The Political-Economy of RECONSTRUCT to Urban Post-Conflict Reconstruction: The Case of Jobar

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ATTRIBUTES

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INTRODUCTION

Cities are organic bodies. As long as they exist, their people need to breathe and express their interests in the way they design, build, and live in them. When a political economy is directed towards suppressing those people's wills and imposing its own self-interest on the city, conflict will eventually erupt. However, when the will of a people is articulated in the texture of their city, even after a prolonged period of conflict, it can begin to experience peace.

Jobar is a northeastern district of Damascus that, while only five kilometres from the city's centre, is much further apart in terms of its infrastructure and economy. Much of the district was made of informal housing settlements before the Syrian conflict began. When the uprising started these informalities were a centre for opposition to the state, and as a result the district was targeted by the Syrian Army. Today, most of the district's housing and infrastructure lies destroyed as a result of the intense violence it experienced throughout the war.

Jobar is just one of the districts in Syria that has to be rebuilt after more than a decade of conflict. The recent history of post-war reconstructions is not promising. Vast amounts of money have been directed towards some of these projects, but ultimately there is very little to show for them. Some destroyed neighbourhoods have been turned into upscale areas that alienate their original population, while others have been left in ruins out of the fear that their rejuvenation will pose a challenge to the state. A fundamental problem with the conventional approach to reconstruction is that it can only imagine a process imposed on communities and neighbourhoods from people who do not live there, resulting in cities that do not match the expectations, desires or needs of the people who will reside there.

The dilemma of Syria's reconstruction is that the government cannot afford the top-down reconstruction approach. It does not have the legitimacy nor the national institutions to do so. At the same time, the government is against an organic reconstruction driven by local populations because by nature that is a democratic reconstruction. The government’s preferred and proposed reconstruction would feed into the alliance it has with real estate developers and cronies. This will result in some overpriced expensive housing and neighbourhoods that will benefit a tiny fraction of the country’s population. It will neglect most of the Syrian people and make another uprising inevitable. The country requires local people to be involved in both its physical reconstruction and the creation of a new social contract. The Syrian government may not want to allow its people to drive the country’s reconstruction, but it will have to if it is going to avoid entering a cycle of civil conflicts.

Here, I present *RECONSTRUCT* as a framework through which local populations can drive Syria’s reconstruction. I draw upon my personal experiences with reconstruction projects and research to show why this will be necessary for Syria. Rather than being idle observers of a process administered from the very top, local populations in the country will own and invest in the rejuvenation of their own cities and districts. This will empower these communities and result in neighbourhoods that match their actual needs, and not those of speculators trying to enrich themselves. I use Jobar as an example to show how one district in Syria could be impacted by a framework that is applicable to the entire country because it is context-based and driven by local communities.

The research project is based on literature and open-source reviews, personal reflections and experiences with reconstruction approaches, and open-ended Zoom interviews with different experts. These experts include Jomaa Hijazi, a lecturer at the Higher Institute for Population Studies and Research in Damascus City, Aziz Hallaj, a Syrian architect and development consultant, Adeel Malik, a macroeconomist and Associate Professor of Development Economics at Oxford University, Adnan Sallakho, Syria’s former Minister of Industry, and Omar Imady, a Syrian scholar and novelist.

CHAPTER ONE: PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH RECONSTRUCTION

This chapter provides information about my personal experiences with large-scale economic development projects and reconstruction efforts. It shows how these experiences led to my confidence in Reconstruct as an approach for Jobar. It also aims to demonstrate how traditional top-down approaches to reconstruction have failed, and how a bottom-up, inclusive, and participatory reconstruction strategy empowers countries and their people. Throughout my career, I have seen firsthand how top-down approaches have had severe negative impacts and been captured by elites. As a result, I have tried over time to alter this approach in various contexts, which this chapter will show. This chapter also provides insight into the internal politics of government entities and international organisations and how these politics impact implementation. Therefore, this thesis is the result of a long history of work that I aim to bring to IUAV.

I. Syria: 15 Years Late

I have always been a firm believer in multidisciplinary approaches toward political and economic development. This is evident in my work as a government official in Syria - first as a Chairman of the State Planning Commission from 2003 until 2005, and then as the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs from 2005 until 2011. These experiences not only gave me insight into managing country-wide projects and plans, but also into the ins and outs of Syria's political system, the needs of the diverse Syrian populations, and efficient ways to implement positive change under difficult political structures and circumstances. As the Deputy Prime Minister, I was responsible for leading the development and implementation of Syria's tenth five-year plan. The plan aimed at reforming the Syrian economy and transitioning it from a socialist centralised economy into a social market economy where the state works as a regulator instead of an owner of economic assets. The plan hoped to focus the efforts of the public sector on producing public goods such as education, health, and environmental and social protection, and for the private sector to focus on producing private goods such as consumables and services. It sought to implement socio-economic reforms to eliminate public sector monopolies, leaving space for the private sector to experiment in a competitive environment.

My main objective driving my work in Syria was public participation. The problem with the Syrian decision-making process historically is that it revolved around one man with ultimate authority manipulating all decisions for the purpose of ultimate control.. In Syria there is an obsession with control; absolute control by absolute power. I was opposed to this approach not because I had an ideological position against it, as I was already part of the government and not an opposition member, but because it was a question of sustainability. My understanding of the situation was that the government could not sustain Syria from an administrative point of view, a financial point of view, or a political point of view. In order to stabilise the country, it was critical that the government allow people to take part in decision making at least in areas that are not absolutely political such as people's economic, cultural and urban lives as well as the architecture they live within. This participation was critical in bringing energy and resources to the country that are extremely needed for Syria to transition from a lower-income developing country to an upper-income developing country. That was my plan for Syria, that by 2020, the country would move from a lower-income developing country with a GDP per capita of less than $4,000 to around $5,000 a year GDP per capita.

This is what drove me to develop and implement the tenth five-year plan; a dramatic transformation plan for Syria that allowed, for the first time since 1963, an explosion of private sector activities across the country in manufacturing, tourism, financial services, and trade. That explosion mainly took place in urban settings as the cities were ready for such a transformation since they already had a heritage of entrepreneurial skills and large latent capital waiting for the opportunities to be invested. Syria’s major cities also had regional and global networks that allowed them to expand relatively rapidly. Admittedly, the pressure on the cities to respond was too strong and it was a classical case of rapid urbanisation. To limit this pressure, the government set up large industrial cities and complexes outside major cities including Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, and Deir Ez-Zor, and smaller satellite industrial compounds for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and micro enterprises. Nonetheless, the large cities' resources were under increased pressure caused by rural-urban migration. This included increased water scarcity, limited urban transportation, and limited public space in addition to tremendous pressure on public services such as health and education. At the same time, the building of formal housing did not match the speed of increased activities and informal urbanisation especially that Syria has a history of poor land regulation captured by elites in addition to limited, inefficient, and unsustainable urban planning.

There were also other challenges to regional planning in Syria. While the industries were developing, a terrible drought hit the country between 2006 and 2010. This caused massive movements from rural areas to peri-urban areas. Around 1.5 to 2 million people moved to the peri-urban areas of Aleppo, Damascus, and Dar'aa. It is important to note that a large number of the people who revolted in Dar'aa came from areas in Syria that were directly impacted by the drought. Therefore, there was a connection between the uprising and bad governance of the drought and peri-urban informal areas.

Real estate was captured by a few real estate developers who had an alliance with the security apparatus and were only building for high-income Syrians. This triggered exponential growth in informal housing and urban-rural migration. During the 1980s and the 1990s, Syria needed around 100,000 apartments every year while the government built a maximum of 80,000 every year. The country also lacked real estate and urban development financing mechanisms. Therefore, the dynamics in Syria were leading to an implosion that eventually took place in 2011. After witnessing such dynamics during my time as a public servant, I decided to develop a new system for housing finance and thus established the Real Estate Development and Investment Authority[1] and the Real Estate Finance Authority[2] to balance supply and demand and to open the space for the private sector to invest in large middle-income housing projects. During 2004 and 2005, the government managed to build up to 120,000 apartments per year, however, this was still fifteen years too late. It was not enough time to compensate for all the structural damage in the economy, the real estate sector, the housing sector, and the demographic changes that happened from the early 1980s to the 2000s.

It was impossible to have a society go through the economic transformations that started after 2004 without some form of people's participation where Syrians are able to trust their political and legal systems and their currency. In order to garner this trust, the government needed to bring people to some sort of participation. Otherwise, success would not be sustainable which is exactly what unfolded in Syria later on. The government's initial successes in economic reforms proved fleeting since participation was extremely weak. Additionally, the peri-urban and informal housing areas proved to be the centre of the implosion due to poor management. The government failed to include people in managing that difficult transformation and to develop informal, badly-serviced housing areas into more formal, well-serviced areas.

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[1] Name in Arabic: هيئة التطوير والاستثمار العقاري.

[2] Name in Arabic: هيئة التمويل العقاري.

During the mid-2000s, when the economic reforms that I was leading began, it was by nature that major cities were better placed to benefit from open trade and industrialization. The reforms, to a large extent, had positive impacts on Syria’s economy. For example from 2000 until 2010, 100,000 new micro and macro industries were set up in Syria, mostly around big cities. Additionally, and for the first time in Syria's history, the number of people working in industry matched the number of people working in agriculture. By 2010, Syria had 1,000,000 people working in the industry sector compared to 1,000,000 working in agriculture, almost 1,000,000 working in services, and 1,500,000 million working in the government.

While these developments were taking place and the tenth five-year plan was being implemented,there were still powerful cronies who were working in real estate development who created real estate bubbles to make quick money. By real estate bubbles I am referring to the monopolisation of the real estate market by developers and agents who develop projects and make fast income through rapid sales and as a result, inflate prices beyond market conditions. This is possible in Syria as the country has a shortage of supply, especially in formal real estate development. These cronies’ vision did not go hand in hand with the five-year plan that aimed to make Syria more economically robust and socially equitable and where the majority of lower-middle-class and middle-class people were able to buy homes. However, there were severe increases in real estate prices in the ten years prior to the conflict and as a result real estate had the highest returns for investors. According to Robert Goulden, only in the span of two years “between 2004 and 2006 property prices in Syria as a whole increased by some 300 per cent.”[3]

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[3] Robert Goulden, “Housing, Inequality, and Economic Change in Syria,” British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies 38, no. 2 (2011) 192.

To limit these cronies' power, I attempted to introduce regional planning with more favourable rural-urban dynamics where industries and investments could move to axes of development that go through rural areas. I worked to establish and renovate new highways and increase connectivity across Syria that permitted people in remote areas to enjoy social services, such as healthcare and education. Additionally, while in government, I opened 50 university departments between 2005 and 2010 across the country in places where there had never been university-level education such asDeir Ez-Zor, Hassakeh, and al-Raqqa. I aimed to push Syria toward a much more regionally-balanced development with more sectorally-balanced development in order to move away from creating real estate bubbles that could burst at any moment and create urban troubles that the state could not handle. Without regional planning there would be a significant increased demand for urban services such as water, sanitation, and electricity which the government could not afford.

As the leader of the five-year plan and its economic implementation, I convinced the rest of the government to conduct regional planning, specifically land management and planning, as I knew that the government could not have continued its economic development without better management of its land resources. As a result, we set up the National Commission for Regional Planning, established a National Training Institute for Regional Planning, and started the National Framework for Regional Planning which is now adopted by the government as the main framework for reconstruction despite being developed in 2009 for a completely different context. For the first time in its history, in the mid-2000s the Syrian government started to at least begin thinking about the best way to use Syria's territorial space and the ways to diversify and achieve a rural-urban balance. It was a form of reconstruction of natural resource management, mainly land resources. The National Framework, however, was halted due to the conflict in 2011 when the main centres of outbreaks were the informal peri-urban areas around major cities including Jobar. Therefore, unfortunately it was a little too late. The government started late because the concept of regional planning was alien to its work. Although Syria had many laws organising urban development, in many cases they were contradictory laws that focused on the micro-management of individual buildings or small projects, rather than a macro perspective of how the country should be territorially managed. The reason I decided to lead the urban development project was that it was critical that, during the five-year plan, the country would be utilised so that industry did not eat up all of its agricultural land. It was also important that urban development be balanced to allow for social interaction for all communities and participation, and for the development of public spaces in cities that were increasingly polluted, congested, informalized, and segmented across economic classes.

Although the Framework's main theme was decentralisation and creating an axis of development, today it is approached by the Syrian government from a highly centralised perspective and in the context of controlling society and economic resources. The theory that was developed for regional planning in Syria in the mid-2000s was about the decentralisation of economic activities and creating development corridors; however, it was not a bottom-up reconstruction approach such as Reconstruct. The tenth five-year plan was built for a different Syria, while the country today has lost a decade of urban planning. Additionally, the government has increased its centralised approach with a larger focus on control since there were moments in the last ten years when it felt like it had lost control.

Of course, there was significant pushback against my approach to urban and economic development. This included from the real estate cronies who had, and still have, strong connections among the security branches and in the political structure of the Ba'ath Party. They wanted to keep the focus on uncontrolled and unregulated real estate development for their financial benefit. I was, therefore, facing a daily struggle fighting an unholy alliance of Ba'ath Party conservatives, corrupt security structures, cronies, and a monopolistic private sector; a large and powerful alliance. Meanwhile I was pushing for a much more regulated, controlled, balanced, and inclusive urban development and rural-urban dynamic in Syria. Some ministers also opposed this approach, such as the then Minister of Housing Omar Ghalawanji. No opponent to the approach was more powerful than President Bashar al-Assad, who wanted further centralization to keep power in the hands of the government. Nonetheless, we had all reached the same conclusion: that the country needed better regional management of its territories. Therefore, after four years of fighting for regional planning, I finally succeeded. While there were numerous opponents to the plan, there were others who supported it. These included former Prime Minister Mohamad Naji al-Otari and the then Minister of Local AdministrationTamer Hijjeh who encouraged a bottom-up approach to urban development.

The reason the Syrian government finally agreed to the Framework was that it thought it would allow its business people to make profits while having a stronger grip on power. The president, and the people around him, thought that they would bring me in as a reformer who speaks English and was educated abroad to be the facade for the international community. However, they did not expect deep changes in Syrian society and economic successes resulting from the reforms I introduced. As a result, there was a complete break between the political track in the country and the economic plan.

The government thought at the time that if it decreased decentralisation by giving local authorities more space, it might actually avoid political liberalisation. This is why the government issued Decree Number 107 in 2011 which provided relatively larger space for local authorities to engage in public-private partnerships, among other things. Yet the government applied the same oppressive principles in the local council elections that it used in managing central authority. The principle of full control through violent oppression did not change. As a result, Decree 107 did not generate any success. It was fifteen years late. These developments should have been implemented in 2005 through 2006 at the latest, and not in 2011 when the country imploded. If the Syrian government started similar reforms in 1990 when the Soviet Union collapsed, the informal centres would not have been so large by 2010. Today we have over 20 years of informal housing and 20 years of real estate developers ravishing the country through their alliance with the security structure through low-quality and high-priced real estate development. Although I was trying to implement change quickly, it is impossible to recuperate fifteen years of delay in five years. Change and urban reform need time, and by 2005 we had already run out of it.

II. **UN ESCWA: Remote Reconstruction**

After leaving the Syrian government in 2011, I found my way back to the United Nations (UN) where I had worked as Assistant Resident Representative at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Damascus, Syria from 2001 until 2003. I continued to build on my expertise to support the future of Syria and the Arab region at the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN ESCWA) in Beirut, Lebanon, as a Director for Economic Development and Globalization Division from 2011 until 2013, as Chief Economist and Director of the Economic Development and Globalization Division from 2013 until 2014, and as a Deputy Executive Secretary and Chief Economic from 2014 until 2017. My experience with tackling conflict-driven reconstruction further developed during my time at UN ESCWA.

When I moved to Lebanon in 2011, Syria had just entered a violent new phase. There was also no national debate on what Syria was facing and, as a matter of fact, debate was not allowed even among the supporters of the government. In the early months of the conflict the Syrian State Planning Commission tried to conduct a study on how to exit the conflict and the optimal ways to deal with its economic impacts but it was directly suppressed. It was clear at that time that someone like me with a vested interest and legacy in Syria could not completely ignore the country and work in a typical UN job. I decided that I could not leave the country without any type of plan or participatory process for the way forward, especially since, at the time, there was no discussion of any strategy to exit the war or a possible new social contract. As a UN agency, ESCWA was not able to conduct the technical work through a participatory approach because it is not a political institution. It also could not conduct political dialogues as these matters are left to the special envoy and the Secretary General. But what we could do at ESCWA was provide involved stakeholders and officials with technically grounded background material that could support their political discussions. I, therefore, started a small project in 2012 that developed a comprehensive model to assess the possible economic losses of the Syrian conflict if it continued until 2015. At that time, that was the maximum number of years I thought the war could last. The module, unfortunately, predicted most of what unfolded in Syria including increase in unemployment, poverty, physical destruction, and loss of GDP.

It was clear to me at the time that the trajectory of destruction would have an existential threat to the security of Syria. It was not just a question of economics as the social construct would vanish, which is what eventually happened. As a result, I established the National Agenda for the Future of Syria Programme (NAFS) in 2012 and made sure that the whole process of the program was participatory and involved as many Syrian stakeholders as possible. Although NAFS is not a reconstruction plan per se, it is an effort to rebuild the country's social contract. NAFS had more than 3,000 Syrians from different economic, political, religious, ethnic, and social backgrounds participating in meetings from 2012 to 2017. This was due to my belief that the power of the exercise was not its technical aspects, but its participatory approach that sought better representation of the Syrian populations' needs and vision for their country. I, therefore, insisted on organising numerous events for Syrian women and youth and had 53 working groups that met regularly. The participatory methodology is, in my perspective, the main value of NAFS.

NAFS conducted a mapping of the urban situation in the country and the level of urban destruction over the years and found that the social contract that had kept Syria together was shattered. NAFS concluded that there are more than 2 million houses fully or partially destroyed and that the inhabitants of these houses have been displaced both internally and externally. On average, there were 5.5 people in each household in Syria prior to the conflict which meant that 11 to 12 million people had lost their homes. NAFS found that the cost of rebuilding these houses through a traditional top-down approach was around 200 billion dollars. This data supports the argument of this thesis that a traditional approach to reconstruction is not only exclusive to the majority of local populations but also unaffordable and unsustainable. During my time at ESCWA it was clear that Syria was, and still is, in a situation where neither the state has the financial capabilities to rebuild what was destroyed, nor are its financial institutions capable of financing reconstruction. A completely different approach to rebuilding is necessary if Syria is to have an inclusive, relatively rapid, and sustainable reconstruction that does not quickly relapse into conflict. This is where ESCWA started discussions with IUAV on its concept of *urbicide,* which is urban genocide or homicide. After gaining experience from NAFS, I began to lead other regional rebuilding efforts in the region and started similar processes for Yemen and Libya, however, these efforts were not completed as I moved to the World Bank.

It was also at ESCWA that my relationship with IUAV began as I invited my friend Nihad Hajj Saleh, an IUAV graduate, to attend NAF events as a Syrian stakeholder. He then introduced me to IUAV and as a result, IUAV became part of NAFS' discussions and even organised a summer school and competition on Syria's reconstruction and invited me as a judge. Therefore, NAFS, IUAV, and Reconstruct are not alien to each other. This is why I brought IUAV to the Building for Peace framework that I developed later during my time at the World Bank. I also facilitated communication between IUAV and the Homs and Aleppo governorates in Syria by asking the governors of both to work with IUAV to plan for the reconstruction of both cities in 2015.

By 2017, I decided to move to the World Bank with the idea that I could use my position as a senior advisor for reconstruction to influence the way the Bank and other financial institutions design and plan their reconstruction efforts. I wanted to provide a new approach in line with Reconstruct, which responds to the needs that are highlighted in NAFS.

III. The World Bank: Building for Peace?

When I moved to the World Bank as a Senior Advisor on Reconstruction in 2017 I insisted that my portfolio would include Yemen, Syria, Libya, and Iraq in hope of applying the methodology of participation to the World Bank's reconstruction plans which resulted in Building for Peace (BFP). I was not responsible for rebuilding homes in any of these countries but was tasked to develop a new conceptual framework for the design of reconstruction strategies. This was especially important as the World Bank's usual post-conflict reconstruction plans are top-down, large infrastructure projects that have failed in the past, including in Iraq. I was therefore worried that Syria or Yemen, countries that are deeply rich in urban cultures and agriculture, would have the same fate. Both countries' cities have histories being melting pots of different ethnicities, cultures, and religions, but have also been frontlines for violent confrontations. Since the World Bank is one of the most influential international financial institutions, it was important for me to be able to influence its reconstruction approaches in the

Arab region. However, that was not an easy task as there was significant resistance from within the Bank. The institution is used to well-set mechanisms, pre-defined structures, and ready moulds on how to design reconstruction and build cities and economies in post-conflict settings.

NAFS was a critical but normative project and therefore, I hoped that I could transfer this normative framework into reality at the Bank by understanding the four Arab countries' local and cross-border dynamics in detail. Cross-border dynamics were essential to take into consideration as there are millions of refugees from Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Libya displaced in neighbouring countries who should be considered when developing and implementing reconstruction plans. I was also interested in understanding the economics of reconstruction including the types of available resources, fiscal space, and institutional capacities of those four countries in order to undertake such massive operations.

My first experience at the World Bank was not Building for Peace, but the Yemen Reconstruction and Recovery Strategy. When I arrived in Washington, DC in 2017 there was already an agreement among donors, Saudi Arabia, and the World Bank to hold a reconstruction conference on Yemen in Riyadh in May 2017[4] six weeks after my arrival. This required the preparation of a reconstruction strategy that I was assigned to develop which the Yemeni Country Director at the World Bank would then take forward. I began working with a small team on the strategy that considered various possible scenarios mainly from an economic perspective. While I kept insisting to include the perspectives of Yemenis as consultants to the strategy, I was overruled. Eventually, the World Bank went to the Riyadh Conference on Yemen without actually involving any Yemenis in the strategy's preparation.

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[4] "Meeting on Reconstruction in Yemen Held in Riyadh," Saba Net, May 10, 2017, https://www.sabanew.net/story/en/17084.

Based on this first experience with the World Bank I decided that I could not continue down this path and that I would bring no added value if I designed similar reconstruction strategies without yielding positive change for local populations. I therefore talked to the Vice President of the World Bank at the time to inform him of my interest in conducting normative work to influence the way the World Bank does business in reconstruction. He provided me with a small budget and, as a result, I went to the German government and asked for funds especially since Germany, mainly the German Corporation for International Cooperation (also known as GIZ), had funded NAFS. I informed GIZ that I was interested in conducting a similar project to NAFS but on a larger scale and required significant funding to do so, which they agreed to finance. This is how I managed to hire more than 25 think tanks, universities and consultants and prepared for a massive consultation process in the four countries. The World Bank reluctantly accepted the document itself as a new approach to reconstruction which examines local, regional, and geoeconomic dynamics. Unfortunately, I was not able to pursue the degree of consultation that is necessary when developing reconstruction frameworks or plans, and as a result Building for Peace did not have the participatory foundation that I consider necessary.

IV. Afghanistan: Déjà Vu

I moved to Kabul as Resident Representative of the UNDP in Afghanistan in 2019. Since then, my approach in Afghanistan has become the foundation of what the UNDP calls the Crisis

Offer which aims to help "countries anticipate, prevent, respond to and recover from crisis, every day, and in every development context" (UNDP, 2022:2).[5] What I tried to do when I first came to Kabul was convince President Ashraf Ghani and the ministers at the time that development is not just a collection of projects, but a conscious strategy for society. However, the international community, in addition to the government, continued to implement a fragmented approach to development. I soon discovered that there were 1,000 donor-funded projects in the health sector, yet still no functioning national health system. From 2001 until 2021, around 300 billion dollars was spent on aid and development; 20 years of development funding consisting of thousands of fragmented projects that were not captured in a clear national strategy. No real development of national institutions took place and most of the funding was spent outside of the national budget. Even the President and some government officials complained to me that the international community was pushing them to take accountability for this budget although it was the international community that spent this money outside the budget.

I woke up in Kabul the morning the Taliban took over on 15 August 2021 to discover that the World Bank's projects were shut down and its employees had fled the country two days prior. Since 15 August, donors who wasted hundreds of billions of dollars on this elite capture development refused to recognize the Taliban and continued to only provide humanitarian aid. They are spending millions of dollars on food aid instead of spending that money to create jobs. My regular argument with international donors is that instead of feeding 20 million people, we should create 2 million jobs and empower people economically to be able to feed themselves. In 2021 the UN, funded by donors, still needed to feed 19 million Afghanis after 20 years of Western-rule economy and 300 billion dollars. In fact, in 2022 the number increased to 28 million beneficiaries. If they continue this approach they will have to feed 30 million people next year. This is clearly unsustainable.

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[5] "UNDP's Crisis Offer takes a systems-lens, drawing on the whole of our substantive capabilities and SDG integrator role. Its focus is on integrated approaches towards sustaining development gains, preventing losses, and resuming progress towards development goals as rapidly as possible. It connects the analytical dots between macro-economic and fiscal challenges, political instability and governance-related challenges, climate change-induced disasters, impacts of the energy transition, risks of unrest, violent conflict, extremism, and other multidimensional risks" (UNDP, 2021). *UNDP's Crisis Offer: United Nations Development Programme,*" UNDP, September 21, 2022,. 3. (accessed date: 10 November 2022).

My experience in Afghanistan shifted in 2021 from trying to put together a nationally-owned framework for integrated development to build national institutions that could manage this strategy, to bringing development to the country and economic recovery after 2021. As the head of the UN development agency, my daily struggle since 15 August is to convince the international community of my approach to development and reconstruction in Afghanistan. I have been arguing on a daily basis that it is more efficient, sustainable and cheaper to create jobs rather than bring food aid to the country. We know that the pre-Taliban reconstruction efforts produced no positive development and yet, today the same mistake is repeated in the post-Taliban reconstruction approach. My strategy today is to create two million jobs because when you create two million jobs you do not need to feed 30 million people. In 2022 alone, I was able to create 560,000 jobs. I am constantly gathering funds and trying to convince different stakeholders of a new approach that empowers Afghanis and supports the economy. Not only is money being wasted on aid that does not provide jobs to people, but this aid ultimately damages the country's largest sector, the agricultural sector. Additionally, not only can Afghanistan feed itself, it has the potential to export food as well, but only if aid is directed toward productive agriculture and job creation.

Conclusion:

My personal experiences managing macroeconomic projects in developing countries and conflict settings have guided my approach toward reconstruction in the MENA region. They have also provided me with an insider perspective on the politics behind decision making processes of states and international organisations and their impact on local populations. Additionally, my work as a government official in Syria has provided me with unique insights and understandings of the Syrian political economy and local contexts which will feed into my analysis of Jobar. My aim for this thesis is to bring all my experiences to Jobar and show that a participatory, bottom-up and inclusive reconstruction strategy is the only viable and affordable approach. Traditional and elite-centred reconstruction is not viable, as it has proven to be expensive and unsuccessful. This chapter is also an effort to show that it is critical to economically empower countries and their populations when implementing reconstruction plans and that people need to trust their governments' financial and public institutions in order to invest in their country's reconstruction via a participatory approach.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND RECONSTRUCTION FRAMEWORKS

This chapter will examine existing literature that covers the connections between the field of political economy, post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding. It will first define these terms and cover how some of the authors in these fields explain them. In some cases, for example that of reconstruction, the term can have a variety of different meanings depending on the author that may not necessarily be explained. It will then discuss the central points in the literature examined. Much of the literature on post-war reconstruction is written from perspectives emphasising the roles of aid groups, international agencies and states in the development of extremely poor countries. I will draw attention to ideas in these readings that are instructive for a reconstruction in Jobar, as well as shortcomings present in the literature. Finally, this chapter will provide brief overviews of three reconstruction frameworks I have developed in addition to RECONSTRUCT, as the three strategies will eventually frame the analysis of the thesis.

PART 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

The field of political economy examines interactions between economic and political systems. Theories of political economy examine how politics and networks of power shape economic systems.[6] The field of political economy bears great relevance to the topic of reconstruction. When emerging from a conflict, a country's recovery will be shaped by the political power structures that are present and by the motivations of actors with power.

Omar Imady, an author and senior research fellow at the University of St. Andrews Centre for Syrian Studies, writes that discussions of reconstruction typically do not explain or define what the term means.[7] He dates usage of the term to the end of the American Civil War, where it was used in reference to a radical re-envisioning of former Confederate southern states which was presented and mythologized as a reconstruction of the United States as a whole.

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[6] Adeel Malik in discussion with the author, December 2020.

[7] Omar Imady, "The Weaponization of Syria's Reconstruction: A Preliminary Sketch," *Syria Studies* (2019*)* 6.

Imady writes that in this process the victorious Union mythologized both a reconstruction of a pre-war order that had not existed and the possibility that they could accomplish an extremely difficult, if not impossible, reconstruction of the American South.[8] Imady sees contemporary discourse on reconstruction as doing the same: presenting a utopian vision of a past that never truly existed as a goal, and setting such a goal that is unrealistic.

Imady writes that the term reconstruction at the very least suggests the re-building of pre-war structures, but can also refer to "a rebuilding of … political, economic and social frameworks."[9] The combination of these different physical and societal priorities would represent a point in history that the reconstruction seeks to recreate.[10] Reconstruction also has to be considered in terms of which actors prevailed during a conflict. Architect Marwa al-Sabouni writes that in the aftermath of a conflict it is the winning side that controls narratives, and that for them reconstruction might be an opportunity to perpetuate their military success into peacetime.[11] Imady makes a similar point when discussing Syria, stating reconstruction is "an opportunity for the Syrian government to signal the end of the conflict and for the initiation of its international rehabilitation."[12] The government's references to reconstruction are used to reinforce a message that they have won the civil war and that it is time to move to the next phase of the country's history, which they will determine as victors of the conflict.

The element of reconstruction that goes beyond the solely physical is also present in Imady's recounting of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's statements that prioritise the

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[8] Ibid 8-9.
[9] Ibid 9.
[10] Ibid 9.
[11] Marwa al-Sabouni, *Building for Hope: Towards an Architecture of Belonging* (London:Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2021) 35.
[12] Imady, "The Weaponization of Syria's Reconstruction," 15.

rebuilding of minds, values, and ideologies of Syrians over the rebuilding of physical infrastructure. Imady writes that these statements acknowledge the irrelevance that physical reconstruction will have on the distaste a huge segment of the population feels toward al-Assad and his government. As a result al-Assad articulates the "intellectual restructuring" of Syrians opposed to him as an integral part of reconstruction.[13]

al-Sabouni considers the role of architectural decisions as critical to reconstruction. She writes that in modern architecture there is a focus on building taller, bigger and more impressive buildings that exacerbate social imbalance, and describes social breakdown as an underlying cause of the Syrian conflict.[14] She is frustrated with the attitude that the reconstruction of Syria should implement the new forms, techniques and materials of this era. al-Sabouni writes that all work done on key sites that have been damaged in the conflict, like the Khalid ibn al-Walid Mosque in Homs, has been driven by this approach. The use of materials like Italian plaster and cement in this work signifies to al-Sabouni that the skills used to create these structures originally have been lost.[15]

Imady is extremely critical of how reconstruction is typically used as a framework for post-conflict recoveries. He writes that the communities whose areas will be reconstructed are typically marginalised in literature about the topic, and that the concept is more often a way for different actors to empower themselves either economically or politically.[16] Opposition groups can use reconstruction as an opportunity to advance their agendas and myths that they are qualified to lead it, while the government will use it as a way to begin rehabilitating their image internationally and raising huge sums of money.[17] The historical cases where reconstruction was successful, Imady argues, were cases in which there were already reconstruction efforts on the ground that originated before receiving financial support. In contemporary examples, like American-funded efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the vast majority of funds raised were completely wasted through corruption.[18] The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, in a report on why the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan collapsed in 2021, noted that the rate of money being spent on programs was being used to measure their success. In reality much of the money was being wasted or corruptly syphoned.[19] In fact, the report notes that the amount of money that flooded Afghanistan from the international community exacerbated the corruption of the country's government.[20] Imady noted that advocates of reconstruction typically include cost estimates, which are used to present them as investment opportunities, when in reality there is no certainty that any money raised will be responsibly spent to reconstruct anything promised.[21]

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[13] Ibid 12.
[14] al-Sabouni 29.
[15] Ibid 47.
[16] Imady, "The Weaponization of Syria's Reconstruction," 6-7.

Some studies have attempted to poll people displaced from conflict and consolidate data about the features they value and prioritise in their homes. In "Mosul City: Housing Reconstruction after the ISIS War," Zaid O. Saeed, Avar Almukhtar, Henry Abanda and Joseph Tah first described unique architectural elements in Mosul including "the arched gateway, stripped arched windows, wall ornaments and local marble finishing."[22] They also wrote that more private facades with less external exposure, introvert spatial configurations and plain walls on the exterior of buildings were representative of the city's community identity and social ideology.[23] They then asked respondents displaced from Mosul about the housing components that they consider necessary and prioritise. Their questionnaire was sent to 34 people who had been displaced with varying levels of damage to their homes and who had lived in different types of houses including row houses, detached houses and traditional courtyard houses.[24] The questionnaire asked about indoor spatial configurations, the prioritisation of outdoor features like garages and backyards, the preferred building materials and facade styles. The respondents generally prioritised having front yards with garages over traditional courtyards, preferred mixed building materials, wanted a combination of contemporary and traditional Muslawi facades, and were divided on which spatial configurations they wanted.[25] The authors then presented three housing proposals in row house designs. They contained different floor zonings, window designs and facade elements, and one of the three contained a courtyard.[26] The authors then wrote that the proposals could be used "as a reference point for planning post-conflict housing of Mosul City."[27]

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[17] Ibid 14-15.

[18] Ibid 16.

[19] Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), *Why the Afghan Government Collapsed* (Arlington V.A.: SIGAR), 41.

[20] Ibid 2.

[21] Imady, "The Weaponization of Syria's Reconstruction," 15-16.

[22] Zaid O. Saeed et al., "Mosul City: Housing Reconstruction after the ISIS War ," Cities 120 (January 2022), 4.

The definition of peacebuilding, like reconstruction, can vary depending on the context it is used in. In a report, then-vice president of the International Peace Academy Neclâ Tschirgi wrote that peacebuilding originally "referred to action to identify and support structures to consolidate peace in post-conflict countries in order to avoid a relapse into conflict."[28] In the

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[23] Ibid 4.
[24] Ibid 5-6.
[25] Ibid 6-7.
[26] Ibid 10-13.
[27] Ibid 13.
[28] Neclâ Tschirgi, "Post-Conflict Peacebuilding Revisited: Achievements, Limitations, Challenges" (New York: International Peace Academy, 2004) i.

1990s, she wrote that the behaviour considered as peacebuilding grew to include the prevention and management of conflict, as well as post-conflict reconstruction. At that point peacebuilding emphasised the international community's responsibility in preventing the re-emergence of conflict in countries that had recently emerged from war.[29] In a post-9/11 international environment the discourse of peacebuilding changed to emphasise nation building and the stabilisation of countries to prevent international fallout from failing states. Tschirgi writes that this could undermine the premise, at the core of her conception of peacebuilding, that peace cannot be externally imposed but has to be gradually established in ways concordant with the political reality of countries on the ground.[30] The priorities and definitions of peacebuilding will vary according to the interests of those defining the term and the goals emphasised by the international community in different time periods.

Much of the literature related toward reconstruction and peacebuilding emphasises the state as the principal relevant actor. The establishment of a competent state is often seen as a prerequisite that any meaningful post-conflict efforts depend on. While strong state institutions and trust in the state are necessary, this kind of emphasis can occasionally overlook other relevant actors in a country's political economy milieu. *Fixing Failed States: A Framework for Rebuilding a Fractured World* is one of the books that sees the state's ability to perform this role as critical. It is co-written by Clare Lockhart and Ashraf Ghani, who are also co-founders of the Institute of State Effectiveness. The two were involved in the development of Afghanistan's new government after the U.S.-led invasion of the country, and Ghani would later serve as the president of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in its final seven years of existence.[31]

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[29] Ibid i.

[30] Ibid ii.

Central to Lockhart and Ghani's book is the idea of a sovereignty gap, where an underlying assumption that all states are sovereign does not reflect the degree to which many of them have failed or are failing. They view these states as incapable of addressing extreme poverty or of providing their citizens with the most basic of public services.[32] While they do not think a highly-centralised state is required if lower levels of government can adequately perform relevant functions, the state at a bare minimum has to be competent.[33] As a result they view it as necessary that states create an actual social contract with their citizens and turn them into motivated stakeholders in national success.[34] Above all, Ghani and Lockhart believe this problem of malfunctioning states has to be addressed in order for extremely poor countries to escape cyclical poverty.[35]

The authors are extremely critical of the infrastructure of international aid, which they view as undermining state capacity in crucial areas. They consider it too fragmented and believe that it must devote itself to building "effective, functioning states" above all other priorities.[36] They examine the practice of developmental projects, which they say can be effective but only when "aligned to a national vision" - otherwise they can contribute to waste, corruption and the undermining of state institutions.[37] Ghani and Lockhart want strong coordination between different groups over development projects, and that long-term state-building as a goal should take precedence over disparate types of developments.[38]

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[31] Ashraf Ghani and Clare Lockhart, *Fixing Failed States: A Framework for Rebuilding a Fractured World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) v.
[32] Ibid 21.
[33] Ibid 165.
[34] Ibid 22, 24.
[35] Ibid 29-30.
[36] Ibid 111.
[37] Ibid 95.

Ghani and Lockhart see development as one tool that must ultimately lead to specific final outcomes of established, stable state institutions. They view the challenges facing post-conflict recovery similarly. The impact of conflict here is one that undermines the public's trust in state institutions. They criticise approaches to peacebuilding that create accommodations with opposition groups at the expense of making cogent plans for functioning states, which makes state dysfunction, corruption and violent relapse more likely in the wake of conflicts.[39] They suggest that if the peacebuilding process was focused on functional state-building rather than the accommodation of rival political groups, a reversion to war would be less likely. Ghani and Lockhart do acknowledge the relevance of specific political economy features, writing that "post-conflict conditions require a firm understanding of entrenched interests and the conditions of state institutions."[40] While this is certainly true, it is not just the interests and conditions of state institutions that need to be understood but also a whole host of distinct non-state institutions, both formal and informal.

Ghani and Lockhart view generalised "one size fits all" approaches to failed states as unviable.[41] They are extremely disappointed in engineering plans for development projects that use outdated blueprints or reused Requests For Proposals originally intended for different countries.[42] Their vision for development is one that should take into account the specificities of

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[38] Ibid 169.
[39] Ibid 81.
[40] Ibid 81.
[41] Ibid 5.
[42] Ibid 97.

national contexts. Their vision of the state's relationship with citizens also does recognize the importance of input from populations onto the state, as seen in their statement that "citizens can become active collaborators in the production of public value."[43] Of particular interest are the examples of village-level associations, where Ghani and Lockhart describe community-managed forestry and microhydroelectric production projects.[44] These examples serve as models of how populations are able to collaboratively embark on large and successful undertakings despite almost no support from their state. Later, Ghani and Lockhart discuss visioning processes in American cities where residents and government officials determine key priorities that will shape their agenda for the future.[45] It is a consultative process echoed further in the book when they mention discussions they had with stakeholders in Nepal. The representatives of different groups they spoke with then "formed a national visioning team to begin to flesh out a common strategy."[46] Here there is a bottom-up approach to mapping out the direction of a country by its citizens who are working collaboratively and with input from different segments of the national society. Ghani and Lockhart are still writing about this approach in relation to the state-building process, but this methodology can be extrapolated to apply to other contexts like urban design.

One scholar whose work covers reconstruction in post-conflict contexts is Paul Collier, a development economist and the former director of the World Bank's Research Development Department.[47] Collier's writing focuses on extremely poor countries, and his book *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It* is about countries that he says are not only poor but are failing to develop.[48] In this book Collier describes four traps that constrain development in these states and discusses the potential roles of international aid, military intervention, trade policy and legal overhaul as remedies. One of these traps, which Collier calls the conflict trap, is directly relevant to reconstruction and peacebuilding. Collier writes that seventy-three percent of people in the world's poorest countries are currently or have recently experienced a civil war.[49] He finds that low-income countries have a 14 percent chance of experiencing a civil war in any five-year period and that this probability decreases at the same rate as a country's growth rate rises.[50] There is also a linear relationship between a country's income and the length of the civil war: they will last longer for countries that are poorer when the war begins.[51] Collier considers civil war in poor states to be a trap because of countries' post-conflict experiences. He writes that half of all countries that have been through a civil war will experience another in their first post-conflict decade, with the risk dramatically higher for poor countries.[52]

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[43] Ibid 135.
[44] Ibid 74.
[45] Ibid 172.
[46] Ibid 182.
[47] "Paul Collier," International Growth Centre, accessed November 25, 2022, https://www.theigc.org/person/paul-collier/.

There are a few factors that Collier says explain the cyclical risk of war. The economic damage of civil wars persists after the end of the conflict, which essentially increases the risk that another conflict will occur.[53] In low-income countries people are much more likely to join armed rebel groups and risk their lives if they live in extreme poverty with almost no chance of improvement.[54] The institutional legacy of political violence and presence of experienced fighters without other options for employment are also viewed by Collier as increasing the resumption of civil war.[55] He also writes that homicide rates increase in post-conflict countries, which he presumes is part of a general rise in violent crimes.[56] This could mean that living in conflict environments has the psychological impact of normalising violence, which would significantly challenge attempts to maintain peace after war.

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[48] Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why The Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It* (New York, NY.: Oxford University Press, 2007) x.
[49] Ibid 17.
[50] Ibid 18.
[51] Ibid 26.
[52] Ibid 27.
[53] Ibid 33.
[54] Ibid 29.

Collier also discusses policy choices which can help states escape from the conflict trap. He writes that international aid is effective for raising countries' growth rates after conflicts, but that it is often concentrated heavily in the immediate aftermath of war when the governments are likely to be much less effective. Instead, he argues aid should be sustained over the first decade after a conflict ends so it can make more of a difference as the institutions of a recovering country improve.[57] Governments immediately emerging from conflicts typically spend as much on their militaries as governments in active civil wars, and Collier writes that this makes a resumption of conflict more likely because it signals to rebel groups that the government may betray peace settlements. He instead suggests that they cut military spending to very low levels as a gesture of good faith.[58] Collier also writes that in post-conflict contexts governments may be too incapable to meet the needs of the population. He provides an independent service authority model, where an authority finances and evaluates competing service providers on the ground, as a potential solution. On the topic of funding the restoration of infrastructure projects, Collier writes that donors "will need exceptionally substantial supervision both to ensure success and to guard against corruption."[59]

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[55] Ibid 33.
[56] Ibid 34.
[57] Ibid 106.
[58] Ibid 132-133.
[59] Ibid 177.

This model does move its focus of reconstruction beyond just the state as an actor, but it still presents a top-down vision where populations are served by providers who are answerable to an authority funded by donors. On the topic of infrastructure Collier's reference to restoration is vague but suggests an architectural vision of reconstructing pre-war buildings rather than creating new designs. His focus is on ensuring that the money of donors does not go to waste and he does not mention the needs or goals of the populations that these infrastructure sites will ultimately be used by.

Four years before the publication of *The Bottom Billion* the World Bank published a policy research report written by a team led by Collier. This report is specifically about development policy as it relates to the conflict trap and goes into more depth on some concerns and potential solutions related to the threat of cyclical conflict. While *The Bottom Billion* is enthusiastic about economic growth as a peacebuilding tool, the World Bank's report is more nuanced and suggests that post-conflict growth may not be distributed fairly. If the positive effects of growth are concentrated in capital cities and more developed regions, those in other regions may feel left out and nurture a sense of grievance. The report notes that market forces will probably direct economic activity in a way that is not beneficial to former rebel groups, and that governments have to prioritise peacebuilding over sheer growth.[60] Similarly to *The Bottom Billion,* the report argues states should not heavily fund their armies after conflicts. Yet the report instead suggests that these governments prioritise policies of social inclusion, like improved health care and education systems, as signals to former rebel groups, their population as a whole and international donors of their commitment to peace.[61] In a section on responding to health crises commonly experienced after a civil war, the report offers a "general recommendation" that the community "participate in the construction of public services," which it claims function better if the community partially funds them.[62] The population's sense of agency is critical to the eventual success of these efforts.

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[60] World Bank and Oxford University Press, *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy* (Washington D.C.: World Bank and Oxford University Press, 2003) 166.
[61] Ibid 155-156.

Adeel Malik, an associate professor at St. Peter's College in Oxford University, is a development macroeconomist who researches the causes and impacts of economic fluctuations in developing countries. One of his areas of focus is on the political economy of institutions and their relevance during the process of development.[63] In an interview with me, Malik said that while he is not an expert on reconstruction, he uses his knowledge of political economy to think about reconstruction.[64]

Malik is especially interested in the long-term consequences that reconstruction initiatives and interventions will have. "You have the possibility to create something new, but once reconstruction you engage with has long consequences over time," he told me. Malik said that urban environments are the result of history and that reconstruction efforts in these cities will create new historical patterns. This can be a good thing as reconstruction brings with it the possibility to create wholly new forms of infrastructure and exchanges.[65] This is an opportunity to create more equitable and connected urban environments that can sustain peace when the risk of a relapse to violence is present.

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[62] Ibid 170.
[63] "Adeel Malik," Oxford Department of International Development, accessed November 24, 2022, https://www.qeh.ox.ac.uk/people/adeel-malik.
[64] Adeel Malik in discussion.
[65] Adeel Malik in discussion.

In his article "The Political Economy of Reconstruction in the Arab World," Malik argues that the focus on state-building in the existing literature on reconstruction makes it less relevant to the Arab world. In a regional context where the complexity and internationalisation of conflicts makes their resolution less likely, the role of conflict resolution as a prerequisite for state-building is less viable. Approaching reconstruction just as a means of creating strong institutions and states will likely disappoint, as Malik emphasises that the development of institutions in the Arab world will likely not be linear and experience setbacks.[66] However, he does add that literature on state fragility is relevant to the Arab world due to "its insistence on dysfunctional institutions and social exclusion as the roots for conflict."[67]

When planning reconstruction projects in the Arab world, Malik considers a thorough understanding of relevant political economy factors to be essential.[68] He says that a broad view of power is needed to analyse how economic resources are allocated in a society, as well as which actors hold economic, political or coercive power.[69] In Arab countries Malik says there are some common elites including "members of the security services, religious elites, influential members of merchant communities and tribal leaders."[70] Who holds these powers determines which institutions will influence the country's political economy. Formal institutions that shape the scope of human behaviour, like laws, fall within this scope. Malik uses Syria's Law No. 10, which allows the Syrian government to designate areas of the country for reconstruction and seize the land of people who do not prove their ownership after one year, as one such example[71]. Less widely-discussed, Malik argues, are informal institutions like religious, tribal and ethnic identities or solidarities. He writes that these informal institutions will likely hold relevance for the Middle East and will influence the effectiveness of interventions during reconstruction. In some cases, incorporating these informal institutions into reconstruction plans can increase their legitimacy. It should also be noted that informal and formal institutions are not isolated from one another, and will interact in cases such as tribal communities separated by national borders.[72]

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[66] Adeel Malik, "The Political Economy of the Arab World: Putting together elements for a possible framework," (University of Oxford, 2018) 2-3.
[67] Ibid 2.
[68] Ibid 2.
[69] Ibid 6.
[70] Ibid 8.

With this wider view of power, Malik writes that reconstruction projects need to examine the situation of a country's political economy at different points in time. The projects must take into account which elites held power before the beginning of a power, and which were excluded. How power distribution changed during the conflict is important as well, because actors who benefited during the conflict have the potential to oppose reconstruction initiatives and spoil peacebuilding.[73]

Malik notes that there are three possibilities that institutional structures will experience in the wake of conflict. They may largely persist despite ruptures that are limited in scope, be severely broken so that conflict-emergent institutions take precedence over pre-conflict ones, or a hybrid between these two other possibilities may pass.[74] Malik says that the hybrid scenario could be the most realistic because most civil wars are unlikely to see either the complete dissolution or preservation of pre-conflict institutions.[75] In the Middle East Malik writes that governments in conflicts have "empowered shadow networks who derive rents through their control over informal economy and capture of state resources."[76] He uses the example of government-affiliated businessmen in Syria who purchased assets for cheap after they were left behind by merchants fleeing the country due to conflict. They thus further consolidated their economic control over the country. Malik argues that this represents not just a continuation of the power they held pre-conflict, but actually its intensification.[77]

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[71] "TIMEP Brief: Law No. 10 of 2018: Housing, Land, and Property," Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, December 10, 2018, https://timep.org/reports-briefings/timep-brief-law-no-10-of-2018-housing-land-and-property/.

[72] Malik, "The Political Economy of the Arab World," 7.

[73] Ibid 8.

[74] Ibid 9-10.

Malik is here challenging conventional literature "where intense conflict typically represents as a moment of institutional rupture and destroys the pre-war institutional equilibrium, thereby opening the space for new possibilities."[78] Collier's writing contains a similar argument, that sustained turnarounds are statistically more likely after civil wars because pre-conflict interests have been disrupted, making change easier to facilitate.[79] Malik instead frames this concept as inapplicable to contexts where a state's allies use ongoing conflicts to entrench their own power. The vacuum for substantial, overarching reform that Collier sees in post-conflict environments may not be present in Syria's political economy.

Additionally, Malik writes that reconstruction projects themselves will impact the political economy. Some actors will lose power from brick and mortar developments and others will use newly-found power to entrench their position. Consequently people considering reconstruction projects need to consider how they will change the reality on the ground.[80] If these repercussions are not clearly thought out such policy interventions could have unintended effects. Malik writes that if the intervention is poorly-considered or impractical, it may be better not to intervene at all.[81]

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[75] Ibid 10.
[76] Ibid 11.
[77] Ibid 11.
[78] Ibid 11.
[79] Collier, *The Bottom Billion,* 71.
[80] Malik, "The Political Economy of the Arab World," 12.

SIGAR's report on the collapse of the government of Afghanistan demonstrates exactly how much can go wrong if the political economy of a country is misunderstood. SIGAR refer to the American government's view of Afghanistan's political, social and economic contexts as embarrassingly simplistic and incorrect.[82] The American perspective of "good allies" who opposed the Taliban and "bad enemies" who supported them resulted in them allying and supporting warlords who were despised by much of the country, and whose unpopularity had been a major factor in support for the Taliban.[83] The report also validates Malik's argument that policy interventions can have unintended effects by noting that even successful projects in Afghanistan could inadvertently benefit one actor over another and disrupt the balance of political economy. If a program is successful in one village, a neighbouring community where it had not been implemented could nurture jealousy and become bitter that they were not benefiting from it.[84] This could risk stoking both frustration with reconstruction processes and inter-communal hostility. SIGAR also provided an extremely instructive example about how the banning of logging in 2002, which was driven by misguided environmental concerns including those of Ghani, destroyed the only successful industry in the Pech Valley. American allies there began extorting the loggers and provoked an insurgency. While this initially had nothing to do with the Taliban, the Americans present had no idea about the true economic context of the insurgency and assumed anyone fighting them must belong to the group. Within a few years these insurgents had joined the Taliban, who were the only ones willing to protect their interests.[85] This is exactly the kind of intervention that Malik would describe as poorly-considered. It was based on misplaced environmental concerns and had impacts that, with an accurate understanding of the area's economy, would have been predictable. In the absence of that understanding, however, an intervention proceeded that completely destroyed the reputation of the Afghan central government and the Pech Valley and empowered the Taliban. Malik is right to emphasise the importance of truly understanding complex political economies before embarking on an intervention, as the consequences of doing so can be catastrophic.

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[81] Ibid 18.

[82] SIGAR, *Why the Afghan Government Collapsed,* 41.

[83] Ibid 42.

[84] Ibid 38.

Malik outlines different challenges related to political economy that could disrupt or derail reconstruction projects. Many of these problems relate to uncertainty in a post-conflict environment or one that still experiences conflict. Long-term investments are less likely if the eventual post-conflict power distribution is not yet clear. The private goals of actors may be at odds with the aim of reconstruction projects.[86] The different incentives of all actors involved are generally a potential problem for these projects, and creating institutional arrangements incorporating divergent actors may be difficult.[87] Coordinating between all relevant parties is another potential problem. Any brick and mortar projects, Malik points out, require the coordination of government agencies whose functionality may dramatically vary in post-conflict contexts. [88] Governments and actors, both local and international, will have to commit to long-term projects, and there is a very real risk they will not keep their promises years later.[89]

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[85] Ibid 44.
[86] Malik, "The Political Economy of the Arab World," Malik13.
[87] Ibid 17.
[88] Ibid 15.
[89] Ibid 13.

The commitments of these actors are amplified, Malik argues, in the Arab world due to greater scales of uncertainty, the complexity of conflicts and the interconnection of problems and conflicts across national borders.[90] The preponderance of proxy conflicts in the region further challenges the credibility of commitments armed parties make in the region.[91] If reconstruction projects begin while conflict is still ongoing these problems will be exacerbated as parties may be concerned about whether reconstruction measures will shift the conflict's momentum.[92]

Concluding, Malik posits that insisting on "final outcomes" like the promotion of democracy or anti-corruption measures may contradict with a focus on statebuilding. He frames the statebuilding process as requiring the establishment of "credible enforcers," while democracy may require limits on the state. The pressure to democratise may cause a low level of state functionality, which can be a driving factor in the start of civil wars.[93] Malik then refers to an ongoing struggle in post-conflict contexts "between achieving short-term stability and long-term institution building."[94] This creates a conflict in priorities that Malik considers difficult to reconcile. Emphasising institution building comes with the risk of inadequately addressing glaring and immediate concerns, but focusing on stability could see the legitimization of war profiteers or governments.[95] There are some connections here between the arguments of Malik and Collier, who argued that risk of conflict declines in the year before an election before sharply rising the year after an election in post-conflict societies.[96] Ultimately both writers are cautious about the ability of elections to contribute to peace-building in post-conflict societies.

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[90] Ibid 14.
[91] Ibid 19.
[92] Ibid 15.
[93] Ibid 19.
[94] Ibid 20.
[95] Ibid 20.
[96] Collier, *The Bottom Billion,* 153.

Lockhart and Ghani view the role of elections rather differently. They describe the National Solidarity Program, which provided block grants to Afghan villages conditioned upon anonymous elections of leadership councils, as an example of bottom-up democratisation. They argue that institutional reform and the promotion of democratic decision-making at lower levels does more to encourage democracy than formally changing democratic procedures in developing countries.[97] They do note earlier in their book that there is a significant tension between "short-term electoral cycles" and "medium to long-term planning periods that are necessary for public stewardship."[98] However the political development of Afghanistan after the publication of *Fixing Failed States* presents a much bleaker vision of democratisation in reconstruction contexts. The Bonn Agreement led to the creation of a constitution where power was heavily concentrated in the executive. In an extremely diverse country like Afghanistan, the SIGAR report finds that this significantly raised the stakes of presidential elections and provided few other avenues for citizens to be represented.[99] Ghani and Lockhart described widespread allegations of electoral fraud in the country's first presidential election in 2004 which was overcome "thanks to the maturity of the candidates and the significant margin between the number of votes for President Karzai and his closest opponent."[100] In the country's subsequent presidential elections allegations of fraud were still widespread but on these occasions the margin had narrowed. When Ghani stood for office in 2014 and 2019 he was declared the winner despite widespread accusations of fraud and his success was challenged by Abdullah Abdullah on both occasions. On the first occasion this resulted in a power-sharing agreement brokered at the last minute by the United States.[101] The fact that a foreign power had to broker an agreement following a disputed election does not inspire confidence for the Afghan electoral system. The international community did not take the accusations of fraud in these elections seriously and led to a perception among Afghans that the United States was selecting the country's president.[102] By 2019 voter turnout in Afghanistan had dramatically declined, signalling a complete lack of confidence in the country's democratic system.[103] This election's winner was not announced for months and was again challenged by Abdullah, who held his own inauguration ceremony on the same day as Ghani's.[104] By this point it was clear that the electoral system in Afghanistan was hopelessly dysfunctional and that the country's citizens had no reason to be confident in their votes having mattered.

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[97] Ghani and Lockhart, *Fixing Failed States,* 206-207.
[98] Ibid 139.
[99] SIGAR, *Why the Afghan Government Collapsed,* 21.
[100] Ghani and Lockhart, *Fixing Failed States,* 77.

The conflict between short-term stabilisation and long-term institution building is often treated as inherent by the authors. The best solution to this dilemma requires an approach that is based in the community and not administered from the top. Community-based approaches can provide the breathing space of short stability while institutions are being built. The societal interactions during community-based reconstructions will lead to the emergence of state institutions. There is no one path for the building of institutions, states or social contracts in a post-conflict context; each society needs to go through the exercise of developing them. We cannot, from outside or above, impose the stability or institutions that are appropriate for these societies because we do not yet know what they are. A short-term investment in the society is necessary, and the only way through which these structures can successfully develop.

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[101] SIGAR, *Why the Afghan Government Collapsed,* 2-3.
[102] Ibid 24.
[103] Ibid 2.
[104] Ibid 36.

PART TWO: RECONSTRUCTION FRAMEWORKS

I. National Agenda for the Future of Syria

In 2011 I joined the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia in Beirut, Lebanon. Within a few months of my joining UN ESCWA the situation in Syria had deteriorated into an armed conflict. By 2012 it was clear to me that the scale of violence and destruction in Syria represented an existential threat to the country's social contract. When the conflict did end Syria would need a new social contract and I believed that the only way to create a new one would be to connect it to the question of how the country should be reconstructed. The vision of this reconstruction would need input from as many Syrians as possible.

I established the National Agenda for the Future of Syria in 2012. This program sought to create ideas for policies responding to the challenges the country will face during post-conflict recovery and to enable as much participation in and support for this transition as possible. A guiding principle for the program was that "each and every Syrian citizen has the right and the responsibility to participate in envisioning the future of Syria."[105] We agreed that all participants in the program should be Syrian and that they should represent Syrian society in its entirety. We invited as many stakeholders and experts to participate as we could, and by 2017 more than 1400 stakeholders, 165 experts representing 57 development sectors and 200 civil society organisations had done so.[106] This program produced more than 30,000 pages of research which saw numerous revisions and updates by the different Syrian stakeholders involved in the program before their eventual validation. We also committed to having a highly adaptable program due to both the continuously changing nature of the Syrian conflict and the new information we were learning through the process.[107] The involvement of a wide group of stakeholders and their collective participation made NAFS and the research it produced organic.

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[105] National Agenda for the Future of Syria, *The Strategic Policy Alternatives Framework (SPAF): Syria Post-Conflict Executive Summary* (Beirut: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, 2017) 9.

[106] Ibid 5.

In the *Strategic Policy Alternatives Framework* we published we found that a number of structural factors contributed to the Syrian conflict. The governance of the country was related to some of these factors such as the lack of inclusion or accountability in the country's totalitarian security state, the marginalisation of civil society and exclusion of women from decision-making processes through laws like those prohibiting women from forming non-government organisations.[108] It also found that general economic factors such as the government's untimely response to the collapse of the Soviet Union and unbalanced development during the second phase of economic reform that was not matched with required institutional change.[109] The structure of the country's GDP saw new corrupt sectors which obstructed economic reform efforts and prioritised short-term investments over more substantive ones. At the same time oil revenues fell and the government increased taxes and cut public services, which negatively impacted the country's development spending and growth.[110] There were also many factors relating to the country's social structure including critical division between the country' three class groups, the ways in which the state's nationalism did not successfully manage the diversity of identities in Syria and discrepancies in social development throughout the country.[111] Generally the government did not respond well to the growth of the country's population as the country's workforce and affordable housing stock did not grow enough as the population rose.[112] At the same time health services were not able to cover the needs of rural and remote populations.[113] These factors, and a number of others, mounted over the course of decades and resulted in social discrepancies in Syrian society that led to the outbreak of conflict.[114]

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[107] Ibid 5.
[108] Ibid 15-16.
[109] Ibid 16.
[110] Ibid 17.
[111] Ibid 19.

NAFS also analysed the impact of conflict on the country's governance, economy and society. Many state institutions sharply declined as a result of the conflict, while the state's constitutional reform efforts were not nearly sufficient.[115] Corruption saw large increases in areas of the country due to the rise of war economies.[116] At the same time, civil society activists were able to take a more prominent role as advocates and became much more active in general.[117] The conflict's economic impact was catastrophic as the country lost 56 percent of its GDP between 2010 and 2016 while 71 percent of Syrian families fell below the food poverty line.[118] The country's social cohesion was challenged as a result of the polarisation of views on the conflict, while some Syrians did challenge division in an effort to create a new social contract grounded in human rights and citizenship.[119] The experiences of refugees and women saw both groups experience more violence and often inhuman conditions, but also in many occasions demonstrate incredible resilience and contribute to proud understandings of Syrian identity.[120] Additionally as a result of conflict the Syrian health and education systems suffered gravely, while dramatic increases in poverty and unemployment drove many to either illegal or unsustainable sources of income.[121] The country's human capital was drained by the degree of refugees and internally displaced persons, which also saw the disintegration of families and intense psychological trauma, particularly for children.[122]

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[112] Ibid 19-22.
[113] Ibid 21.
[114] Ibid 45.
[115] Ibid 23.
[116] Ibid 25.
[117] Ibid 24.
[118] Ibid 25.
[119] Ibid 26-27.
[120] Ibid 27.

The Framework then presented a vision for the country in 2030 based on the contributions of Syrian experts to NAFS. The vision was based on a view of Syria as a unified country that can be rebuilt by its society which is grounded in diversity and human civilization, and on a recognition that the country has to deal with unique challenges as a result of its geopolitical status. The decision to adopt or not adopt it would be at the discretion of the Syrian people.[123] There were nine principles of the decision including the pursuit of the voluntary, safe and dignified return and reintegration of Syrians to their country, the prioritisation of peacebuilding, the role of good governance in administering public institutions and the inclusive representation of the country's society and diversity.[124] NAFS also presented nine nexus of policies to guide Syria as the country creates sustainable peace and trusted state institutions.[125] Each nexus outlines the vision that should be achieved and the logic of why it is integral to peacebuilding and statebuilding in addition to the alternatives and challenges to them. For example one nexus, Building Legitimacy and Political Reform, articulates a goal of ensuring a consensual process of reforming the government's structures and institutions, building a democratic culture and establishing a political trust between prominent political figures. This is explained as a way to reduce the risk of a Syrian reversion to conflict by protecting an established peace and by building the state's ability to meet essential governance demands.[126]

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[121] Ibid 28-29.
[122] Ibid 28.
[123] Ibid 35.
[124] Ibid 35-36.
[125] Ibid 37.
[126] Ibid 40.

The nexus are informed by the different factors NAFS mentioned as contributors to the outbreak of conflict and seek to enact a social contract where these different factors are addressed and their threats reduced.

Omar Imady criticised NAFS for creating false expectations of what a Syrian reconstruction could result in and for presenting reconstructions as post-conflict frameworks that have a successful history.[127] Imady's criticism brings attention to a contradiction in NAFS, that it proposes what appears to be a top-down, more traditional reconstruction through a process that is consultative and bottom-up. While we worked on NAFS we did not adequately communicate the extent to which local communities should own and drive the reconstruction process, and as a result it created a false impression that NAFS existed as a plan that donors could fund in order to implement. NAFS was not complete when I left in 2017, and the framework of Building for Peace would go on to further this work by bringing the reconstruction process to the hands of the community, while connecting physical reconstruction with the emergence of a new social contract.

Five years after NAFS published our *Strategic Policy Alternatives Framework* the situation in Syria has continually changed. While much of the research NAFS produced has been made outdated because of this, the program still contains great value in its methodology. Envisioning a viable future for Syria, its social contract and its urban design requires the extensive participation and consultation of Syrians representing the entire country's fabric. Reviving this type of work participatory work through a new version of NAFS is critical. My personal contribution to this thesis is a contribution to the possible re-engagement of NAFS.

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[127] Imady 11.

II. Building for Peace

Building for Peace: Reconstruction for Security, Equity, and Sustainable Peace in MENA is a report published by the World Bank Group in 2020. This report was the result of collaboration between a great number of authors and researchers, and was produced under my overall guidance.[128] BFP provides an alternative approach to reconstruction and peacebuilding from state-building centric models that have been predominant over the last three decades. The conflicts in Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen challenged this emphasis on state-building. This is due to the fragility of these states as a result of prolonged conflict, the role of political and economic marginalisation of large segments of these populations as a factor in the emergence of conflicts, and the presence of informal armed networks challenging centralised state authority. If the structures of a centralised state are too ineffective, exclusionary and challenged to be seen as legitimate, then approaches to reconstruction and peacebuilding have to be developed with more actors than just the state in mind.[129]

With its basis in the World Bank's Fragility, Conflict, and Violence strategy, BFP advocates for an understanding of the specific circumstances of each conflict in question. It emphasises people who are the most vulnerable and affected in conflict contexts. These are people who are often at the greatest risk of experiencing violence when there are outbreaks of hostilities. They are also usually excluded and unable to benefit from the institutions central to state-oriented reconstruction and peacebuilding. Building for Peace finds it is necessary to restore, if not outright establish, their sense of security and trust as a prerequisite for the development of functional and inclusive institutions.[130]

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[128] World Bank Group, *Building for Peace: Reconstruction for Security, Equity, and Sustainable Peace in MENA,* (Washington DC: The World Bank, 2020), ix.
[129] Ibid xi-xii.

Historically, reconstruction measures taken in the Middle East and North Africa after conflicts have practically resulted in little more than the reconstruction of corrupt networks, inaccessible institutions and dynamics that either stagnate social development or incubate resurgent conflict. These measures constituted top-down approaches necessitating stable, central governments that could deliver on reconstruction. Most of the time these intended reconstruction projects have simply provided ornamentation and good press for institutions that did not fundamentally change. While some achieved a semblance of stability in the short-term, they did not remedy historic grievances. This resulted in cycles of conflict as the underlying problems these countries faced went unaddressed. Reconstruction efforts cannot simply be carried out unilaterally with states that often lack the trust and confidence of many of their citizens. A lasting peace requires that these top-down approaches be just one part of a larger effort that also incorporates bottom-up approaches informed by the needs and perspectives of local communities.[131]

Building for Peace suggests a comprehensive and dynamic evaluation process to determine the unique circumstances at play in each conflict context. It is important in this framework to carefully consider before a policymaker decides on an intervention, as even those which seem entirely neutral can dramatically change realities on the ground in unexpected ways. Poorly-considered interventions can risk undermining stability, incentivizing spoilers to peace or even outright reigniting conflict. There is also a risk of poorly allocating resources in a way that reinforces destructive power structures or factors of conflict.[132] The circumstances in these contexts will require innovative resource mobilisation and well-considered risk management.[133] Additionally, fully evaluating conflict contexts allows us to take into account those who are benefiting from conflict, such as beneficiaries of the war economy. Providing them with incentives or alternatives may be necessary to prevent them from seeing the peacebuilding process as against their interests and hindering it.[134]

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[130] Ibid xii.
[131] Ibid xiii.

This can represent a major conundrum for policymakers at all levels. Immediate stability may be necessary to ensure security for populations in a conflict or post-conflict context. At the same time addressing the underlying causes that led to conflict in the first place can result in significant social upheaval and disarray. While this may undermine stability to varying degrees in the short-term, a failure to address the underlying causes of conflict can mean that interventions in the short-term will actually exacerbate these problems. There is no easy solution here, as each context will require policymakers to carefully determine their strategies and approaches in ways appropriate for the case at hand.

Policymakers will, at the very least, have to examine conditions prior to the conflict, the ways the context has changed as a result of conflict and how local populations and actors have adapted to these changes.[135] For a thorough picture, they will need to acquire as much information as they can to understand as much context as possible. This can not be done just by focusing on one point in time, but will have to incorporate the past, present and future simultaneously. The historical conditions that have resulted in the country's present will have to be kept in mind, so that practitioners can ensure that their work is addressing the problems that have led to its current state. The contemporary present itself also has to be understood, as local contexts will determine where and how policymakers should intervene, and whether they should intervene at all. While the future may be uncertain, those working in reconstruction and peacebuilding have an obligation to evaluate the ways that their actions will affect how actors respond, and more broadly how they will change that country's circumstances. This understanding should be drawn from as many sources of information as possible, and much input from a great range of different communities and actors on the ground.[136]

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[132] Ibid xii.
[133] Ibid xiii.
[134] Ibid xv.
[135] Ibid xvii.

Including think tanks, universities, and experts was critical for the BFP framework since the World Bank has great technical specialists, but limited people that can understand and analyse the political economy, geopolitics, and local dynamics of the four countries. Therefore, I looked for experts who worked in the Middle East, knew the Middle East, wrote about the Middle East, and could be a credible source of information about the region. I also wanted to bring IUAV on board in addition to think tanks such as Brookings, Carnegie, and the Atlantic Council which commissioned papers that cover various dimensions in the four countries. My small team reviewed and edited these papers to develop the framework.

However, to me, the more significant aspect of Building for Peace was to be the consultation process. My original plan was to have at least one whole year of consultations and then launch a comprehensive strategy that was approved by these stakeholders. However, the

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[136] Ibid xviii.

World Bank did not agree. Unfortunately, we managed to organise only one consultation conference on Libya in Tunisia which included Libyans from different backgrounds to discuss the political economy of their country and strategies for reconstruction. We were also able to visit Iraq and conduct several meetings with concerned Iraqis about Mosul in Baghdad. Although these events were supposed to be part of several consultation efforts, they did not materialise due to opposition from the World Bank and I was not allowed to continue similar efforts on Yemen or Syria or conduct additional consultations for Iraq and Libya. Although most of these conversations with local stakeholders did eventually influence Building for Peace, they were not enough. The document itself should have been the subject, similar to NAFS, of extensive consultation. NAFS was a powerful document because it was an organic one based on extensive participation. It is not possible nor should it be acceptable to agree on a reconstruction plan for a country based only on a one or three-day meeting. Participatory reconstruction requires years of work with local stakeholders, which was needed but not achieved in Building for Peace.

III. RECONSTRUCT

The main framework for this thesis is based on *RECONSTRUCT*, a research report published in 2018 through Università Iuav di Venezia under the principal research of Benno Albrecht. *RECONSTRUCT* is an acronym that stands for REconcile CONflict through STrategic Resilience in Urban Context and Territories. *RECONSTRUCT* focuses on providing a new approach to "post-conflict reconstruction of architecture, urban settlements, and built environments."[137] This report sees conflict in the twenty-first century as defined by persistent, irregular and typically located in urban areas. Urbicide, the deliberate destruction of cities, is consequently now a common military objective. It necessitates the reconstruction of not just urban architecture "but also cultural and social systems, economic structures and administrative organisations."[138]

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[137] Università Iuav di Venezia, *RECONSTRUCT: REconcile CONflict through STrategic Resilience in Urban Context and Territories,* (Washington DC: Università Iuav di Venezia, 2018).

RECONSTRUCT presents a vision of urban reconstruction that fuses modern and sustainable qualities of urban design with the specific historical characteristics of each city.[139] One central approach to the research is in the concept of Exporting the Historical Core. This involves consolidating major features of a city's historic neighbourhoods and using them to inform development in more distant and fringe areas. These features can be modified and adjusted according to the needs of the city in question. By using centrally located and iconic sections of the city as a benchmark guiding further development, *RECONSTRUCT* seeks new models of urban development. Rather than a heavily-centralised city wherein outlying peripheries exist are literally and figuratively marginalised, the research seeks to establish "a constellation of centres" or "a cellular city."[140] The creation of urban geographies that are less defined by their relation to city centres presents opportunities for "shared use of natural resources" and more sustainable models of production.[141] Decentralised urban designs can also potentially mitigate social isolation, especially between different neighbourhoods in close proximity. The model of the cellular city rather than a centralised one could encourage inter-neighborhood collaboration and socialisation. This can help reduce the risk of conflict that is present between neighbourhoods developing in isolation from one another while competing for resources.

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[138] Ibid 18.
[139] Ibid 22.
[140] Ibid 43.
[141] Ibid 43.

RECONSTRUCT adopts a strategy called the Minimum Viable Reconstruction Project (MVRP). This strategy is grounded in community involvement and advocates for a bottom-up approach where people living in these environments "self-produce reconstruction."[142] It seeks a coordinated effort to create a single reconstruction process. It contrasts with what the research calls a "vertical layers top-down approach" wherein the development of an urban area's systems like infrastructure and education are not coordinated.[143] With the proposed decentralised design model at the centre of *RECONSTRUCT*, this allows for designs successful in one area of a city to be proposed for others in close proximity, and for them to be adjusted accordingly.[144] The reconstruction methods will have a testing ground in the RE-LAB Mobile Laboratory. This will be a fenced-in area in the city to be reconstructed. It will be used to test, analyse and coordinate reconstruction activities. The Laboratory will also, before testing of reconstruction methods begins, function as a meeting space for community members and policymakers.[145]

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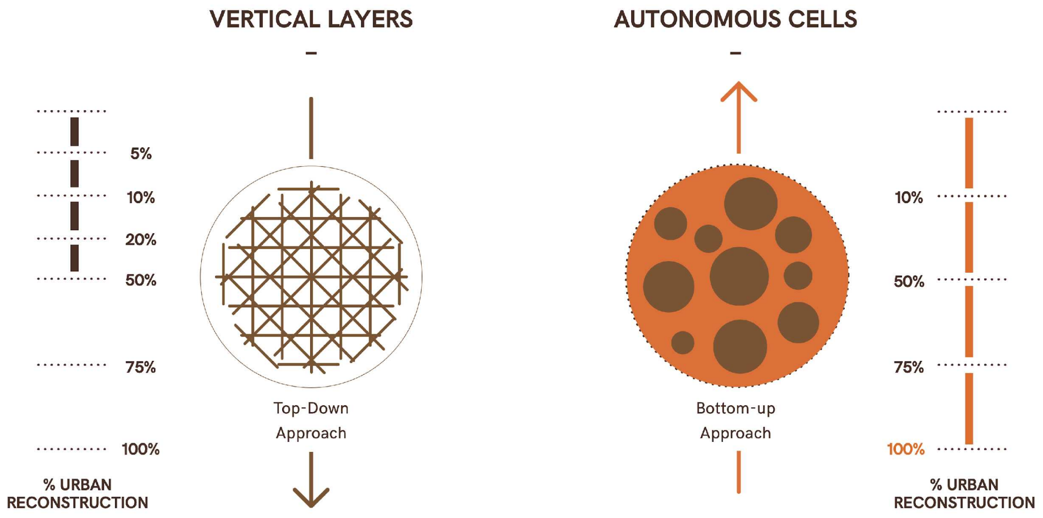
[142] Ibid 44.
[143] Ibid 44.
[144] Ibid 44.
[145] Ibid 50.


VERTICAL LAYERS
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Top-Down Approach
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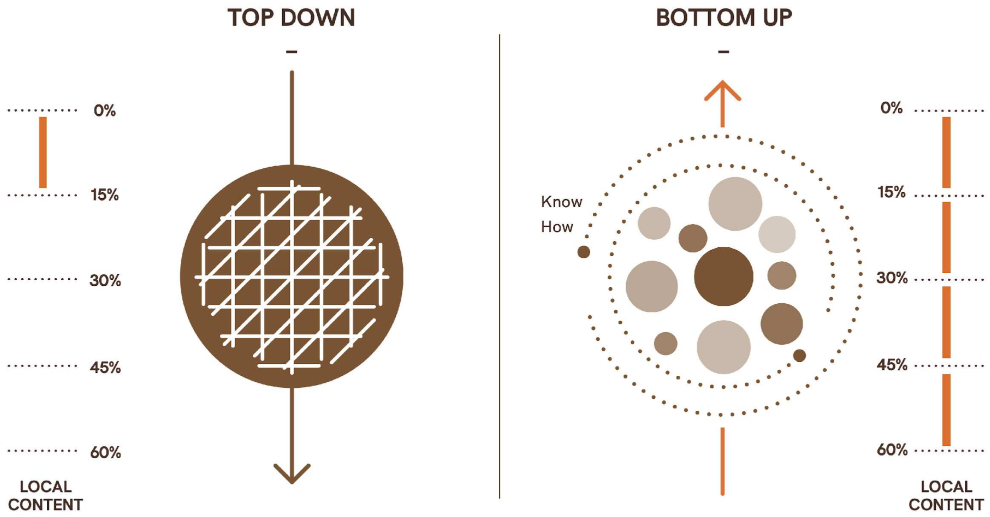
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LOCAL CONTENT
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Know How
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LOCAL CONTENT

RECONSTRUCT presents a promising path for post-conflict reconstruction through its emphasis on community involvement. It requires local involvement and ownership of the reconstruction, which will help communities to see their neighbourhoods as their own. It provides practical means through which these communities will be able to test the activities necessary for their reconstruction. Through *RECONSTRUCT* populations whose sense of home and community has been entirely disrupted by conflict can begin to establish the environments they will live in. However, it needs to become the subject of very extensive consultations and participatory decision-making to be successful, otherwise, it will lose its value.

CHAPTER 3: TRADITIONAL APPROACHES TO RECONSTRUCTION: BEIRUT, MOSUL, AND KABUL.

Using the examples of Beirut, Mosul and Afghanistan, I will explain how top-down reconstruction approaches failed in each of these cases. There are varying reasons why each of these cases have not yet seen successful reconstructions. Two factors are present in each one, however. One is the extent of corruption in each context, and the other is the fact that these reconstructions have proceeded without meaningful input from the communities they should be serving.

I. Beirut Case Study

Although various efforts of reconstruction took place prior to the formation of Solidere, this section will mainly focus on the company's own reconstruction efforts while providing contextual analysis of the economic, political, and social conditions that took place prior to Solidere's inception and during. It concludes that although Solidere pushed the country into significant debt, turned the city centre to a space for elites, and increased sectarian divides.

Lebanon experienced a devastating civil war from 1975 to 1990. An estimated 131,000 people died in this conflict while around 500,000 Lebanese left the country. Lebanon's economy was reduced to less than a third of the GDP it had before the war began, and around $25 billion worth of physical assets were destroyed.[146] The country's territorial integrity was also continually disrupted throughout the war as the Syrian and Israeli militaries each invaded Lebanon. They would continue to occupy parts of the country after the end of the civil war. The course of the conflict saw different militias form, each claiming to represent one of the distinct ethnic and religious groups that compose Lebanon, and ethnically cleansing regions of the country and Beirut in particular to create more homogenous areas. This resulted in a disintegration of the Lebanese social contract and sense of national identity.

The Lebanese Civil War was resolved with the Taif Agreement in 1989, although some fighting continued by parties opposed to the Agreement.[147] The Taif Agreement attempted to resolve one of the foundational problems in the Lebanese political economy that had led to the civil war, the structural dominance of Maronite Christians over the country's other religious and ethnic groups, by redistributing positions of political power in a more equitable way across the country's different demographics.[148] However, this ensured that Lebanese citizens would have to view their political identity through the prism of either their religious sect or ethnic identity, further hindering the development of a Lebanese national identity. This has also had the impact of empowering the representatives of the country's different sub-national identity groups and "led to a massive distributive and rent seeking predatory activities."[149] As a result there is an entrenched clientelism in Lebanese society, where the country's different sects and ethnic groups are reliant on patrons for resources.

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[146] Ghassan Dibeh, "The political economy of postwar reconstruction in Lebanon." WIDER Research Paper, No. 2005/44. (Helsinki: The United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research 2005) 1.

[147] Ibid 19.

[148] Ibid 19-20.

[149] Ibid 11.

Solidere is a real estate company that was formed after the end of the civil war for the reconstruction of the Beirut Central District (BCD).[150] Before the civil war this part of the city had been one of the most religiously diverse. Both an economic and cultural hub for Beirut, it contained a number of common areas that "brought together groups to transact business and for social opportunities."[151] Much of the area was completely destroyed in the civil war when it was divided by the Green Line separating predominantly Muslim West Beirut from predominantly Christian East Beirut. This caused most residents of downtown Beirut to flee to suburbs which were much less religiously mixed.[152] Beirut's historic souqs, a large series of markets, were destroyed in the intense fighting downtown Beirut suffered during the war.[153]

Solidere's reconstruction project was mandated from the top-down with no real input from the property owners or informal residents in the district after the war. Solidere has powers of eminent domain and acquired property in BCD by compensating owners with shares in the company's stock, which many of the owners considered insufficient.[154] Many of these shares were also issued late, after the company's stock value had reached its peak of $170 in USD per share in August 1994, before eventually falling to between $3 and $10. These property owners missed out while the main shareholders in the company, including Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, were able to benefit.[155] It should be noted that the same thing is now happening with the Marota

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[150] Hadi Makarem, "Actually Existing Neoliberalism: The reconstruction of Downtown Beirut in post-civil war Lebanon," doctoral thesis, (London School of Economics and Political Science:2014) 4.
[151] Dona J. Stewart, "Economic Recovery and Reconstruction in Postwar Beirut," Geographical Review 86, no. 4 (1996) 494.
[152] Ibid 494.
[153] Ibid 495.
[154] Makarem 4.
[155] Ibid 230.

City development in Damascus, another luxury development that offered shares in its business to owners displaced from Basateen al-Razzi.[156]

Solidere's plan for the reconstruction of the BCD was driven by a vision of Beirut as a cosmopolitan, global city that should be attractive to international investment.[157] Solidere and its supporters presented the pre-war property rights holders as a threat to the cosmopolitanism of the area. Henri Edde, an architect who created preliminary plans for the downtown reconstruction, blamed the pre-war owners for a decline in the souq area before the civil war began, and Solidere public relations officials said that if they remained in the area it would become a ghetto.[158] Supporters of the plan referred to traditional and informal property arrangements between owners, tenants and family members as a confusing obstacle to the area's redevelopment. As a result the rights of the 40,000 property rights holders were expropriated.[159]

The old souq also contained large numbers of Shi'a displaced from southern Lebanon and Beirut's southern suburbs who were living informally in the ruins of the BCD. Both Solidere and government officials saw this population as a threat to the area's reconstruction and characterised these populations stereotypically as backwards, anti-urban and cultureless. This population was seen by these officials as a threat to their vision for the area.[160] Eventually Solidere began to pay off Shi'i families, however in order to achieve the support of the country's Shi'a political parties - Amal and Hizbollah - Solidere involved the parties by paying them a huge amount of money and tasking them with distributing it among the displaced families.[161] This further reinforced the country's clientelist system and the reliance of these displaced populations on Amal and Hizbollah. It is one example of how Lebanese populations have become further dependent on sect-based political parties as their guarantors and how the reconstruction process drove Lebanese sectarianism.

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[156] al-Sabouni, *Building for Hope,* 153.
[157] Najib Hourani, "Post-conflict reconstruction and citizenship agendas: lessons from Beirut," *Citizenship Studies* 19:2 (2015), 186.
[158] Ibid 187.
[159] Ibid 188.
[160] Ibid 188-189.

This agreement between Solidere, Amal and Hizbollah is also an example of how Solidere functioned as a racket for the country's elites, particularly Hariri. Hariri and his allies distributed both public and private resources, usually money, to those who might otherwise oppose their endeavours such as Solidere. With their support the government was able to pass special laws and decrees which enabled Hariri and his allies to extract even more rent from the country's reconstruction and further enrich themselves.[162] Solidere existed as another mechanism for Lebanese clientelism, and the country's post-war reconstruction became a resource to be distributed among its elites. Ultimately Hariri and Solidere's supporters spent so much of the country's public resources on this process that it contributed to the increase of Lebanon's public debt.[163] By 2005 Lebanon had one of the world's largest debt to GDP ratios, which remains the case today.[164]

Solidere's BCD is a modern, expensive shopping and entertainment area that bears little resemblance to the city's historic centre. Their plan required a significantly more dense central district which, according to architect Assem Salam, led Solidere to clear 80 percent of the area's original fabric and demolish more buildings than had been destroyed in the civil war.[165] The new BCD and its high-end shopping malls are an abrupt divorce from the neighbourhood's historic character and role, and caters not to Lebanese society as a whole but the very rich, the visiting Lebanese diaspora and visitors from the Arabian Gulf.[166] Many of the residential communities in downtown Beirut are gated and exclude people considered undesirable, creating sections of the city that are cordoned off and inaccessible to many Lebanese.[167] The BCD has an expensive image that deters most Lebanese people from visiting it, which has made it difficult for the businesses in the BCD to survive and caused the neighbourhood to decline.[168] This is symbolic of how the broader reconstruction efforts in Lebanon have not been designed in a way that considers most of the country's population. Lebanon after the civil war saw the resources of the state redistributed more equitably among the country's regions and sects than they had been prior to the conflict, but this has just empowered the country's elites. Similar efforts were not taken to allocate the country's resources more equitably across different economic classes. Lebanon's post-war tax system reduced income, profit marginal and corporate tax rates, and when the country entered a fiscal crisis the state responded by raising and creating indirect taxes disproportionately impacting the lower classes.[169] At the same time the country's sectarian divisions have also been exacerbated by the reconstruction process. Solidere was associated in the public consciousness with Hariri and his allies, and he responded to accusations of corruption and a campaign to disempower him and his clique from positions with influence over reconstruction by rebranding himself as a Sunni leader rather than one with national appeal. As a result public perceptions of Solidere, Hariri and his political allies, and the Lebanese Sunni population as a whole have become linked.[170] As a result support or opposition toward different reconstruction projects in the country gained a dimension of sectarian conflict and are perceived to benefit certain populations over others.

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[161] Makarem 244-246.
[162] Makarem 24-25.
[163] Makarem 26.
[164] Dibeh 12.

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[165] Makarem 231.

[166] Makarem 98 - 100

[167] Makarem 31.

[168] Allam Alkazei & Kosuke Matsubara, "Post-conflict reconstruction and the decline of urban vitality in Downtown Beirut," *International Planning Studies* 26:3 (2021) 280.

[169] Dibeh 10.

Solidere's reconstruction of the BCD is characteristic of the problems a top-down effort can bring. The reconstruction was carried out with no real input from the communities in the area either before, during or after the conflict. These populations were treated contemptibly by Solidaire as nothing more than an obstacle to be cleared away through eminent domain and cash payoffs. Solidere viewed the central area of Beirut's history as unimportant as well and created a district that has no meaningful connection to its history. The souqs in central Beirut today appear as American shopping malls randomly thrown into the city and completely divorced from the history that came before them. The BCD was designed with the extremely rich and foreigners in mind; it is prohibitively expensive and most Beirutis cannot afford to shop there. Solidere's failure to take the population of Beirut itself into account when designing this high-rent area has resulted in the ghost of a luxurious shopping centre that is poorly supported. Solidere itself is closely connected with many of the problems Lebanon has experienced since the end of the civil war. It is a vehicle for corruption and clientelism that has helped to drive Lebanon's extraordinary debt. It is also used to reignite sectarian tensions and has fueled a perception of post-war reconstruction as a zero-sum competition between Lebanon's different populations. The central district of a capital city is used by its country to represent an ideal vision of itself. Solidere's BCD presents a vision of Beirut that is unconcerned with its own population and instead preoccupied with attracting foreign wealth.

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[170] Makarem 26.

II. Mosul Case Study:

Mosul, the capital of the Nineveh Governorate and the second-largest city in Iraq, is currently the subject of various different international and domestic reconstruction campaigns following its occupation by ISIL from 2014 to 2017. Mosul is located in an area that has been continuously inhabited for more than 8,000 years and contains a wealth of cultural heritage.[171] Mosul, an extremely important city on the Silk Road, has been a destination for many travellers and traders over the centuries. Mosul hosts some of the most historically significant libraries of Arabic and Islamic manuscripts, as well as libraries of Arabic music, in the world. The city has also been an industrious economic centre. Mosul is one of two cities in the region, along with Aleppo, that have been vibrant economic and cultural centres that were neither political capitals, like Damascus or Baghdad, nor holy cities, like Mecca or Najaf. Instead Mosul has been an example of a city driven by a thriving civil society. Mosul's architectural design also ensured that the city's diverse populations were able to live together without segregation.

Many sites with incredible historic significance in Mosul were damaged or destroyed during the ISIL occupation and in battles to liberate the city, as were an estimated 100,000 valuable manuscripts. As a result many international reconstruction efforts in Mosul are dedicated to repairing important locations including the al-Hadba minaret, the al-Saa'a Church and the al-Tahera Church.[172] There is also a great need for housing in Mosul. 1,000,000 people were displaced between 2014 and 2017 and have been mostly displaced in tent camps around the area.[173] In the Old City of Mosul alone approximately 20,000 buildings were destroyed, "a high percentage" of which were residential.[174] There is an urgent need for reconstruction to house displaced Muslawis, but the process has been extremely slow and complicated by a highly-centralised Iraqi government that is hesitant to reconstruct the city.

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[171] Giovanni Fontana Antonelli and Tommaso Cossu. "Urban Recovery and Reconstruction Strategies for the Old City of Mosul After ISIL/Da'esh Occupation," in *Transcultural Diplomacy and International Law in Heritage Conservation*, eds. Olimpia Niglio and Eric Yong Joong Lee (Singapore: Springer, 2021). 396-397

[172] "Mosul: Rebuilding Begins," UNESCO.org (UNESCO, March 22, 2022), https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/mosul-rebuilding-begins.

Prior to the ISIL occupation Mosul was still a site of great displacement. After the Iraqi government was overthrown following an American-led invasion, efforts to establish a new social contract and functional government institutions dramatically failed. All of Iraq saw increased extremism and sectarian and ethnic violence as a result, which was particularly intense between 2006 and 2010. Between these two years the demographics of Mosul changed considerably. Many of the city's ethnic and religious minorities including Christians, Yazidis, Kurds and Turkoman Shi'a fled out of fear of intercommunal violence. At the same time Mosul received large numbers of Arab and Turkoman Sunnis as Internally-Displaced Persons.[175] The increase in the city's population occurred in concert with "poverty, limited social welfare and misguided urban policies" ensured that most of Mosul's urban growth after 2003 has been through informal settlements on public and agricultural land.[176] Before the ISIL occupation the housing unit deficit in Mosul was about 46,000 units.[177] By the time of the city's recapture 500,000 units were needed. Additionally, 60 to 70 percent of Mosul's infrastructure and 15 entire neighbourhoods in the western part of the city were destroyed.[178]

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[173] Saeed et al, "Mosul City: Housing Reconstruction after the ISIS War," 1.

[174] Shaimaa Hameed Hussein, Zina Riadh Abdullah, and Nawras Motathid Mohammed Salih, "Urban Regeneration through Post-War Reconstruction: Reclaiming the Urban Identity of the Old City of Mosul," *Periodicals of Engineering and Natural Sciences* 7, no. 1 (June 2019): 297.

[175] Fontana Antonelli and Cossu "Urban Recovery and Reconstruction Strategies for the Old City of Mosul After ISIL/Da'esh Occupation," 396.

[176] Saeed et al, "Mosul City: Housing Reconstruction after the ISIS War" 2.

[177] Ibid 2.

[178] Ibid 2.

In the aftermath of the American-led invasion elite Shi'a politicians, many of whom were just returning from exile, became the country's dominant political actors. The Iraqi government has become based around patron-client relations at every level and every section of the country's administration is an opportunity for politicians to enrich themselves.[179] Iraq's institutionalised corruption is a defining element of the country's political economy.[180] While non-Shia political elites allied with the country's governing authorities benefit from this structure as well, the perception of an elite Shi'a political class benefitting from the pervasive corruption in Iraq is deeply alienating to the country's Sunni population.[181]This also applies to the integration, or lack thereof, of Sunni paramilitary forces with the rest of the country. Beginning in 2007 Sunni tribal security forces known as the Abna al-Iraq, or Sons of Iraq, participated in military operations against al-Qaeda in Iraq.[182] However, afterwards these forces were only marginally integrated into the Iraqi military or supported by the Iraqi state. This created a void of security in predominantly-Sunni western areas of the country.[183] However, this was made much worse when then-Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki appointed his supporters to the commandership of Nineveh's Operational Command.[184] Muslawi politician Osama al-Nujaifi, who was then the Speaker of Iraq's Council of Representatives, responded by leading a local protest movement against the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), who in turn arrested prominent community, religious and activist leaders.[185] In the following years the ISF would continue to treat Sunni Arab Muslawis abusively, fostering anti-government sentiment in the city.[186] While news reports typically described the capture of Mosul by ISIL as rapidly occurring, residents of the city have recounted that the group's fighters were actually present in Mosul long before then.[187] By late 2013 they were influential in the city and were able to appeal to the abysmal treatment of Mosul's population by the ISF.[188] The lack of support from the central government for credible security forces there and the complete alienation of the Sunni Arab Muslawi population from the ISF were contributing factors. Since then, the creation of Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), which are predominantly Shi'a, have further established an impression of vulnerability among Iraqi Arab Sunnis. It has created a perception that the country's Shi'a, through the PMF, and Kurds, through the Peshmerga, are allowed to have military factions while Sunni Arab tribal requests for funding and weapons are denied by the state.[189]

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[179] Fanar Haddad, "The Political Economy of Iraq: from regional powerhouse to external and internal conflict," (Middle East Institute, 2018) 17.

[180] Ibid 19.

[181] Ibid 19.

[182] Hideki Matsunaga,*The Reconstruction of Iraq after 2003: Learning from Its Successes and Failures* (Washington D.C.: World Bank Group, 2019) 31 and Renad Mansour, *The Sunni Predicament in Iraq,* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Middle East Center 2016), 5.

[183] Matsunaga, *The Reconstruction of Iraq after 2003,* 91.

[184] Zmkan Ali Saleem and Mac Skelton, *The Failure of Reconstruction in Mosul*, (Sulaimani: Institute of Regional and International Studies, 2020) 6.

The PMFs were significantly involved in the campaign to recapture Mosul and Nineveh Governorate. The participation of the PMFs along with other military and political forces was driven in part by a desire to claim influence in the Governorate and profit from its natural resources and funds that would be allocated to reconstruct the city. PMF factions which were marginally, if at all, present in Mosul before, such as the Badr Organization, Kata'ib Hizbollah and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq have become significant actors in the city's political economy. They profit from smuggling oil, trading scrap metal, collecting fees illegally at checkpoints and other activities. The governors of Nineveh are not appointed without the approval of PMFs and they are not able to challenge these militias without losing power.[190] The PMFs exist in Mosul as political and economic forces with very little local support that extract resources and money from the city.

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[185] Ibid 7.

[186] Ibid 8.

[187] Antonelli and Cossu, "Urban Recovery and Reconstruction Strategies for the Old City of Mosul After ISIL/Da'esh Occupation," 396.

[188] Ali Saleem and Skelton, "The Failure of Reconstruction in Mosul" 8.

[189] Mansour, *The Sunni Predicament in Iraq*, 4.

Since Mosul was recaptured by the Iraqi government, its reconstruction has often been hindered by politicians at the national and regional levels. Nofal al-Agub, who was appointed the Nineveh Governor in 2015 before his removal in 2019 after 100 died in a ferry accident, frequently refused to sign off on development projects for the city's reconstruction. al-Agub also helped facilitate the corruption of PMF groups who profited from reconstruction efforts in Mosul. While he was extremely unpopular in Mosul he was supported by the country's major Baghdad-based Shi'a parties to prevent the emergence of a popular local leader from the city.[191] After al-Agub's removal from power PMF groups are still perceived to dominate Nineveh Governorate's offices and directorates. Nineveh Provincial Council member Hussam Abar claimed that PMFs prevented the Council from holding PMF-supported government officials accountable.[192] Sunni Arab leaders have also accused both PMFs and national politicians of obstructing the return of IDPs displaced from Mosul.[193]

The reconstruction of Mosul has not occurred through a concerted effort with coordination from all involved parties, but rather in a disjointed fashion. Many government agencies hold different responsibilities for the city's reconstruction including the Governor of Nineveh's office, federal ministries responsible for service provision and the Reconstruction

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[190] Zmkan Ali Saleem, "Prisoner of the Deal: Nineveh's Governor and Local State Capture," Conflict Research Programme Blog (LSE, May 14, 2020), https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/crp/2020/03/12/prisoner-of-the-deal-ninevehs-governor-and-local-state-capture/.
[191] Ali Saleem and Skelton, "The Failure of Reconstruction in Mosul" 9-10.
[192] Ibid 12.
[193] Mansour, *The Sunni Predicament in Iraq,* 12.

Fund.[194] Nineveh Provincial Council member Owayd ali al-Juhaishi said the central government ministries decide which projects to pursue without the input of the local government or provincial council, and that the central government is prioritising certain projects without understanding what is needed for the governorate.[195] Without any semblance of local deliberation this is a crude effort blindly imposed from Baghdad that has no hope of providing Muslawis the reconstruction appropriate for and needed by their city.

As a Senior Advisor on Reconstruction at the World Bank my team and I visited Baghdad and met with a group of Muslawis. The Muslawis we met with were some of the city's most important intellectuals, writers, economists, artists, musicians and politicians. Their biggest priority for the reconstruction of Mosul was that the city should retain its multi-ethnic and multi-ethnic characteristics, as well as its relevance in international trade. They wanted to maintain the city's demographics and to prevent large shifts out and into Mosul. They were concerned that many fighters from southern Iraq who fought against ISIL in the city want to stay there and that IDPs displaced from Mosul would not be able to return there. Maintaining or restoring Mosul's historic architectural style and texture was also considered by them as a necessary part of the city's reconstruction.

They also viewed Mosul's reconstruction as obstructed by the fact that part of the city's pre-war significance was from the large amount of Ba'ath Party cadres it produced. The current Iraqi government, which has pursued an aggressive policy of de-Ba'athification, does not want

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[194] Ali Saleem and Skelton, "The Failure of Reconstruction in Mosul" 12-13.
[195] Ibid 13.

Mosul to regain its prominence as a result. However, Muslawis will not accept a reconstruction of the city that does not preserve its culture, ethnic diversity and architectural identity.

Local communities in the Old City, which was largely destroyed, have initiated some reconstruction efforts. These initiatives have been led by the city's civil society and young Muslawis, who have attempted to return Mosul's markets to their pre-war glory. This shows that there is a strong desire and drive for reconstruction on the ground in Mosul, which Imady characterised as present in the cases of reconstruction that did succeed. However, it has not been sufficient as it has not returned the city's IDPs, and the Iraqi government's resistance to reviving Mosul remains an impediment.

III. Kabul Case Study:

Afghanistan historically was a rural society with around 75 to 80% of the population living in rural areas and surviving on subsistence agriculture. Then in 1973 there was a coup d'état that got rid of the king and, as a result, a communist government was later set up in Kabul and backed up by the Soviet Union. This was the first attempt at modernization in Kabul. This is when urban centres started to expand in the country with schools, universities, hospitals, and clinics built with the support of the Soviet Union. Yet, these developments mainly took place in urban centres and there was little to no investment in rural areas. During that time, Afghanistan's economy remained mainly based on subsistence agriculture, with some trading controlled by a few elite families. However, the communists started fighting with each other which led to the direct intervention of the Soviet Union in 1979 when 100,000 Soviet soldiers moved into the country. While there was significant fighting at that time, there was no massive destruction in urban centres as most of the fighting took place in remote rural areas.

In 1987 the Soviets withdrew their troops from Afghanistan due to pressure triggered by the Perestroika policy from 1985 until 1991 which ended with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Perestroika also led to the withdrawal of the Soviet Army from Afghanistan as the Soviet Union did not want to be involved in any foreign adventures at the time. This was a tense period in Afghanistan as many mujahideen groups based around various ideologies, ethnicities and sects were fighting the Soviet Army and each other until the Soviets left and the different groups entered Kabul. Each militia occupied a part of Kabul and there was destructive fighting. At the same time, however, there were also massive waves of rural-urban migration. Kabul, which had been a city of 1 million, saw its population grow to 6 million. The city's economy was controlled by warlords who controlled different plots of land.

During 1990 to 1996, there was massive destruction in Kabul as the different Mujahideen groups fought each other and the city was shelled from the surrounding mountains. It was fierce combat internationally funded by different countries. Then the Americans who supported the Mujahideen pulled out and there was no foreign power that could control the situation in Afghanistan. During this time, about 4 million Afghans escaped to Pakistan while around 3 million went to Iran. Many of the people who went to Pakistan were families headed by women as the men had been killed or imprisoned. At that time, the Saudis were funding something called madrasas to spread the Wahhabi sect among the Afghans in Pakistan. The students of those madrasas were called the Taliban. While the Mujahideen were fighting each other the Taliban, who had a puritanical interpretation of Islam, were growing more radical and strict. They were aware of the unstable conditions in Afghanistan and formed a militia that was supported by the Pakistani intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence. When they decided to move into Afghanistan nobody resisted them. They first went to Kandahar, the historical capital of the Taliban, and then to Kabul. Most people welcomed them as they were fed up with the fighting among the Mujahideen groups. As a result, the Taliban in 1996 brought peace and security at the cost of brutal rule, however, the majority of the population were still willing to put up with them. Many of the warlords joined the Northern Alliance and fought the Taliban while controlling a small amount of the country's northeastern territory.

Although the Taliban ran a failed state, there was a significant increase in construction in Kabul which opened jobs for workers in that industry. However, after 9/11 happened the US formed an alliance to uproot the Taliban in 2001. That year the US invaded Afghanistan and brought back the Northern Alliance, which was predominantly composed of non-Pashtun groups, and took over the whole country. As a result, the non-Pashtun populations returned to rule the country while the Taliban, which are mainly Pashtun, were pushed out.

From 2001 to 2021, the international community backed the government in Afghanistan and spent around 300 billion dollars in development and humanitarian aid along with about 2 trillion dollars in military investments. Despite all these funds, they did not build infrastructure, an economy or even a single power plant.. Instead, the money was syphoned out by the cronies and elites. They also did not try to build strong national institutions. Most of the development funding was spent outside the national budget of Afghanistan so there was no accountability. We do not know where the 300 billion dollars are. The real ministry of finance in Afghanistan was not the Afghani Ministry of Finance. the World Bank established a trust fund called the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund[196] which spent hundreds of millions of dollars in ten years outside the national budget. The question of who is accountable and responsible for these finances and corruption has not been answered.

This is the reconstruction experience of Afghanistan. It is similar to the political economy of Syria, where elite capture took place with the alliance between the security apparatus, real estate developers, and the political system. In Afghanistan a different manifestation of the same story took place with the alliance of warlords, who then became army generals in the National Army. There was also corruption among the American industrial military complex and retired army generals who made billions out of working in Afghanistan. Therefore, cronies controlled the economy and did not allow for real economic growth. The US created the Special Inspector General for American Reconstruction of Afghanistan (SIGAR), which is a congressional group. SIGAR just published a report where they admit the scandal that was the American reconstruction of Afghanistan.[197]

Through the last 20 years there was some growth in the economy, but it is all related to foreign military spending. In fact when growth was taking place, unemployment and poverty were rising. This is a very narrow and exclusive growth. Hence, when the Taliban came back to take power in 2021 nobody resisted them. Not a single soldier in the National Army tried to fight them because they knew they were defending a system of corruption.

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[196] “Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund,” The World Bank Group, accessed December 30, 2022, http://web.worldbank.org/archive/website00811/WEB/OTHER/B79EA4-3.HTM?OpenDocument.
[197] SIGAR, “Why the Afghan Government Collapsed,” 2022.

In the five years before the Taliban took over, Afghanistan's GDP was falling while poverty and unemployment were rising. Poverty continued to rise during the Taliban's initial rule. Yet in the time period when the Taliban were out of power, despite 20 years of western-backed government support and 300 billion dollars in aid and development, povertyhad continued to rise significantly. That is the reconstruction experience in Afghanistan.

All over Kabul there is informal housing and there are some isolated elite housing areas. This is similar to what can be found in Damascus. Kabul is also divided by sectarian lines. The informal housing in the north of Kabul, for example, is mainly Hazara Shi'a. Just as in the case of Beirut, there was no mixing of the national identity in urban development.

CHAPTER 4: JOBAR CASE STUDY

This chapter aims to implement lessons learned from my personal experiences and from examining traditional approaches to reconstruction in an effort to argue that *RECONSTRUCT* is the sustainable, efficient, decentralised, and inclusive strategy that will allow Jobar and other cities in Syria to flourish while limiting risks of future conflict. It starts with mapping Syria's political economy then provides contextual analysis of Jobar pre and post conflict. Finally, it attempts to implement *RECOSTRUCT's* approach to Jobar and compare its possible outcomes with projected outcomes of current centralised urban planning approaches in Syria.

I. Syria's Political Economic Context:

Syria's political economy is driven by the al-Assad family, the Ba'ath Party and the country's elites in the security services, as well as businessmen allied with them. Cronyism is central to Syria's economy, and the support or participation of business figures aligned with the government is a prerequisite for any significant deals or ventures.[198] Before the start of the civil war, while the country was beginning to liberalise economically, these cronies in real estate were creating bubbles by developing and rapidly selling projects, which drove property to absurd levels. As this was their focus they failed to meet the country's demand for housing. Between 2005 and 2010 not more than 20 percent of this demand was met each year.[199] This is one example of how these cronies profited through behaviours that debilitated the Syrian economy.

The conflict has been cataclysmic for the Syrian economy. The country's GDP fell from $60.2 billion before the war began to $12.4 billion in 2016. Additionally the rate of unemployment and job loss has been dramatic. 2.1 million actual and potential jobs had been lost by 2015, while 55 percent of the country was then unemployed.[200] However some businessmen were able to profit from the conflict and become extremely wealthy and integrated with other major actors in the country's political economy such as those from the security services and army. Warlords who profited from the conflict have also used limited liability companies and

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[198] Joseph Daher, "The Political Economic Context of Syria's Reconstruction: A prospective in light of a legacy of unequal development," (Florence: European University Institute, 2018)

[199] Mazen Ezzi and Wajih Haddad, "The Housing Crisis in Syria: Do Social Housing and Housing Cooperatives Still Have a Role?," The Syria Report (Housing Land and Property Rights, July 25, 2022), https://hlp.syria-report.com/hlp/the-housing-crisis-in-syria-do-social-housing-and-housing-cooperatives-still-have-a-role/.

[200] Daher "The Political Economic Context of Syria's Reconstruction."

"participation in investment projects, including real estate, land and business" to move into the space of Syria's formal economy.[201]

Despite this emergence of newly-empowered businessmen, government-aligned cronies have been able to further consolidate their hold of Syria's economy through conflict. They have been able to do so as a result of merchants leaving the country and their assets behind, allowing them to buy them for very cheap prices.[202] Joseph Daher writes that both this class and the newly-empowered elites have used their connections with the government and security sectors to win state contracts with high margins and lucrative import deals, while also profiting from the war economy by becoming involved with smuggling. Their loyalty to the government has created a cycle where they are rewarded with access to new industries and sectors by their benefactors in the state, which further incentivizes their support for it.[203] As a result while the Syrian Civil War has seen new actors gain prominence they have been incorporated into a network of power based around a further strengthened pre-war core of the government, security services and crony capitalists.

The Syrian government's efforts to privatise have been desperate as a result of its financial troubles and funds shortage since the beginning of the conflict. The Public Private Partnership Law in 2016 allows private companies to engage the Syrian government with new co-ventures and empowers them with the ability to manage, develop and profit from public assets.[204] This will bring further benefit to the traditional security service-aligned cronies and this new crop of businessmen. Although access to public assets moves into private hands, it will advantage only those deeply-integrated with the government. They will continue to act to empower and enrich this network regardless of any destructive impacts their behaviour will have on the Syrian society or economy.

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[201] Ibid.

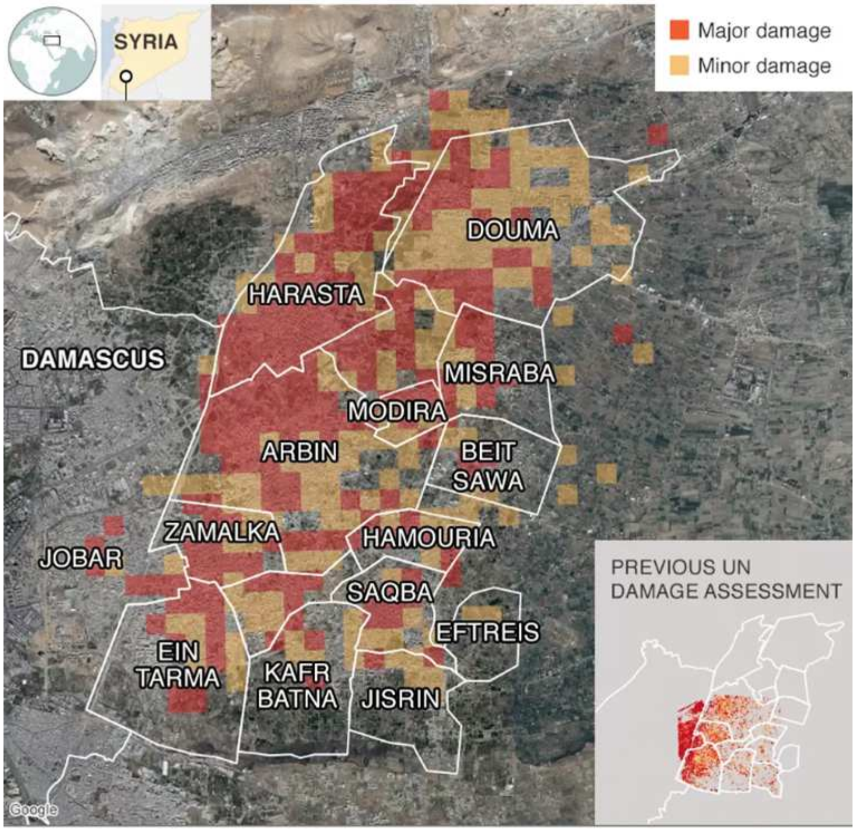
[202] Malik "The Political Economy of Reconstruction in the Arab World," 11.

[203] Daher "The Political Economic Context of Syria's Reconstruction."

[204] Sami Moubayed and Fadi Esber, "The Syrian Political Economy from 1946 to 2018: Patterns, Correlations and Insights for Designing Postwar Reconstruction," (Middle East Institute, 2018). 49-50.

II. Jobar: Background Information, Urban Plans, and the Impact of the Conflict

Jobar is a district of Damascus Governorate that is located in the northeast of Damascus City and is around five kilometres away from the city centre. It is considered the gateway to the capital for Rural Damascus and Eastern Ghouta and facilitates economic activities and trade between Rural Damascus and Damascus. Jobar is also important as it is considered a focal point due to its access to important traffic nodes such as Harasta, Zamalka, and Ain Terma. Additionally, the Southern Highway or the *Mutahhallek al-Janoubi* highway, which is the freeway that goes across the south of the capital from the far south to the north of the city, passes through Jobar. This also facilitates direct access from the towns of Eastern Ghouta to the capital and vice versa. Jobar is also directly linked to the Abbasiyyeen square in Damascus City which connects it to Damascus airport and to the city's most economically active areas. More importantly, Jobar is adjacent to the Qaboun area which contains Damascus' textile factories.


SYRIA
Major damage
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DOUMA
HARASTA
DAMASCUS
MISRABA
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ARBIN
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HAMOURIA
JOBAR
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JISRIN
PREVIOUS UN DAMAGE ASSESSMENT
Google
[205]

Jobar also is rich with religious and cultural artefacts including the famous Great Mosque of Jobar (also known as Al-Asma'i mosque), the shrine of the Al-Asma'i Arab literary scholar (740-828 AD) and the mosque of the Prophet Mohammad's (PBUH) companion Harmala bin Al-Waleed, whose grave is also located there. Additionally, Jobar contains one of the oldest synagogues in the world which is around 2,000 years old.[206] There is also a public Turkish bath in Jobar built by the Ottomans called the Old Hammam.

Before the conflict, Jobar's urban landscape consisted of formal and informal areas. Informal housing was mainly concentrated in the Qaboun neighbourhood of Damascus City and in Jobar due to the presence of industries and factories in Qaboun and Ghouta. According to Jomaa Hijazi, a lecturer at the Higher Institute for Population Studies and Research in Damascus City, Jobar before 2011 was characterised by high fertility rates, a population growth rate of more than 2.6, and fertility rates of around 4.1% per woman. Jobar was also characterised by its young population as children and adolescents were 45% of the overall population. According to government estimates, the population of Jobar in 2004 was 60,229. Hijazi stated that the number increased between 2004 and 2011 from 60229 to 67703. However, there is a lack of reliable available data on the exact number of residents living in Jobar today because the overwhelming majority have been forced to flee due to mass urban and infrastructural destruction, violence, and poor living conditions. Hijazi estimates that only a few thousand currently reside in Jobar.[207]

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[205] BBC (March 2018). https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-43154146
[206] "Historic Damascus Synagogue Looted and Destroyed | The Times of Israel." Accessed October 10, 2022. https://www.timesofisrael.com/historic-damascus-synagogue-looted-and-destroyed/.

When the armed rebellion emerged in Syria following protests to topple the government, their centres "of gravity came to be located in the informal settlements (and several regular neighbourhoods with a low socio-economic status),"[208] including Jobar where informal areas constituted 38% of the total area. As a result, Jobar became a target of military offences by the Syrian Army which has caused widespread destruction and displacement. While Damascus remained relatively undamaged, the same cannot be said for Jobar. According to Hijazi, The percentage of severely or completely destroyed housing units reached 70% of the total housing units. Most government buildings and public schools and health centres are completely destroyed while infrastructure such as water and electricity is nearly dysfunctional.[209] Based on satellite images acquired in 2016 by the United Nations Satellite Centre (UNOSAT), UNOSAT found that there are 17,043 damaged structures in Jobar and Irbin city. [210]

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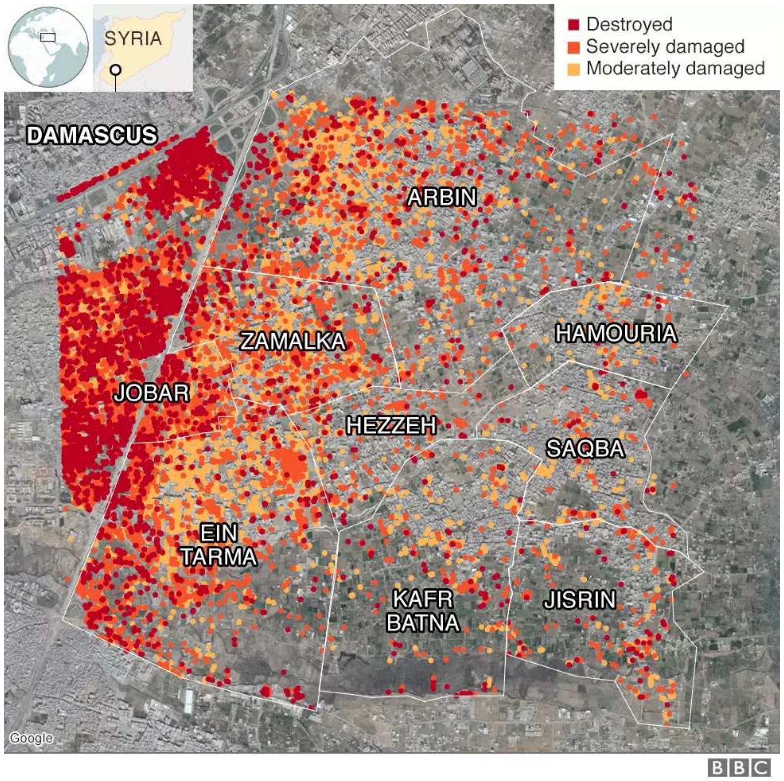
[207] Jomaa Hijazi in discussion with the author, December 2022.

[208] Wind, Barend, and Batoul Ibrahim. "The War-Time Urban Development of Damascus: How the Geography- and Political Economy of Warfare Affects Housing Patterns." *Habitat International* 96 (February 1, 2020): 102109. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2019.102109.

[209] Jomaa Hijazi in discussion.


SYRIA
Destroyed
Severely damaged
Moderately damaged
DAMASCUS
ARBIN
ZAMALKA
HAMOURIA
JOBAR
HEZZEH
SAQBA
EIN TARMA
KAFR BATNA
JISRIN
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BBC
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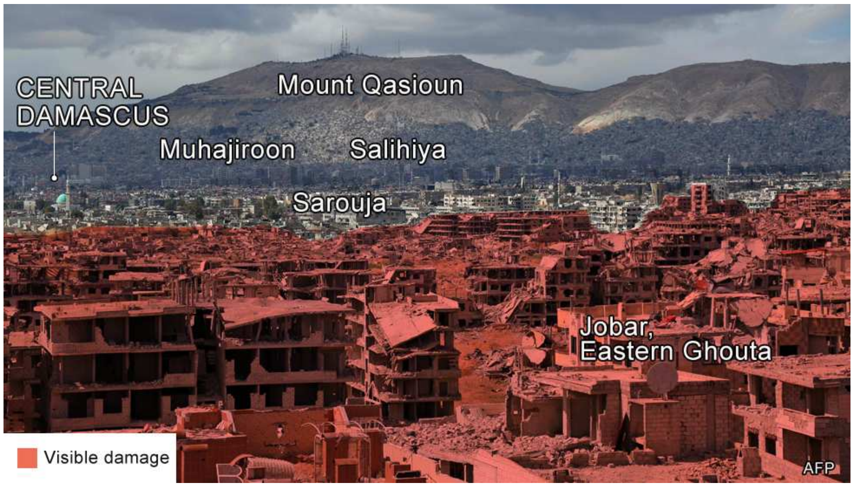
CENTRAL DAMASCUS
Mount Qasioun
Muhajiroon
Salihiya
Sarouja
Jobar, Eastern Ghouta
Visible damage
AFP
212

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[210] "UNOSAT." Accessed November 1, 2022. https://unosat.org/products/1132.
[211] BBC (March 2018).
[212] BBC (March 2018).

Before 1967, Jobar belonged geographically and administratively to the Rural Damascus Governorate. After 1967, a new urban plan for Damascus was issued which included Jobar as part of the city. The plan was approved by the regional technical committees of the Damascus governorate without input from residents of Jobar. The neighbourhood transformed as its traditional architecture and homes were replaced by formal residential and commercial real estate. However, due to slow and limited formal planning and waves of rural-urban migration, informal housing increased significantly during the last few decades. As a result, Jobar had a population density of more than 500 people per kilometre in 2011. Not only was there limited affordable housing, but the government also did not develop services in response to population growth.

Plan 107 for Greater Damascus, the urban plan which I had worked on while in government, was proposed in 2011, allowing for some participation in urban planning by assigning local councils to develop strategies. Its objectives included the need to build local administrative units capable of planning and implementing economic, social, cultural, and urban plans to achieve balanced and sustainable development in local communities. However, Plan 107 remained centralised and did not include a mechanism for developing, preparing and training councils to carry out these roles. As a result, Adnan Sallakho, Syria's Former Minister of Industry, asserted in an interview with me that "local councils did not understand that their role is to set the strategy for their province."[213] Local authorities' jurisdiction is limited to granting permits and approvals, keeping the city clean, transporting garbage, asphalting roads, and managing basic services such as water and electricity. They are therefore not involved in strategy development.[214]

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[213] Adnan Sallakho in discussion with the author, December 2022.

Additionally, the plan proposed that residential buildings with low floors constituted around 62% of the city while administrative and educational institutions occupied 5% of the area, green spaces occupied 15%, and transportation networks occupied 15%. This reduction in agricultural land completely transformed Jobar which was rich in greenery and produce farms that supplied Damascus residents. Groundwater was also rescinded up to 2011 due to increasing demands on basic services caused by population growth. As visible in the urban plan found below, housing areas take up the majority of the city:

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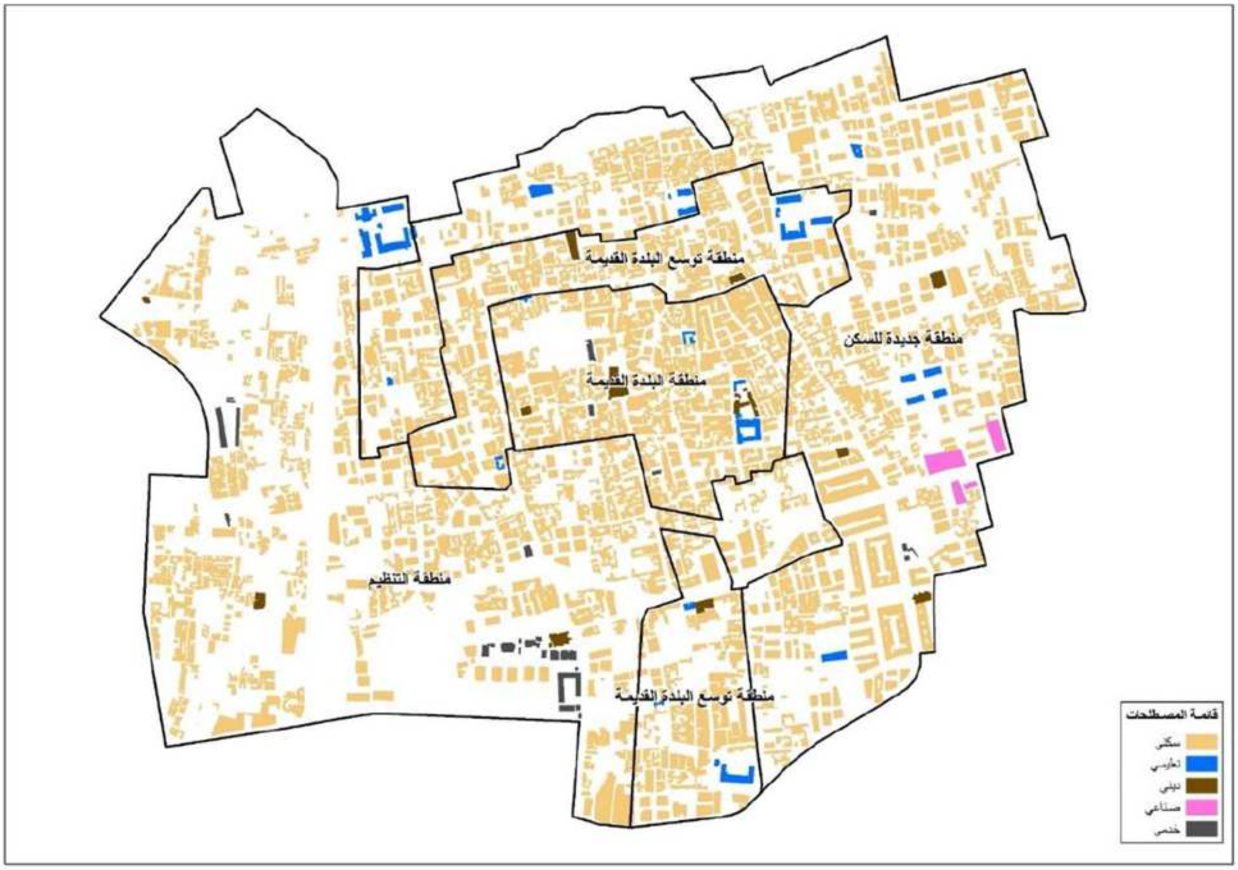
[214] Ibid.


منطقة توسع البلدة القديمة
منطقة جديدة للسكن
منطقة البلدة القديمة
منطقة التنظيم
منطقة توسع البلدة القديمة
قائمة المصطلحات
سكني
تعليمي
ديني
صناعي
خدمي

(**Beige**: housing areas; **blue**: education; **brown**: religious; **pink**: industrial; **black**: services)

Plan 106, the new proposed plan for greater damascus that the government issued in June 2022, includes several planning areas including Jobar, Qaboun, Zamalka and Ein Tarma. It was announced at Damascus Governorate's lobby and allows owners of lands to object the plan during the span of 30 days from the plan's announcement date[215] making it difficult for displaced people to prove ownership or object. Sallakho commented on the lack of participation in Jobar's urban plans and expressed that urban plans are developed by the technical offices of Damascus Governorate without any community participation. After drawing the plans, they are presented to residents at the municipality building where locals have only 30 days to object to the plan in person, which is problematic as the majority of the population are settled elsewhere and unable to return. Sallakho said that "community participation in laying the foundations of the urban plan does not exist."[216] He also asserted that the government does not have a clear plan or strategy with regard to return, which is required in order to reconstruct the city.[217]

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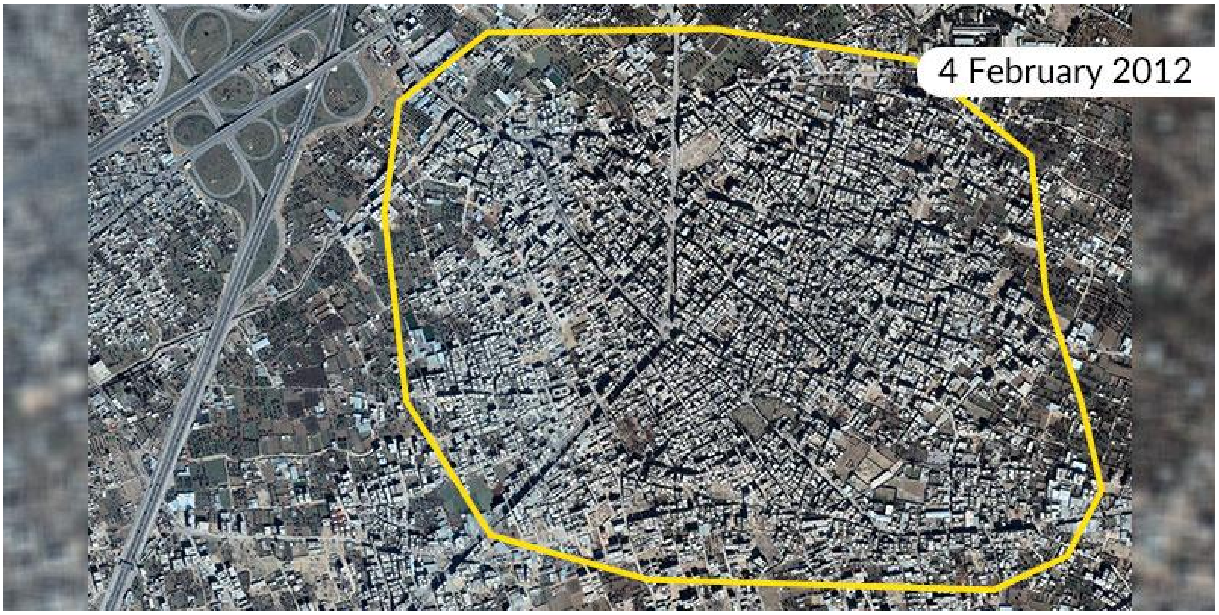
[215] Bassam Alahmed, "Syria: Urban Scheme for Jobar - a New Attempt to Seize Residents' Properties Based on Legislative Decree No.5," Syrians for Truth and Justice (blog), September 1, 2022. https://stj-sy.org/en/syria-urban-scheme-for-jobar-a-new-attempt-to-seize-residents-properties-based-on-legislative-decree-no-5/.

(Images below: Satellite images of Jobar one year into the conflict and almost one decade into the conflict which show the amount of destruction in the area).[218]



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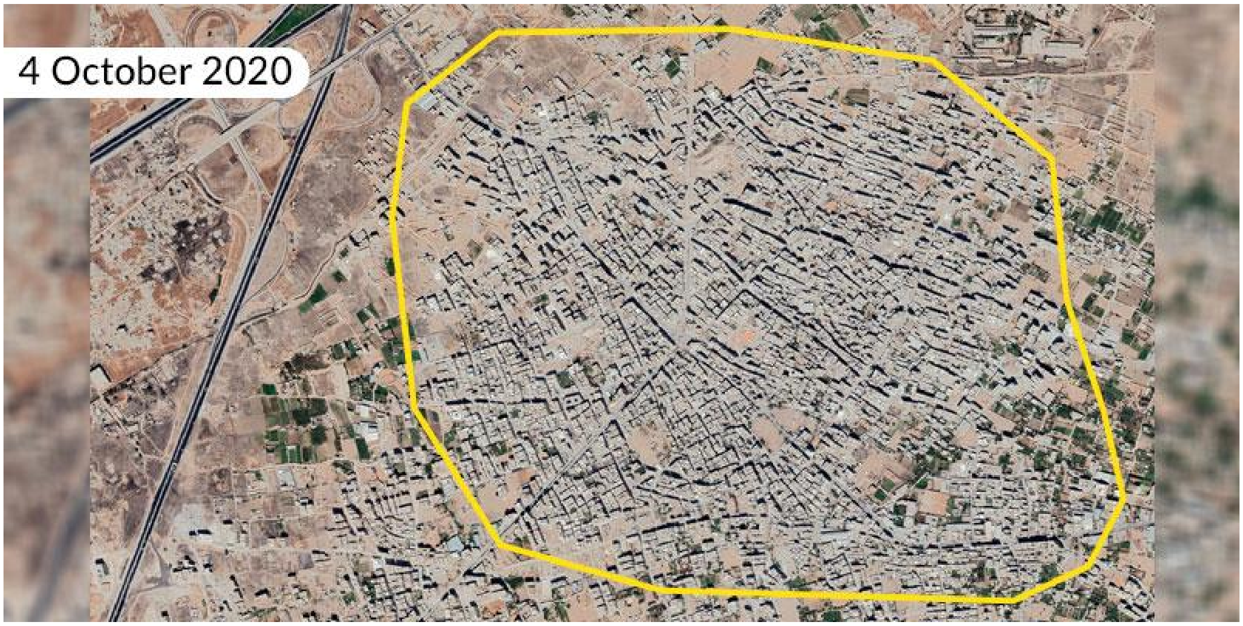
[216] Adnan Sallakho in discussion.
[217] Ibid.
[218] Alahmed, "Syria: Urban Scheme for Jobar."



III. Analysis: *RECONSTRUCT* in Jobar

This thesis critiques centralised approaches to reconstruction adopted by the Syrian government and proposes *RECONSTRUCT* as an interdisciplinary framework that allows us to consider a more equitable and sustainable urban planning for Jobar. It is an effort to learn from past mistakes and push for a strategy that is community driven and bottom-up. I believe *RECONSTRUCT* is the right approach because it includes informal settlements in organic city planning which is necessary for eventual social and economic cohesion and peace. This is pertinent in a context like that of Jobar where informal settlements make up a significant part of the district. I argue that applying *RECONSTRUCT's* values of community participation through the Minimum Viable Reconstruction Project (MVRP) and its emphasis on historical and cultural preservation is an equitable, sustainable, and affordable project. The plan represents inhabitants and "starts some healing process" through "reconstruction that takes place in small chunks and according to the local political economy," as Aziz Hallaj, a Syrian architect and development consultant, explained during an online interview with me two years ago.[219] *RECONSTRUCT* pushes for establishing centres, or cells, across Jobar to develop a cellular and well-connected city that shares resources. This develops social and economic cohesion and therefore sustainable peace, unlike current plans adopted by the Syrian government that are exclusionary and reinforce the authority of the state and cronies. By analysing government approaches using efficiency, inclusivity and effectiveness as points of view we can understand the importance of *RECONSTRUCT* in a setting such as Jobar.

From an efficiency perspective, the government of Syria cannot afford to rebuild Jobar through a top-down centralised approach. If the government gives the city the real estate vouchers, they will build apartments that are not environmentally friendly, provide no public space for people, and are directed to the upper-income bracket of society. A centralised approach will only strengthen the country's current political economies and the authority of real estate developers who are aligned with security and political elites that protect them.

Additionally, the framework the government is suggesting today is an extremely expensive exercise. The framework could have afforded to conduct urban planning of infrastructures and superstructures in 2010, but it cannot afford to do so today. Rebuilding Syria is an expensive project. Rebuilding over twenty cities and over two million destroyed houses will cost over 200 billion dollars. Neither the government, nor any international entity, is able to fund such a large project, especially one that includes significant infrastructure rehabilitation. A square metre of real estate for development in Syria costs on average around $700 with infrastructural development. In 2010, the private sector had enough confidence in the public sector to invest in such a project through public-private partnerships, while the government today is broke. The private sector also has no confidence in the government to invest in it. The only efficient way to rebuild Syria is through a bottom-up approach wherein the communities take the lead. We are currently in a long period of stagnation with mutilated urban centres that will grow as people will be forced to rebuild their homes, but without any particular approach or strategy. The government's deeply centralised and non-participatory approach today is unaffordable without the support of local communities. International investors may construct complexes and residential buildings for the upper class, but this will not reconstruct destroyed cities, nor sustain peace. If so, the same situation will repeat itself with increased informal housing and high end real estate development.

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[219] Aziz Hallaj in discussion with the author, 19 December 2020.

Reconstruction should also be inclusive, representing locals and funded by locals. A *RECONSTRUCT* approach can open the space for innovative financing methods allowing people to invest in their cities and towns. For example, urban rejuvenation can take place through collective ownership and people's ability to raise debt in international and regional capital markets, which helps manage the resources of small cities. Fiscal management of resources means better local tax collection, better investment in local infrastructure that would attract further investments, and better investments in local cultures that attract tourism and trade. Under a *RECONSTRUCT* framework, local development trust funds for Jobar and other cities may be developed to allow for participatory reconstruction. However, the current real estate and urban development financing mechanisms in Syria are not conducive for *RECONSTRUCT*. Financing mechanisms of local authorities and real estate development must also be reformed in order to match the organic bottom-up and people centric approach.

From an effective point of view, if these centralised approaches continue, Jobar will be another hot spot for an uprising in ten years time. Current plans in Syria failed before and if they are implemented here they will fail again. The government's plan also does not include a policy to attract refugees and IDPs to return to Jobar and invest in it. However, in order for reconstruction to be sustainable it must rely on technically capable individuals who are currently lacking in Rural Damascus due to large waves of displacement. Therefore, a reconstruction plan for Jobar must include a policy to attract people back to Jobar. If refugees come back, they will probably do so with some cash from the United Nations and the International Community. They will need a reconstruction strategy that enables them to trust local authorities, which I argue is *RECONSTRUCT*.

RECONSTRUCT shows that rebuilding Syria to support its inhabitants is not a hopeless case, but has to take place through participation. In order for locals to invest in reconstruction, they should have confidence and trust that their investments will not be ripped off by cronies. The UN and the international community should help in rebuilding the trust gap between people and local authorities in Syria, and support seed funding to create funds for reconstruction that are locally owned and managed. They can also provide technical assistance. Local trusts for developments can issue debts and bonds which local businesspeople can buy as an investment instead of bringing in large foreign companies that do not understand local dynamics. When you give the reconstruction businesses to local companies, cities will flourish, and more jobs will open up. At the same time, implementing a *RECONSTRUCT* framework reduces the burden from the shoulders of the state while empowering people because they will own and manage the funds. It provides hope for a peaceful future for Syria where Syrians can claim their cities.

CONCLUSION

This thesis is an evidence-based document on why the Syrian government, or any government or international organisation, cannot continue approaching reconstruction from the top-down. Although it is not an architectural project, it examines *RECONSTRUCT* from a multidisciplinary perspective to explore how a reconstruction plan built on *RECONSTRUCT's* objectives and values can develop Jobar. The analysis provides insight to first-hand encounters of macro-development projects and a literature review on political economy and reconstruction, to argue that traditional approaches to reconstruction will not result in sustainable cities. It provided analyses of Beirut, Mosul, and Kabul to show the negative impacts of top-down reconstruction on social cohesion, inclusiveness, efficiency, and equality. With *RECONSTRUCT*, people are included in building their cities, and neighbourhoods are self-reliant and well-connected, limiting risks of relapsing into conflict. Therefore, I argue that *RECONSTRUCT* is the sustainable and affordable reconstruction strategy that can bring peace back to Jobar and develop social cohesion.

In addition to encouraging participation and inclusion, *RECONSTRUCT* is also the most efficient reconstruction strategy for Syria. Neither the Syrian government nor the international community have the funds necessary to rebuild the country. However Syria needs to be rebuilt, and the government cannot afford its centralised reconstruction plan, leaving its options limited. By developing trust between populations and government entities, a *RECONSTRUCT* approach encourages community investments and funds to rebuild cities and towns. This, in return, brings back profit to locals and develops economic activities in each cell of Jobar. With *RECONSTRUCT*, Jobar can become a district of cells that are self-sufficient and diverse, connected to neighbouring cells that do not need to rely on the central government consistently, nor does the central government have to invest highly to support them. In *RECONSTRUCT*, urban development strategies are developed and implemented according to the historical, social, economic, and political contexts of the local communities. However, for *RECONSTRUCT* to be applied in Syria, changes in regulations and urban plans by the government should take place.

Finally, it is important to note that the analysis of the thesis is also an effort to contribute Syrian national reconstruction policies in order to help build a peaceful and equitable Syria. It hopes to identify why *RECONSTRUCT,* an organic, bottom-up, and locally owned strategy, is the best viable solution for Jobar, its residents,, the government, and the international community.

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