

What Happened to the Iraqi Police?

*Applying Lessons in Police Democratization
Successes in West Germany and Japan*

James R. Phelps

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Foreword

*Jess Maghan**

The idea of history has in many ways become *globalized*. Yet it remains a human—time and culture—bound creation, whose technologically enhanced future is as uncertain as its past has been controversial and irregular; and its history will continue to be rewritten.

—D.R. Kelley, *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*,
2005: Vol. IV-1008.

I cannot recall ever hearing of a single high school student or military historian who hasn't been swept away when discovering *The Peloponnesian War* by the votive Thucydides, or the heroics of Pedicles' *Funeral Oration*. But while military history as a humanities discipline analyzes the glorious and inglorious character of war, it also measures the monotony and waste inherent in both sides of a battle. It recognizes the functions of contractors, suppliers (fuel, food, and mail) and medical staff that perform a critical role in protecting the backbone of morale and effectiveness during the heat of all wars.

U.S. Navy veteran James R. Phelps has applied his expertise (and it is considerable) in history and historiography in producing a lucid comparative analysis of the constrained democratization efforts for the Iraqi Police, circa 2003–2009. He does not kid-glove his depiction of the Iraq war fought in the

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midst of a people trying to go on with their daily lives under a canopy of domestic terrorism and radical websites continuously streaming disinformation and propaganda. Though, May 2006 marked the transition to Iraq's first constitutional government in nearly half a century, we are still left wondering what happened to the vaunted goal of leaving a "footprint of democracy" in the Middle East.

The Iraq war has morphed into a shattered mirror of omerta-type tactics, extorting obedience and silence via kidnappings, beheadings, suicide bombings and assassinations. Dr. Phelps has developed a tenacious portfolio of applied research propositions and counterpoints in examining a primary question: "*What Happened to the Iraqi Police?*" He has also expanded his research with a comprehensive critique of a "war running a war" outside of the mandate of American and allied forces. Using case studies of the post-WWII police democratization in West Germany and Japan, he reiterated historical hallmarks, such as the birth of the United Nations, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the emergence of NATO, and the European Union as a contextual perspective.

The use of a dual exegesis—the reconstruction of the police under the *denazification* of Western Germany and likewise the re-establishment of the police system(s) in Japan—anchors the absolute necessity of securing borders and crime control among displaced persons prior to returning governance back to local municipalities. This mandate was guided by the three intervention domains: demobilization, demilitarization and democratization. Of particular note is the specification inserted at the signing of the Japanese surrender document on September 2nd 1945. "*Pending further instructions, the Japanese Police force in the main Island of Japan will be exempt from this disarmament provision.*" Pointedly that provision enabled a "Golden Hour" for Allied Forces to stage public safety controls and ultimately reinstitute the unique community policing (Koban) function of Japan. Phelps has also provided specific iteration of the SCAPIN 115 (10/22/1945) directives for the reestablishing of Japan's democratized policing.

The basic asymmetric/symmetric grids used in portraying the "Shock and Awe" sweep into Baghdad in March of 2003 emphasize the subtext that one cannot win an asymmetric contest with symmetric responses. Phelps determined early on that the only practical route would be the use of an inverse (reciprocal) lens of the Iraq situation in comparison to that of successful post-WWII occupations. Thus the analysis shifted to an in-depth examination of the inherent flaws in waging a war without strategic controls in securing materiel supply lines. For example, the U.S. Organization for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA), which is responsible for the post-fighting gov-

ernance of Iraq, had identified these problems even before they occurred. Additionally, ORHA identified twenty key facilities and structures that needed U.S. military protection during the invasion as well as after the fighting ended. Unfortunately the military did not allow ORHA to enter Iraq and begin their rehabilitation and humanitarian functions until weeks later. By this time, the physical and bureaucratic structure for the process of governance had been destroyed.

It is at this stage of his analysis that Phelps had, as it were, “a bowl of despair for breakfast,” and started writing his operations manual of “*How Not to Fight a War.*” And, because our author is as bluntly pragmatic as a grave digger, he has brilliantly prevailed. He chases answers anywhere the contingencies and questions may lead him. For example, some would argue with the application of “dilemma theory” in relation to military history. For them, it is preferable to use “cycles” which describe *structural trends* and which correspond more to institutional realities. Others prefer to use the theme that military functions are based more on convention, and have been surrounded by their own *appropriateness*; ending up mirroring *intransigence* in the larger political and social context. In this sense, therefore, *dilemma theory* is seen as fundamental to a historiography of the police democratization strategies. Nonetheless, we can yield that *chaos theory* might be a more apt definition of the lonely journey Phelps has undertaken in implanting the premise of his deft military history, especially in his carefully deployed signposts for finding his way back from the abyss of the USA-Iraq war.

Phelps ploughs into the all-consuming evidence at hand. We have “*duration of occupation*” as a checkmate for measuring the success of Iraq democratization initiatives. We have the exposure of failed chain-of-command access to the lines of authority and responsibility. We have a brutal bureaucratic retrenchment among military units fueling a lethal impotency of response in supporting civilian contract projects and communication liaison assistance. The morass becomes even thicker and cries out for an analysis of the on-par role of the new Iraqi government in stabilizing democratization and institutionalization of a rule-of-law policing. He wisely bypasses the unsuitable American urban policing counsel and instead turns to the work of international police research academic, D. H. Bayley and counterinsurgency expert, J. A. Nagl, in constructing a series of provocative operation and training objectives appropriate to democratizing Iraqi police operations. But in the end his frustration breaks through as a *Sun Tzu* admonition, “Do you know your enemy? Do you know yourself? Do you understand processes?” But interestingly, as a master historian he checkmates himself by gifting us with a probing “appendix” entitled: *Can Occupiers Be Learning Institutions?* And he carefully frames all of this with “flexibility.”

His parting arrow hangs in the air. “While very flexible in fighting Iraqi forces, the bureaucracy of multiple echelons of command, coupled with ad hoc civilian control, combined to eliminate innovation by virtually any unit.” The Phelps historiography concludes with a haunting discomfort. It was clear that the struggle to secure a stable and prosperous future for Iraq was not yet won. And as a final caveat, he calls on Daniel Webster’s definition of *hubris* as “excessive pride or arrogance” and applies it incisively to the masterminds of “Shock and Awe.”

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Acknowledgments

This book is an extension of the lessons developed in my doctoral dissertation to the situation in Iraq. While I searched for a dissertation topic, several mentors presented thoughts and ideas in the hope I would find something interesting and pursue it to completion. Mitchell Roth¹ recommended that I look into the development of police in Germany and Japan following the Second World War. As my preliminary investigation into this topic progressed I became ever more enamored with the potential analysis of historical records and development of lessons that would find applicability in the modern effort to spread democratic ideals and institutions worldwide. Thank you Mitch.

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1. Of Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas.

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