

SECURITY AND THE 'GOOD CITY'



Beirut

Briefing Paper 7

Security and the 'Good City':

The many factors involved in creating a secure city

Cities can be vibrant and dynamic centres of commerce and culture because of the flexibility and possibilities allowed by urban environments. However, heavy-handed security measures prevent people from enjoying the benefits that the city has to offer. Mobility, especially, is key to success for all groups and classes in contested cities, and its restriction denies people access to necessary amenities. Long-term military occupation, in the name of security, abuses rights rather than protecting them.

Conflict in Cities (CinC) research suggests that lighter, more flexible and co-operative approaches have potential, but must be monitored carefully and given appropriate support. Security measures should be conceived to allow movement from the management of conflict to its resolution in a viable city. This is enabled when security measures respect the basic human rights of all communities. While initial responses to conflict may involve heavy and formal security measures, authorities must find ways of handling conflict so that violence is minimised, different populations have some level of interaction, and cities begin to flourish in various ways. Accordingly, security must be well integrated with other critical aspects of the city such as commerce, community

groups, public space, local initiatives, and religious and national events.

Ultimately, the security of the city depends on it being a 'good city', where all residents not only enjoy access to amenities and opportunities but can also seek justice and exercise freedom. Extreme security measures fragment the city for *all* populations and limit plurality and diversity – leaving less of the city for residents to access and enjoy.

Heavy security in urban situations

There will always be a trade-off between heavy- and light-handed security measures; whilst the latter approach may lead to a livelier city, it also brings more risk, at least in the short-to-medium term. Initially, operations may be focused on quelling conflict and ensuring security at key locations during and immediately after times of violence. In Beirut, political instability following the assassination of Rafiq Hariri saw the residences of political leaders surrounded by a security perimeter. This had serious implications for mobility as access for cars and pedestrians was restricted, and allowed only after stringent inspection of vehicles and handbags. Roads leading to the houses were guarded by military police in conjunction with the

Key findings for policy

- **Extreme security measures fragment the city and restrict people's mobility, thereby limiting their access to the benefits and diversity essential to urban life.**
- **The city must work properly for *all* of its inhabitants; measures that target certain populations on the basis of ethnicity cannot be considered security.**
- **In all but extreme circumstances, security provision should support rather than disrupt urban functions. It needs to be adjusted as the city changes.**
- **Informal security networks, including community groups, should be studied for their value as integral components of overall security systems.**

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political leaders' own security personnel.

Although often instituted as temporary measures, it is not uncommon for heavy security interventions to become permanent features, as with the Buffer Zone in Nicosia which has been controlled by the Turkish army, the Greek-Cypriot army, and the United Nations since 1974. Whilst this has maintained stability in the city, such security 'solutions' require a heavy investment and a long-term commitment. In Hebron, security is managed through the division of the city into two zones, one falling under Israeli and the other under Palestinian control. Divisions and an extremely harsh military regime have been imposed to protect a few hundred settlers, severely restricting the lives of thousands of Palestinian residents.

Severe security imposed over long periods can make conditions worse. The situation in Jerusalem is one of the most potent examples. Here, frustration over the long occupation of Palestine provoked the Second Intifada and a period of suicide bombings against Israeli civilians. Israel's response – the Separation Barrier, or what Israelis call the Security Fence and Palestinians the Apartheid Wall – separates Jerusalem from its West Bank hinterland, causing distress to Palestinians and isolation from the city. It is a high-profile conflict infrastructure supported by an elaborate system of checkpoints. Many Israelis say they prefer to have the Barrier which has been closely associated with a sharp decrease in violent attacks; this overly simple reading neglects the complex and harsh security regime that accompanies the wall. And, resulting Palestinian bitterness is likely to become a generational problem, despite the fact that the wall was planned only as

a temporary measure. The wall is supported by additional hard security measures, including a segregated road system, checkpoints and road blocks, house demolitions, and rigid restrictions upon Palestinians who wish to enter Jerusalem.

Co-operation and informal security

After many years of heavy-handed treatment, a more flexible approach to permanent security arrangements can be found in Belfast. Peace walls have pedestrian gates that are left open during the day and used by people on both sides. These borders tend to harden at times of heightened intercommunal conflict, suggesting a trade-off between light- and heavy-handed security which is responsive to the current situation in the city. Since the Troubles, security measures are now geared towards respecting the idea that disruption to the essentials of daily life – for example, access to employment, personal relations, and public areas in the city – should be minimised. In the longer term, order and stability is the result not only of overt security measures, but is also instituted through cultural, societal, religious, and historical factors.

Cooperation between authorities and communities, combined with informal security measures, has potential for reducing conflict. CinC research in Jerusalem and Belfast suggests contrasting approaches and results. In Jerusalem, the police effort is focused on managing public disorder and terrorism; this is a 'top-down' policy with very little accountability to the community. Less formally, there is extensive penetration of Palestinian communities by



During the Mughrabi ramp unrest in 2007, Palestinians clashed with the Israeli army and border police in and around Jerusalem's Old City. The military quickly restricted access to the Old City by setting up ID checkpoints.

“[T]he fact that we have committed people on both sides of the community here ... who try and work with each other and with the police to try and resolve tension is beyond invaluable...Otherwise you just end up pushing police resources to these interfaces... It’s hugely expensive, quite antagonistic and it doesn’t solve the problem.”

- Police District Commander, Belfast

intelligence agencies, whereby leaders are expected to pressure their communities or suppress dissent. Such co-option of local leaders by the Israeli authorities results in their being delegitimised in the eyes of their people.

Informal conflict management networks in Belfast are supported by a range of state agencies, and by power-sharing at regional government level. Partnership and coordination between police forces and community-based groups is developing, critical to which is a reformed police service underlying the practice of neighbourhood policing. This allows for greater visibility, participation and accountability at community levels. Here, relationships between neighbourhood police teams and communities are changing for the better, although this remains an incremental process, with periodic setbacks and with varied success across the city.

One area of coordination and cooperation that is necessary between communities and authorities is the security management of urban events; although grounds for potential violence, these also allow different groups of people to express their desires, needs, displeasure and identities. Experience in Belfast has shown that the participation of community leaders and organisations in contested events is key to them passing off peacefully, and critical to the development of trusting relationships between police and communities. Such coordination is necessary since the impacts of such events on the city are so immediate, and poor management can impact negatively on all communities in the city,

Even very small-scale informal initiatives can have a significant impact in mitigating conflict. In Belfast, paramilitary groups can play a role in the resolution of everyday disputes, at times dealing out rough justice. At the same time, local cross-community groups often work together in attempting to control actions that might lead to trouble. For instance, community workers in Belfast reported good relations with workers from the other community whom they contact about potential incidents, so that they might intervene.

Problems with informal systems

However, activity at this level can have ambiguous and even negative effects. The crowded nature of Jerusalem’s Old City means that even small-scale disruptive acts can have damaging impacts on the everyday lives of residents. Here, Jewish settlers have built connective walkways that link the rooftops of their properties enabling them to pass



Community safety stewards at an interface in West Belfast during a contentious march.

above and intimidate the Palestinians below. The Shuafat Refugee Camp, located within the municipal boundary of Jerusalem but on the West Bank side of the wall, receives little or no services from the state, and clan-based protection groups have emerged to fill the vacuum – although they have been known to both control and cooperate with criminal groups operating in the area. In Beirut, territorial policing of the city is executed by young men, members of political parties, who monitor the streets, pulling people aside and interrogating them if they deem their presence in the neighbourhood to be suspicious. Activities and outcomes such as these – good and bad – do not exist within a vacuum, and it is important that

authorities consider who supports, informs, or controls them, and look at what other kinds of security measures might be useful in contested cities. This underlines the increasing importance of the challenges and responsibilities facing authorities as more power is shared, with the need for greater bureaucratic capacity within fragile environments a prerequisite. Ultimately, progress towards conflict resolution requires that security measures support rather than disrupt urban functions. These measures should be integrated with the work of community leaders and groups, supported fully by state and even international agencies, and undertaken with great care.

Further reading

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'Conflict in Cities and the Contested State' explores how divided cities in Europe and the Middle East have been shaped by ethnic, religious and national conflicts, with particular reference to architecture and the urban as a setting for everyday activities and events. It is concerned with how cities can absorb, resist and potentially play a role in transforming such conflict. The main research sites are Belfast and Jerusalem, with supplementary enquiry into other divided cities including Berlin, Beirut, Brussels, Kirkuk, Mostar, Nicosia, Tripoli (Lebanon) and Vukovar. This multi-disciplinary project is led by three UK universities - Cambridge, Exeter and Queen's Belfast, with an international network of partners. It is funded by the Large Grant Programme of the Economic and Social Research Council of the UK (RES-060-25-0015). © Conflict in Cities, November 2012; updated by © Centre for Urban Conflicts Research, 2019; www.urbanconflicts.arct.cam.ac.uk. Grateful acknowledgement is made to ARUP London for their support.

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