Conclusion

Building peace and resilience for Lebanon

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How the Lebanese people perceive their nation, state and fellow citizens; their frustrations and expectations; and their priorities in terms of identity and security: all these issues are vital to determine an equitable and viable Lebanese state, free from ideological prejudices and imposed external interests. Individuals, trans-sectarian civil associations and NGOs, as well as organised groups such as political parties and unions, need to be encouraged and supported to engage in dialogue, share knowledge and build trust on core issues for peace and stability. To achieve this, they need to be guaranteed freedom of expression.

Looking back to move forward

The government's refusal to deal with the past (the infamous 'state-sponsored amnesia') places even more importance on civil initiatives to promote memory and reconciliation – many examples of which are highlighted in this publication. These demonstrate popular desire and innovation to address the psychosocial legacy of the war.

But at present civil efforts are largely restricted to Beirut intelligentsia. To be effective, these need to be much more inclusive and extended beyond urban and intellectual elites in order to incorporate peripheral districts and grassroots. Structures exist in Lebanon to help realise this. Established, elder-led rural traditions and norms for peaceful mediation, which combine civil law and tribal codes within local justice systems, could provide channels for national reconciliation processes to reach marginalised and remote populations.

Lebanese history is taught in ways that can be sectarian, confining memory of the war to partisan perspectives, sustaining divisions between communities and fuelling distrust. The Ministry of Education should resume efforts to review and revise history curricula for schools. Rather than develop an amalgam or official history, however, it should create space for narratives of the war that better

accommodate and acknowledge different views, and so improve understanding of the 'other'.

It is the responsibility of Lebanese religious clerics of all denominations as well as secular intellectuals to connect with each other in peaceful debate on shared humanitarian, ethical and spiritual values, which can underpin national political life and state policies across all constituencies. Clerics can also reach out to engage extremists from within their own confessions.

Post-war demobilisation, demilitarisation and reintegration of militias has been piecemeal and selective – with Hezbollah the most obvious example. Significant sectors of society remain armed and ready for violent mobilisation, including post-war generations. Flawed reintegration policies have led to the militarisation of politics rather than the civilianisation of militias, as quasi-operative militia fighters have been incorporated into partisan national institutions by political leaders, many of whom are themselves former warlords. Although the armed forces have been rehabilitated and reorganised, sectarian tensions and conflicting political priorities have weakened its role, limiting its operation to strict confines agreed between powerful elites.

State-led return and reconciliation programmes for thousands of Lebanese displaced by the war have either not been completed, or have reinforced social and political segregation. They have variously ignored local traditions, customs and other common reconciliation approaches based on acknowledgement and forgiveness, or have misguidedly been underpinned by a communal rather than an individual rationale. Victims have been explicitly excluded from discussions on returnee policy, while some reparations have been made conditional on recipients accepting official 'reconciliation agreements'.

Lebanon has a history of social mobilisation to press for political change – from before, during and after the war.

Grassroots mobilisation in the late 1990s around common rights succeeded in making a political impact. Anti-confessional demonstrations in Lebanon in 2011 – inspired by the Arab Spring – illustrate popular (particularly youth) dissatisfaction with the current political setup. But the ability of 8 and 14 March Alliances rapidly to divide and co-opt demonstrators exposes the weakness and disunity of Lebanese civil society. The potential of the Lebanese people to affect positive change needs to be supported rather than dismissed.

Honouring the social contract

Ultimately, engineering real and lasting peace is the responsibility of Lebanon's political class; to build a meaningful social contract so that all Lebanese can trust the state to provide (at least in part) security, political freedom and social justice, rather than looking to confessional and sectarian communities either inside or outside Lebanon's borders.

This requires root and branch political reform to transform Lebanon's 'cosmetic democracy' – in which human rights are flouted, most obviously for Palestinian refugees and migrant workers, gender equality is denied, and confessional leaders and state institutions are prone to authoritarianism. The confessional political system with the executive 'Troika' at its summit is at best ineffectual, and at worst a catalyst for conflict.

A concerted and gradualist strategy is required that both acknowledges the realities of confessionalism and leads clearly towards genuine and inclusive representation. This would allow people to see progress in a functioning political process. A starting point could be an audit of the process of reform of public administration – promised at Taif, inscribed on the agenda of every subsequent government and heavily supported by international institutions and Western partners.

Three domains should be prioritised – as these provoke unanimous criticism among Lebanese and are crucial for the legitimacy of the state:

1. reduction of tensions around economic and social inequality: ensure investment in key infrastructure; and address socio-economic welfare and extreme poverty, in particular serving the needs of marginalised and peripheral populations

2. legal disentanglement of public and private sectors in order to ensure fair and efficient access to essential services such as fresh water, electricity and telephone

3. effective political decentralisation, to restore public confidence in state institutions and facilitate political participation of peripheral, marginalised and younger groups

Legitimising the state would offer a solid basis for the government to start implementing political reforms, ongoing delays of which accrue risk of a return to civil war. There is widespread consensus that the Taif power sharing formula reinforces unfair representation in terms of age, gender and region – not to forget sect.

Confessional belonging hampers the freedom of individual social and political choice and blurs state-citizen relations. Many Lebanese, especially youth and women, question the democracy of the Lebanese power sharing formula and trust neither their leaders' capacity nor inclination to bring about reform. Only social justice (to respond to deepening frustration) and political distancing from confessionalism (to defuse sectarian strife) can alleviate violence and enmity.

Lebanese leaders should not delay reform policies but should look to adopt and implement them as early as possible – for example as part of the 2013 legislative elections. A good starting point would be electoral reforms suggested by the Butros Commission and accepted in principle by deputies in 2008: lowering voting age to 18, organising the vote of expatriate nationals and facilitating the election of women. They should also reopen National Dialogue negotiations to build minimal consensus on national identity and security policy and prepare for the complete return of the rule of law and state monopoly on the use of force.

Reforms should be negotiated as balanced 'packages' that enable various parties, political blocs and interest groups to compensate losses with benefits – for example realising proposals for a confessional Senate to offset reforms designed to deconfessionalise parliament. As well as empowering small local administrative units, decentralisation could provide a broad framework for reform, helping to redefine the relationship between central and local authorities, and to re-think key issues of representation, participation, accountability, local development and ultimately the political system itself.

Sovereign resilience

Although Lebanese cannot exercise sole control over it, managing their regional environment is an essential condition for solid and lasting peace. External dangers are real, present and proximate. Lebanon's territorial borders and maritime boundaries are variously disputed and porous. They can provide flashpoints for political violence: despite the presence of UN peacekeepers, clashes between the Lebanese Armed Forces and Israel Defence Forces in August 2010 show how the border with Israel remains controversial and unstable. Meanwhile Lebanon's border

with Syria provides a channel for illicit arms transfers in both directions. There is a risk too that Syria's internal conflict could spill further into northern regions of Lebanon – especially Sunni and Alawite neighbourhoods of Tripoli – as well as into Beirut neighbourhoods.

The failure of Lebanon's state institutions to manage internal conflict encourages leaders to look to neighbouring states for protection. Political blocs and associated sectarian communities present external ties as non-negotiable and immutable, for example 8 March Alliance and Hezbollah's links with Syria and Iran; or 14 March Alliance's hostility to Syria and embrace of the West.

As a small and poorly armed country (at least in its official national forces) Lebanon should not feel threatened by unchecked Israeli interventions or by Syrian diktats – not to mention transnational terrorism. The Israeli border has remained peaceful since the 2006 war. Apparent border disputes like the Chebaa Farms are a strategic pretext for violence rather than a territorial issue.

But the most important issue paralysing change in Lebanon today is Hezbollah's arms. This cannot be solved unilaterally without *détente* on the Syrian-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli fronts in conformity with international law. Similarly, the current uprising and state repression in Syria underline the need for Beirut to clarify relations with Damascus and make sure that this is a conversation between two independent and sovereign states.

The parallel existence of a large but weak national army and Hezbollah's small but well-armed militia at a time when regional tensions and transnational Islamist militancy threaten national security is a particular challenge to Lebanon's sovereignty.

Today, Lebanon, Israel and Syria need diplomatic and capacity support: to cultivate political will in order to resolve outstanding border and boundary disputes; and to provide technical expertise on demarcation. The international community and the Arab League should end the practice of considering Lebanon a weak state whose fate is best entrusted to external actors, as they have since 1975.

External partners need to be coordinated and consistent. A key challenge for the international community is to show that strategic regional politics do not trump international law: many Lebanese perceive the failure of the UN to follow-up on explicit requirements for Israel to withdraw from areas belonging to Lebanon (ie north Ghajar) as a double standard. In return, Lebanese leaders should face up to their strategic responsibilities and become accountable for national security.

Addressing Lebanon's conflict system

Lebanon's conflict 'system' feeds on complex interaction between *levels* (official and unofficial), and *environments* (internal and external). Long-term projects to build sustainable peace are repeatedly overwhelmed by immediate security emergencies. Reconciliation, reform and national self-determination do not exist in isolation, but should be addressed together. Conflict response strategies need to identify and manipulate leverage points within the system to promote positive change.

Hezbollah's various personae illustrate overlaps between internal and external conflict dynamics in Lebanon: their causes and effects; how perceptions differ according to audience; and the confusion this instils in those claiming to build peace. Is Hezbollah a legitimate domestic political power and champion of disenfranchised Lebanese Shia, to be engaged with and supported? Is it an epitome of resistance to Israeli occupation and belligerence, and an essential and justified regional vanguard of Arab, Muslim and Palestinian emancipation and solidarity? Or is it a proxy of radical regimes in Tehran and Damascus, and as such rightfully proscribed by US and UK anti-terrorist legislation?

It is essential to acknowledge and engage with the complex reality of Lebanon's conflict system. Domestic political reform and national reconciliation are key sources of sovereign resilience to external challenges, to bolster national self-determination and to uphold Lebanese security. Power shifts in Damascus, while risky and unpredictable, could in the longer term free up political space for Lebanese parties – in particular Hezbollah – to focus more on domestic priorities.

Resuming the National Dialogue, started in 2006, could provide an opportunity to refocus internally. The Dialogue brought together leaders of key sectarian groups and political affiliations in the broadest gathering since the civil war, to address issues ranging from the status of the president, assassinations of prominent Lebanese figures, disputed border regions and the disarmament of Hezbollah.

The Dialogue could be a positive step to bring opposing Lebanese positions closer together on the definition of state security and national strategy, based on achievable and incremental objectives and including all Lebanese parties. A key step would be to find ways to extend or 'democratise' dialogue, to include Lebanese people's participation and perspectives so that they are party to any deals reached on their future, and so are part of implementing solutions for positive change.