporary Problems*, 11 (2001), pp. 345–79; Noam Chomsky, 'A Call to Action on Sanctions

If the UN estimates of the human damage in Iraq are even roughly correct, therefore, it would appear that . . . economic sanctions may well have been a necessary cause of the deaths of more people in Iraq than have been slain by all so-called weapons of mass destruction throughout history.⁸⁰

Third, the Bush Administration's claims rely centrally on the erasure of the environmental and human health considerations connected to United States military operations in Iraq. In the initial months of the 2003 invasion, many Red Cross facilities, food stocks from World Food Programme warehouses, hospitals, shelters, mosques, churches, schools, United Nations Children's Fund offices, water pipelines, and electric generators were destroyed.⁸¹ This parallels the initial precision air strikes in January of 1991, which eradicated a large part of the Iraqi communication and energy infrastructure, reducing both by more than 75 per cent. A postwar study of the 1991 air campaign revealed that the strategy went beyond bombing armed forces and military targets and concluded that (1) some targets were attacked to destroy or damage facilities that would require foreign assistance to repair; (2) many targets were selected to amplify economic and psychological impact; (3) targets were selected to do great harm to Iraq's ability to support itself.⁸² During both the 1991 and 2003 military campaigns, depleted uranium was used as tank armour and in armour piercing bullets, which resulted in more than 800 metric tons of uranium discharged throughout wide areas of southern Iraq and Kuwait.⁸³ Upon explosion, most of the uranium became aerosolised and contaminated the surrounding air, water, and soil. While, despite countervailing studies and claims, the United States Department of Defense vociferously denies that depleted uranium has any long-term radioactive effects on human health, it is less controversial that uranium is toxic when ingested or inhaled.⁸⁴ Less controversially still, eighteen chemical plants, ten biological weapons facilities, and three nuclear plants were also attacked in the initial wave of air strikes in 1991, releasing large quantities of radiation, and nerve and mustard gas, into the local population.⁸⁵ Subsequent World Health Organization investigations estimated that 31 per cent of animal resources were directly exposed to hazardous radiation and that 42 per cent of arable soil was contaminated, and a United Nations commission visiting Iraq after the Gulf War admitted, 'Iraq has, for some time to come, been relegated to a pre-industrial age, but with all the disabilities of post-industrial dependency on intensive use of energy and technology.'⁸⁶ Expressing the humanitarian goals of freedom and democracy while conducting activities that

and the U.S. War Against the People of Iraq', 8 January 2001, retrieved from: (<http://www.iacenter.org/chomsky.htm>).

⁸⁰ Mueller and Mueller, 'Sanctions of Mass Destruction', p. 51.

⁸¹ Cohen and O'Hanlon, 'The Priority in Iraq', p. 2.

⁸² Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, p. 235.

⁸³ Rania Masri, 'Assault on Iraq's Environment: The Continuing Effects of Depleted Uranium Weaponry and Blockade', in Shams C. Inati (ed.), *Iraq: Its People, History, and Politics* (New York: Humanity Books, 2003), pp. 192-5.

⁸⁴ Masri, 'Assault on Iraq', p. 196; Michio Kaku, *Metal of Dishonor: How Depleted Uranium Penetrates Steel, Radiates People, and Contaminates the Environment* (Washington, DC: International Action Center, 1997); World Health Organization, *Depleted Uranium: Sources, Exposure, and Health Effects* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2001); Beatrice Golomb, *Review of the Scientific Literature As It Pertains to Gulf War Illnesses: Depleted Uranium* (Washington, DC: Rand Corporation Press, 2000).

⁸⁵ Masri, 'Assault on Iraq', pp. 194-5.

⁸⁶ In Alnasrawi, 'Sanctions and the Iraqi Economy', p. 219.

are likely to result in long-term chemical and nuclear contamination of civilian areas and resources requires a particularly sweeping set of erasures.

Certainly the sanctions regime preceded the current Bush administration, with many of these policies instituted by the previous Bush and Clinton administrations. What is important here is the ways in which the history of sanctions on dual-use items, prolonged economic sanctions, and the human and environmental considerations involved with the military invasions were completely effaced from the representations of Iraq used to justify invasion and reconstruction – that is, for external military *and* economic intervention.

Conclusions

As stated above, this article is less about Iraq than about reconstruction discourse as framed in the crucible of Iraqi/US conflict. In the same sense, reconstruction discourse on Iraq is less about Iraq than about imagining a renewed place for American military and economic strength in the post-Cold War era. This ascendant discourse on reconstruction, while taking unique form in Iraq, increasingly structures US and international intervention in countries as disparate as Afghanistan, Bosnia, Somalia, Sudan, and Liberia. It is becoming embedded in both US and UN policy doctrine – in the very ways that international conflict is being represented and addressed.

Joseph Cirincione, a senior policy analyst for the Carnegie Endowment, recently remarked that the war in Iraq ‘is a textbook case of how a small, organized group can determine policy in a large nation, even when the majority of officials and experts originally scorned their views.’⁸⁷ Yet our investigation of reconstruction discourse suggests that the success of neo-conservative policy narratives on Iraq rested on an increasingly embedded institutional discourse that extends beyond neo-conservatives and the Bush administration. The features of this discourse become a way to make sense of, not just the Bush administration’s actions in Iraq, but more general trends in US foreign policy. Towards that analytic goal, we offer three conclusions.

First, Iraqi reconstruction discourse combines the elements of security and development discourse to create a system of knowledge statements constructed around the American moral authority to fight oppression, the apolitical nature of reconstructionist interventions, Western standards of technology and development, and the historical erasure of contravening elements. Such a discourse incorporates the development narrative of difference alongside the rhetoric of sameness – that is, rescuing the partially developed Iraqis from looming darkness to create a new social order rather than simply rebuilding the old. Alan P. Larson inadvertently made this point when he testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee:

In Iraq, we are looking not at reconstruction, but at construction, not at rebuilding, but at building. The Iraqi people must overcome the damage of 25 years of corrupt and vicious tyranny to build their society into a lively and historic center in the Middle East.⁸⁸

The *new* reconstruction discourse is about development as not just a way to avoid war, but as a central justification for it; it thus subverts the historical relation of

⁸⁷ In Lafer, ‘Neoliberalism By Other Means’, p. 342.

⁸⁸ Larson, ‘The Future of Iraq’, p. 11.

security as protecting from ruin, reconstruction as rebuilding from ruin, and development as building from nothing.

Furthermore, this discourse repackages security and development into a singular, technical, and bureaucratic worldview. Reconstruction efforts in Iraq exemplify this point, where reconstruction has been transformed from an exceptional event to a general mode of intervention that re-links development and security practices in new ways. In short, then, the meaning of reconstruction as used in recent conflicts – the notion of development to overcome the darkness and stagnation of recent leaders which have hampered progress in joining the family of free nations and liberal democracies – has converged to also include elements formally found in security discourse, such as threat assessment and erasure of ongoing relations of military domination. Under reconstruction, destruction and development become part of the same process.

Second, the fusion of these two discourses into reconstruction creates a newly unstable ideology, and contributes to political instability and violence in Iraq. Reconstruction discourse construes war, not as a mechanism to stop a hostile action, but as a way to transform a state and society – to create democracy and a free market – through political and economic development. This system is thus self-perpetuating through two dynamics: development through destruction produces a cycle of destruction and reconstruction; security through radical transformation produces a dynamic of emergent and unforeseeable security threats.

These dynamics result from reconstruction discourse attempting to accommodate the problems of underdevelopment, conflict, and security through the use of centralised security and development institutions. By reducing the complex political, social, and cultural problems of conflict to a vastly oversimplified and technical problem of development/security, reconstruction discourse ensures that productive and sustained solutions to social and political problems are never realised. Reconstruction can thus never be dissociated into a development project alone, because the violence and instability is continually reproduced. The instrument-effect of reconstruction thus seems to be a perpetuation of the reconstruction effort itself. While situational incompetence in planning for and administering Iraqi reconstruction certainly goes a long way to explaining failures there,⁸⁹ a focus on reconstruction discourse provides a systematic explanation for at least some of the failed reconstruction efforts in Iraq. Marine General Anthony Zinni, Head of US Central Command between 1997–2000, recently explained that:

If we think there is a fast solution to changing the governance of Iraq, then we don't understand history, the nature of the country, the divisions, or the underneath suppressed passions that could rise up. God help us if we think this transition will occur easily. The attempts I've seen to install democracy in short periods of time where there is no history and no roots have failed.⁹⁰

Ultimately, the vision produced by reconstruction discourse in Iraq becomes chimerical and illusionary because it imposes a construct that is reflective of American political struggles, rather than starting with the experiences of Iraqis and building policy from the ground up. In this context, the problems connected to

⁸⁹ Ed Vulliamy, 'US General Condemns Iraq Failures', *The Observer*, Sunday 22 June 2003.

⁹⁰ In Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 157.

security and development in Iraq matter greatly wherever large bureaucratic institutions are seeking to distribute food, monitor elections, and enhance peace in other parts of the world.

Third, reconstruction discourse is recapitulating many of the problems that have plagued development efforts over the past 60 years, thus further undermining both development and security. Reconstruction of political systems, economies, and cultural dynamics following the complete destruction of war requires massive, top-down efforts, like those seen in Iraq. Many scholars, however, have cautioned that large, centralised, hierarchical and bureaucratic institutions like the military and USAID can never adequately represent the actual complexity of natural and social processes because 'the categories they employ are too coarse, too static, and too stylized to do justice to the world they purport to describe'.⁹¹ Stated concisely, 'no administrative system is capable of representing any existing social community except through a heroic and greatly schematized process of abstraction and simplification'.⁹² This partially explains why state-centred interventions to fight poverty, underdevelopment, and insecurity have failed in Cambodia, Somalia, Vietnam, Haiti, the Balkans, East Timor, and Afghanistan. As Francis Fukayama put it:

I would go so far as to argue that social engineering on the level of institutions has hit a massive brick wall . . . the real difficulties affecting the quality of life in modern democracies have to do with social and cultural pathologies that seem safely beyond the reach of institutional solutions, and hence public policy.⁹³

In other words, the reductionist thinking employed by institutions concerned with reconstruction necessarily obscures working and reliable solutions to poverty and instability. Thus, the approach to reconstruction taken in Iraq, when applied to other conflicts, will only create more instability and violence, and more need for reconstruction, making failure another justification for further action, which will invariably fail. In order to develop effective strategies for ending internal struggles associated with reconstruction, one must develop a different way of seeing and approaching the world, one that grapples with the complex dynamics and various interests involved in attaining development and security. The reconstruction discourse that currently dominates our political, security, and development institutions suggests that reconstruction projects and strategies will accomplish neither.

⁹¹ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 262.

⁹² Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, p. 103.

⁹³ In Anderson and Stansfield, *The Future of Iraq*, p. 191.