

# Introduction

## Positive peace for Lebanon: reconciling society; reforming the state; realising sovereignty

Elizabeth Picard and Alexander Ramsbotham

Lebanon's much praised post-war model of power sharing and liberal economic growth has failed to deliver for most Lebanese. As repeated outbreaks of political violence since the 1989 Taif Agreement testify, a fundamentally different approach is needed to transform negative and precarious stability in Lebanon into positive and resilient peace.

### Peace deficit on three levels

The 'peace dividend' for the Lebanese is undermined by three levels of predicament – social, governmental and regional-international – which interact, reverberate and fuel each other. The Lebanese situation is often presented as an inextricable conundrum at the mercy of external influences, to which many Lebanese (and also analysts) have surrendered, jokingly remarking that their country survived nearly a century of crises and has not done too badly 'in the end'.

Such a judgment is offhand, outdated, obstructive and inaccurate. As the contributions to this Accord publication show, Lebanese are not merely passive victims of a violent fate, determined largely outside their country's borders. Many are hungry for change and have been actively exploring opportunities and pushing boundaries to achieve it.

Independent Lebanon appeared to do relatively well in the 1950s and 1960s. But social tensions grew alongside the economy and a shifting demographic balance saw rural communities (such as the Shia) expand twice as rapidly as urban communities (such as the Greek-Orthodox). Regional crises surrounding the fate of the Palestinians – not least the relocation of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation to Lebanon from the late 1960s – succeeded from the early 1970s in destroying 'miracle' Lebanon. War broke out in 1975.

Today's situation is comparable with the pre-war years, when the combination of domestic tensions and regional pressures resulted in the breakdown of the Lebanese state

and the destruction of the country. In fact, contemporary conditions are perhaps even more precarious. Economic outlooks are grim (although a few dream of 'sea-gas boom' from recent discoveries in the eastern Mediterranean), emigration of qualified Lebanese is even higher than during wartime, and acute underdevelopment of peripheral areas has still not been properly addressed.

In the Middle East region, religious intolerance has replaced Arab nationalist pressures. Sectarian tensions within Lebanon are legitimised and reinforced by a global discourse on 'cultural differences' and by regional appetites for power, namely between Riyadh and Tehran. Palestinian-Israeli relations are deteriorating as military containment appears to be the only 'solution' in town. In response, Lebanese leaders withdraw into conservatism and seek to protect their privileges, blocking practically every peacebuilding initiative and expected reform.

### Peace process: *plus ça change?*

Flaws in the Taif peace settlement continue to resonate and undermine peace today, leaving Lebanese political life stuck in stalemate that has lasted longer than the war itself. In reality, Taif was effectively a ceasefire with ambitious – but hollow – promises, which it is doubtful that those involved in its creation intended to fulfil. Agreed by elites (pre-war and wartime), the revised 'national deal' to share power amongst a conservative oligarchy has done little to extend political inclusion or representation, but rather has enabled leaders to tighten their grip. Confessional political structures decided at Taif have facilitated the extension, elaboration and entrenchment of civil war sectarian animosities.

Lebanon's post-war 'cosmetic democracy' has left internal tensions vulnerable and sensitive to regional interests and instability – namely Syrian interference and Israeli armed threat and incursions. However, looking primarily

outside Lebanon's borders for either causes or solutions to Lebanon's problems mitigates its political leaders' domestic responsibilities, and ignores the Lebanese people's insights and capacity to affect change. Key issues like Hezbollah's arms are intrinsically linked to Syrian-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli developments; but Hezbollah is also a domestic actor.

It is time for Lebanon to wake up to the reality of its situation. If there is to be a democratic and prosperous Lebanon tomorrow – or, some might question, even a Lebanon at all – there should be a move away from criticism, illusion, despair or passive acceptance, to a sense of responsibility, accountability and active initiative. Lebanon's people need to find ways to empower themselves to move forward, so that the reforms which were deemed necessary at Taif are implemented, so that building national consensus and reconciliation are pursued as priorities, and so that policies are adopted that allow their state to survive and manage its perilous environment.

### **Structure of the publication**

This issue of *Accord* is organised into three sections – reconciling society; reforming the state; and realising sovereignty. These structural distinctions should not disguise that each section reflects questions discussed in the other two. The issues examined receive complementary analysis and understanding through changes in perspective, as actors from each level – local, national and international – are interrelated through overlapping associations and interests.

The publication includes contributions from diverse perspectives and disciplines: applied and analytical, and from inside and outside the country – including researchers, analysts, activists, marginalised voices, parties, politicians, practitioners and policymakers.

While we commissioned and interviewed a range of different actors, we paid special attention to underprivileged and – represented groups in Lebanon's misleadingly open and egalitarian society: namely youth and women. Representation according to a pervading narrative of the history of identity groups and their interactions are of particular importance to a study of peace in Lebanon, in order to take stock of the disparate demands and attitudes of the Lebanese toward their society, state and public administration.

### **Reconciling society**

This section of the publication looks at social challenges to building peace in Lebanon, discussing issues of memory, identity, marginalisation, reconciliation and citizenship, as well as the potential for social mobilisation to contribute to political change.

Sune Haugbølle introduces the section by reviewing efforts to pursue reconciliation and deal with the past. He explores issues of memory and remembering, including Lebanon's 'state-sponsored amnesia' over the war years, and the role of culture and of civil society in documenting and discussing them. He considers options to integrate civil and national reconciliation initiatives and to involve political elites, as well as the potential of rural and traditional conflict resolution structures to engage grassroots.

To illustrate civil initiatives for memorialisation, Liliane Kfoury describes the Association for Documentation and Research (UMAM D & R), which gathers wartime testimonies of combatants, politicians, civilians, the displaced and relatives of missing people, in order to help preserve 'collective memory' of the war.

In conversation with *Accord*, Ahmad Beydoun describes how the teaching of history is sectarian for many Lebanese. He stresses the importance of narrative diversity in recollecting experiences of the war, and the potential of a coordinated national educational curriculum to help accommodate and acknowledge different views as a means to improve understanding of the 'other'.

Civil mobilisation has had a mixed record as an agent for political change in Lebanon. Marie-Noëlle AbiYaghi reviews the history and impact of Lebanese civil activism from before the war until the present day. She focuses in particular on anti-sectarian demonstrations in Beirut in 2011, which not only exposed growing popular appetite for de-confessionalised politics, but also reinforced civil society's susceptibility to political interests and interference.

Looking more specifically at youth activism and in particular the 2005 'Independence Intifada' demonstrations against Syrian occupation, Jamil Mouawad discusses the political potential of young Lebanese.

Dima de Clerck then reviews post-war rehabilitation of demobilised Lebanese militia, describing how this has been piecemeal, selective and politicised. Many former fighters remain unemployed and have been left to deal with the psychosocial scars of wartime violence. The fact that a new post-war generation of youth is being recruited through a heroic imagining of the war highlights the dangers of neglecting rehabilitation of ex-fighters.

Religion is central to Lebanese politics and society. Mohammad Sammak reviews priorities and processes of interfaith dialogue to promote tolerance and reconciliation. He describes challenges related to the conflation of religion and politics, as well as the contribution of faith to peacebuilding, including the extent of its social reach: down

to grassroots; out to peripheries; up to political elites; and across sectarian divides.

Fawwaz Traboulsi discusses secularisation, in particular Lebanon's constitutional schizophrenia that simultaneously promises and precludes deconfessionalisation. He also considers the problems of religious consensus and of maintaining the political *status quo*, and the relationship between secularisation and Lebanese national identity.

The patriarchal structure of Lebanese society helps to entrench legal and political restraints on women's participation. Based on interviews with women from Lebanese political parties, Victoria Stamadianou reflects on the possible role of both Lebanese women and of women's issues in promoting trans-sectarian political engagement and peacebuilding.

Finally in this section, Nawaf Kabbara describes how Lebanon's disabled community successfully contributed to anti-war movements using a rights-based approach. Since the end of the war, however, civil society has struggled to sustain cohesion: the disability movement has felt abandoned, while other organisations have become wary of challenging powerful Lebanese religious institutions.

## Reforming the state

The Taif Agreement included comprehensive pledges for political reform. This section of the publication reflects on the reality of post-war experiences of institutional and constitutional reform as a means to promote more participatory and representative governance, highlighting successes, failures, obstacles and opportunities.

In an introduction to the section, Karam Karam explains how both the content and implementation of Taif have precluded genuine political reform or social change, due to structural defects including: flawed revision of confessional power sharing arrangements and a dysfunctional executive Troika; surrendering core state responsibilities to Syrian tutelage; guaranteeing power to warlords; and the marginalisation of key social issues. Karam suggests constructive lessons for the future, based on a framework of political decentralisation and balanced reform 'packages' as part of a clear, incremental strategy.

Interviews with Ali Fayyad (8 March Alliance/Hezbollah MP) and Samir Frangieh (member of the General Secretariat of 14 March Alliance and a former MP) then present perspectives from Lebanon's two main opposing political blocs, regarding: internal and external sources of tension; implications of Taif for contemporary political stability; developing the social contract in Lebanon; and priorities for the future.

Lebanon's convoluted consociational political system is associated with many of the country's political problems. Ziad Majed unpacks its intricacies and impediments, explaining how its apparent intent to guarantee participation in state institutions through consensus and inclusion has in fact obstructed reform, empowering elites that are resistant to change.

Mass displacement during the war resulted in 'confessional cleansing' in many areas. Aida Kanafani-Zahar looks at state returnee policy in the Mount Lebanon region, which purportedly prioritised reconciliation between Christian and Druze to prevent cyclical violence, but in fact has left little room for victims' testimony or memories. Broader goals of 'pacification' and a communal rather than individual rationale have fuelled sectarianism and fed into national-level power struggles.

Chandra Lekha Sriram asks if the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, set up to investigate the assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri, can support a broader function for transitional justice and peace. To date, both the creation and subsequent operation of the tribunal have been politically divisive, generating parliamentary stand-offs and government collapse.

Post-war reconstruction in Lebanon has favoured the powerful. Exploring the intricacies of monetary and fiscal policies, Sami Atallah explains intrinsic and unhealthy links between politics and economics in Lebanon since the end of the war and how these have impacted negatively on social justice and stability. He also points to the failure of international engagement to challenge these dynamics.

## Realising sovereignty

Instability in Lebanon is often blamed on external influence and interference: Syria and Iran, Israel and the West, Palestine and the Palestinians, and Shia and Sunni tensions. This section examines Lebanon within its regional context, unpacking internal and external relationships, and asking how Lebanese people and politics can safeguard domestic priorities against regional hegemony and transnational dynamics, to build sovereign resilience from the inside out.

Marie-Joëlle Zahar opens the section by challenging prevailing perceptions of the Lebanese as powerless victims of their external environment. She suggests that the roots of Lebanon's vulnerability are internal and emanate from state weakness, as suspicion among Lebanese communities and endemic distrust of Beirut to uphold citizens' interests encourages Lebanese leaders to actively seek protection from abroad.

Joseph Bahout examines armed groups in Lebanon and their various agendas, internal and external. He focuses on

Hezbollah: its relations with both its domestic constituency and with Syria, and its role as a resistance force to Israel. He reflects on the potential impact of the Syrian crisis, and the challenges that overlapping agendas present within Lebanon – for dialogue and internal consensus, and for stability and sovereignty.

Michael Kerr then reviews the largely negative impact of external interventions in Lebanon with regard to consolidating peace. These are primarily driven by external (often conflicting) strategic interests, and interact with Lebanon's sectarian political power sharing system to encourage and embed rivalry amongst Lebanese leaders seeking external patronage.

Shia and Sunni militancy are increasing sources of tension in Lebanon. Bernard Rougier reflects on their evolution, domestic constituencies, regional ties and international drivers and catalysts. Meanwhile developments in Syria also exacerbate friction. More accurate and deeper analysis of the intricacies of these relationships would help to clarify distinctions between social ties, identity values and interests of political entrepreneurs. Combined with the development of communication between the relevant leaders in Lebanon, this could facilitate better understanding as a basis for peacebuilding.

The Palestinian question has weighed heavily in Lebanon, before, during and after the war. Articles by Sari Hanafi and Suhail Natour explore the contemporary status of Palestinians in the country – legally and socio-economically, as well as links to religious radicalism. Hanafi focuses on governance within Palestinian camps and relations with broader Lebanese politics, arguing that a more constructive approach to governance and rights for Palestinians would in fact reinforce Lebanese sovereignty and security. Natour unpacks relationships between Islamism and Palestinian political mobilisation – in Lebanon and the region more broadly.

Nahla Chahal explores the reciprocal nature of Lebanon's relationship with Syria, reviewing contemporary history to explain its evolution and complexity at political and socio-economic levels. She emphasises that recent events in Syria and their cross-border impact in Lebanon highlight the need for Lebanon to disentangle itself from its neighbour and clarify relations between the two countries.

Ghassan El-Ezzi and Oren Barak reflect on relations between Lebanon and Israel, from Lebanese and Israeli perspectives, respectively. They discuss ongoing tensions between the two countries, paying particular attention to implications for peace in Lebanon. El-Ezzi examines barriers to achieving peace – or even to opening talks – between the two countries. He looks at internal divisions

and Syrian influence in Lebanon, as well as prevailing Lebanese opinion of Israel as a military power with designs on key Lebanese resources, and explores relations between Lebanon's national security and Hezbollah's 'resistance' role. Barak focuses on more tranquil periods in relations between the two states, reflecting on lessons that might be learnt from these for improved security in the future.

General Nizar Kader focuses on challenges relating to Lebanon's borders, specifically demarcation of disputed areas like the Chebaa Farms, as well as delineating maritime boundaries in view of recent discoveries of natural gas reserves in the eastern Mediterranean. He describes how porous and disputed borders serve as pretexts for political violence or channels for illicit arms transfers. Timur Goksel then analyses the UN Interim Force for Lebanon (UNIFIL), explaining that its role in patrolling Lebanon's border with Israel is more political than military. It has correspondingly played key functions in facilitating liaison between Lebanese and Israeli militaries, as well as with local Lebanese in the south.

Duccio Bandini discusses EU support for Lebanon, and in particular the role of the Instrument for Stability (IfS). EU engagement is increasingly looking to prioritise conflict sensitivity, moving beyond a primarily post-conflict recovery approach to address structural drivers of conflict. This has led to a renewed focus on supporting conflict prevention and peacebuilding tools geared towards dialogue and reconciliation, promoting electoral reform and reconciliation, and emphasising participation and civil society as a means to promote inclusion.

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