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Reconciliation, reform and resilience **Positive peace for Lebanon**

**POLICY
BRIEF**



Peace deficit for the Lebanese

A fundamentally different approach is needed to transform precarious stability in Lebanon into durable peace. Repeated outbreaks of political violence since the 1989 Taif Peace Accord show that Lebanon's model of power sharing and liberal economic growth, while widely praised, has in reality failed to deliver a noticeable peace dividend.

“What accounts for the vulnerability of Lebanon's politics? The state is weak relative to society. The state is also soft; its boundaries are permeable to foreign influences”

Marie-Jöelle Zahar, Accord special adviser

In reality, contemporary conditions for many Lebanese are perhaps even more perilous than the pre-war years: economic outlooks are grim; emigration of qualified Lebanese is even higher than during the war; and acute underdevelopment of peripheral areas has still not been properly addressed.

There have been positive achievements since the end of the war: reconstruction of downtown Beirut; growth in GDP; legislative, presidential and local elections; and return of internal security forces to their primary task of ensuring daily public safety. The recent resumption of the National Dialogue has brought together sectarian and political leaders to address important challenges to Lebanon's national security: the status of the president, truth and justice on political assassination, disputed border regions and the prevalence of arms outside state control – with a view to empowering state security agencies and adopting a national defence strategy.

But the peace dividend is highly unbalanced. Post-war policies for reconstruction and liberal economic reform have favoured the entrepreneurial class, their Syrian partners and financial elites. Social issues have been sidelined and many groups remain marginalised. The state has reneged on its responsibilities to deliver health, education and transportation, for which provision by confessional institutions and international NGOs cannot compensate. The National Dialogue does little to promote vital softer security objectives linked to peacebuilding, and it encounters recurrent blockages because it is the preserve of a ruling elite that 'agrees to disagree', thereby ensuring immobility.

“Lebanon's collective amnesia, resulting partly from the general amnesty law of 1991, has been fostered by political elites who played a role in the civil war and have refused public debates that could implicate them”

Sune Haugbølle, Accord special adviser

Challenges to peace for the Lebanese exist on three levels – social, governmental and regional-international – which

interact, reverberate and fuel each other. Peacebuilding responses to promote reconciliation, reform and national resilience demand equal attention and need to be addressed strategically and simultaneously.

Looking back to move forward

Relations between Lebanese communities are key to building sustainable peace. The government's refusal to deal with the past underscores the importance of the many Lebanese civil initiatives that exist to promote memory and reconciliation. These demonstrate ingenuity and a popular desire to address the psychosocial legacy of the war. But at present prominent civil efforts are restricted to Beirut. To be effective, these need to be much more inclusive, and extended beyond urban and intellectual elites to incorporate peripheral districts and grassroots.

Returnee programmes for people displaced during the war are incomplete or have reinforced social and political segregation. They have variously ignored local customs and common reconciliation approaches based on acknowledgement and forgiveness, or have been communal rather than individual. Victims have been explicitly excluded from discussions on returnee policy, while some reparations have been made conditional on recipients accepting official 'reconciliation agreements'.

“The civil war has not been submitted to the 'labour of memory' that true reconciliation would need. Attempts at writing an educational narrative of the war that have been promoted by the state have tended to reproduce the main cleavages that characterised the war itself”

Ahmad Beydoun, Accord contributor

The teaching of Lebanese history is often sectarian as many Lebanese schools are confessional, sustaining divisions between communities and fuelling distrust. Attempts by the government to develop a unified history textbook after the war have been unsuccessful. In a divided society like Lebanon, diversity needs to be acknowledged through different – even contradictory – narratives of past events. Alternative perspectives do not have to be antagonistic, but can generate dialogue, recognising each other's existence and inviting response. This could be a first step for Lebanese society to move toward embracing debate, remembering and reconciliation.

Demobilisation, demilitarisation and reintegration of militias has been piecemeal and selective – with Hezbollah the most obvious example. Significant sectors of society remain armed, including post-war generations, and reintegration policies have in fact militarised politics as militia have been incorporated into partisan national institutions, often by former warlords turned politicians. Although the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) have

Representatives of Lebanon's religious communities stand with protesters behind a banner reading 'We have only each other' as they take part in a demonstration against the possibility of renewed civil war outside the National Museum of Beirut on 31 May 2012 // © JOSPEH EID/AFP/Getty Images



been reorganised, sectarian tensions and conflicting political priorities have severely weakened their role.

Lebanon has a history of social mobilisation – 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 set-up. 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. More coordinated civil society action would provide a stronger platform to advocate for positive political change.

Strengthening the social contract

A meaningful social contract so that all Lebanese can trust the state is crucial to building peace in Lebanon. Citizens need to believe that the state can and will provide (at least in part) security, political freedom and social justice. This will mean they look less to confessional and sectarian communities either inside or outside Lebanon's borders.

“Selective implementation of the Taif Agreement has belied the essence of its stated objectives. Arbitrary and partial application of reforms ... have in fact exacerbated confessional tension and competition”

Karam Karam, Accord special adviser

Comprehensive political reform is needed to transform democracy in Lebanon, which many of its citizens experience as superficial: for example persistent denial of human rights, most obviously for Palestinian refugees and migrant workers,

and deep-rooted gender inequality. The confessional political system, with the executive 'Troika' at its summit, is often ineffectual and can even act as a catalyst for conflict.

“Palestinians in Lebanon ... are confined to camps or segregated settlements where they are partially dependent on humanitarian assistance and often live in poverty”

Sari Hanafi, Accord author

Political reforms have been deadlocked due to an absence of either incentives or structures for progress. There is broad consensus that the Taif confessional power sharing formula reinforces unfair representation in terms of age, gender and region – as well as sect. Conservative Lebanese leaders seeking to protect their privileges easily block reforms that threaten to disturb this delicate balance.

“Lebanon suffers from constitutional schizophrenia. The political regime, with quotas for the electoral system and government appointments, contradicts the rights of political and legal equality enshrined in the Constitution”

Fawwaz Traboulsi, Accord contributor

Three reform areas are key to establishing the legitimacy of the state: reducing tensions around economic and social inequality; ensuring fair and efficient access to essential services; and effective political decentralisation to restore confidence in institutions and to facilitate wider political participation.

A concerted and incremental strategy for reform would allow people to see progress in a functioning political process. Opportunities to adopt and implement reforms should be seized as early as possible – for example as part of the 2013 legislative elections. A good starting point would be electoral reforms suggested by the Boutros Commission and accepted in principle by deputies in 2008.

Managing the regional environment

Weaknesses in the ability of Lebanon's state institutions to manage internal conflict encourage 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.

The parallel existence of a large but weak national army and Hezbollah's small but well-armed militia is a challenge to Lebanon's sovereignty, particularly at a time when it perceives threats to its national security – from regional tensions and Islamist militancy, as well as ongoing issues of unchecked Israeli interventions and Syrian diktats. Hezbollah's arms remain a key issue paralysing change in Lebanon today. This cannot be solved exclusively unilaterally but is linked to *détente* on the Syrian–Israeli and Palestinian–Israeli fronts.

“In response to unfolding events in Syria, the Lebanese have demonstrated apparently paradoxical positions: on the one hand fearing serious implications for stability, on the other hoping that events may develop in ways that best suit particular domestic interests”

Nahla Chalal, Accord author

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 LAF 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 parts of Beirut.

Lebanon's fate is its own responsibility, and it is Lebanese leaders who should be accountable for national security. But external partners must respect Lebanon's sovereignty and be coordinated and consistent in their engagement with it. International partners and the Arab League have since 1975 tended to treat Lebanon as a weak state that cannot master its own future. 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 (for example north Ghajar) as a double standard.

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.

“Ambiguities over Lebanon's borders with Israel and Syria mean that Lebanese sovereignty has always been violated, leading to border disputes and violent clashes – not least the 2006 war”

Nizar Kader, Accord contributor

Hezbollah illustrates 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. Hezbollah is variously seen as: a legitimate domestic political power and champion of marginalised Lebanese Shia, to be engaged with and supported; 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 a proxy of radical regimes in Tehran and Damascus, and as such correctly proscribed under US and UK anti-terrorist legislation.

“For the international community, maintaining communication with Hezbollah is especially important ... Hezbollah is a highly pragmatic, multi-faceted organisation. It is not just a militia or an armed force, an Iranian projection or a Syrian client. It represents a significant Lebanese community that feels disenfranchised and is looking for its place in the Lebanese system”

Joseph Bahout, Accord author

International intervention has struggled to promote the interests and welfare of Lebanese people. The Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL), set up to investigate the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri in 2005, has operated according to international priorities as much as local needs and realities. It has failed to disentangle internal and external challenges surrounding the assassination and has done little to further peace or the rule of law. Rather, it risks becoming another focus for instability: 8 and 14 March Alliances each use the STL as a tool to undermine the other's legitimacy to rule.

“The Lebanese are not passive victims of a violent fate determined beyond their country’s borders. Individually and collectively, they are responsible actors capable of shaping their own future”

Elizabeth Picard and Alexander Ramsbotham, Accord editors

International and regional partners should support Lebanese sovereignty by actively pursuing a just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Syrian conflicts, which deeply affect Lebanese politics; and by helping Lebanon gain control over

its territory in conformity with international law. This means working with Israel and Syria to resolve outstanding border and boundary disputes through coordinated and concerted diplomatic engagement and the provision of technical support on demarcation.

It is essential to acknowledge and engage with the complex reality of Lebanon’s conflict system. Domestic political reform and national reconciliation can be central pillars of Lebanon’s resilience to external challenges. Conflict response strategies that can influence leverage points within the system and support Lebanese ownership can make an impact to promote positive change.

Priorities for peace in Lebanon: opposing outlooks

Extracts of conversations with two prominent Lebanese figures associated with 8 & 14 March Alliances, respectively. Full texts of conversations can be found in Accord 24.

Ali Fayyad, 8 March/Hezbollah MP:

“Hezbollah’s relations with Iran and allegiance to the *Wilāyat al-Faqīh* [rule of the Muslim Jurist] are part of our religious, cultural and social customs, as enshrined in the Constitution. These do not challenge our political engagement with the Lebanese social contract. Acts of resistance are linked to the defence of the Lebanese people. They are a necessity and are not part of a confessional identity. They could have been developed outside the Shiite faith.

Our Constitution calls Lebanon a ‘final homeland’. But it does not exclude that its identity will evolve. This identity began as a mixture of Arabic and Lebanese elements; of freedom and coexistence. To this we must now add resistance and openness. All of these values respond to Lebanon’s geopolitical situation.”

Interviews conducted for Accord 24 by Scarlett Haddad, Journalist at L’Orient-Le Jour in Lebanon

Samir Frangieh, Member of the General Secretariat of 14 March Alliance and former MP:

“Today, community interests subsume general interests in Lebanon. But civil society has been developed and deserves support. On 14 March 2005, one month after the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri, people took to the streets spontaneously in numbers far beyond the expectations of the political leaders who had called for protests. It is this popular strength, shared by all parties, which must be called upon to start a dialogue.

We are seeing the end of an era. The Arab Spring did not conform to the Iranian project to represent the Muslim world on the global stage. Consequently, it will also bring about the end of the Hezbollah project. The Arab Spring dealt a body blow to Israel, too, as Tel Aviv no longer has a monopoly on democracy in the region. In Lebanon, we must focus on issues that can bridge the gap between proponents and opponents of the Iranian project, such as the campaigns to protest violence, or to support environmental protection or the abolition of confessionalism.”

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Cover photo: Lebanese demonstrators hold a portrait of a missing boy during a protest in Beirut to demand information on loved ones, missing since the country’s Civil War, on 13 April 2012. © Anwar Amro/AFP/Getty Images

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Conciliation Resources is an independent organisation working with people in conflict to prevent violence and build peace. All Accord publications are available free on our website: www.c-r.org/accord

Positive peace for Lebanon

10 priorities for change

Lebanon is not a post-conflict society. Conflict prevention and peacebuilding should be at the centre of international policy for Lebanon. Peacebuilding responses should address the whole of Lebanon's conflict system concurrently and coherently, prioritising reconciliation and political reform as effective measures to strengthen national resilience against persistent challenges to peace – both internal and external.

Civil initiatives to deal with the past are vital for national reconciliation, given official policies of 'state-sponsored amnesia' over the war years. International partners should work with Lebanese civil society to help extend such initiatives beyond Beirut in order to include peripheral or marginalised groups. For example working with traditional, elder-led structures to facilitate outreach in rural areas, or supporting initiatives to share memories of the war across generations and sects.

How history is taught should be reviewed and revised at the national level. Many Lebanese schools are confessional. Seeking to impose an official narrative of the war is not the answer. International partners should work with the Ministry of Education to resume efforts to develop a more coherent national curriculum that can accommodate diverse perspectives of the war. This would encourage understanding between communities and help defuse antagonistic attitudes towards the 'other'.

Prominent Lebanese clerics should engage extremists in dialogue, from their respective confessions – Sunni, Shia and Christian. Religious and secular leaders and inter-faith groups should cooperate in responsible debate on core social values: humanitarian, ethical and spiritual. Key educational institutions could play a much stronger role in enhancing trans-confessional national culture.

Trans-confessional movements within Lebanese civil society can provide entry points for peacebuilding, for instance around common challenges such as the status of women, youth political participation, disability rights and environmental issues. International partners should look for ways to support civil mobilisation for peaceful and positive change in Lebanon – such as the 2011 anti-sectarian demonstrations in Beirut.

Political reform is key to progress in Lebanon. A concerted, incremental strategy could help overcome stagnation. Negotiating specific reform proposals as balanced 'packages' that offset losses with gains for various political blocs and interest groups could facilitate progress. For instance establishing a confessional Senate to accompany measures to deconfessionalise parliament. Key recommendations from the Boutros Commission should be implemented.

Decentralisation offers an overarching framework for reform, to redefine centre-periphery relations and rethink core issues of representation, participation, accountability, local development and – ultimately – the political system.

Regional and international actors should maintain dialogue with all Lebanese groups. Key international partners refuse to engage with Hezbollah, labelling it a terrorist organisation. Hezbollah has multiple roles: an armed 'resistance' militia with ties to Syria and Iran; while it also represents a significant but disenfranchised Lebanese community. Engagement does not confer legitimacy, but can facilitate progress on reconciliation and reform.

Political space for dialogue in Lebanon needs to be protected from external influence. At present, Lebanese communities and parties are especially vulnerable to political and sectarian manipulation and mobilisation in relation to conflict in Syria.

The National Dialogue should place more emphasis on promoting social justice as a core component of enhancing Lebanese security and sovereignty. Making the Dialogue more inclusive, looking beyond the political elite to involve civil society or the wider parliament, could help unblock persistent deadlock.