

(Provisional Title)
Lebanese Students as Peacemakers:
Consensus-Building in Universities and Violence-Reduction in Society

(Pre-proposal / February 2014)

Research and Facilitation Team

Charles Chartouni (Lebanese University, Beirut, Lebanon)
Elina Abou Abse (University of Maryland)
John Davies (University of Maryland)
Michael Dravis (University of Maryland)
Edy Kaufman (University of Maryland)

Background

In late 2013 Professor Charles Chartouni of Lebanese University in Beirut met with colleagues at the University of Maryland (UMD) and provided them with a detailed briefing on the dangerously rising tensions within Lebanese society created by internal political divisions (notably the “March 14” / “March 8” divide) and external pressures (especially spillover from the Syrian war). Professor Chartouni’s analysis highlighted the urgent need for a new conflict transformation initiative focused on the younger generation of Lebanese.

This pre-proposal describes in general terms how a joint project between The Lebanese University in Beirut and UMD’s Center for International Development and Conflict Management (CIDCM) could proceed. The participation of a third party from a European university would also be welcomed.

The Problem

The pressing necessity for a university-based program of violence reduction and conflict transformation is dictated by Lebanese history as well as current events. In the 1970s and 1980s, the presence of a large contingent of radicalized Palestinian students at the American University of Beirut (AUB) was one trigger that led to a cycle of mobilization and counter-mobilization and an explosion of violence that was by no means contained within the boundaries of that campus. Today, with the presence inside Lebanon of one Syrian refugee per every two Lebanese citizens—and with large contingents of Lebanese citizens actively fighting across the border in Syria—an extremely tense and destabilizing situation rife with threats and violence has again arisen. In the words of a November 2013 news report from Beirut, headlined “Schools Could Set the Stage for Strife”:

A senior security official warned that the security situation in Lebanon could lead to civil strife and disastrous outcomes if the underlying conflicts were not addressed and daily spats among university political youth movements escalated, those present at a

closed door meeting with a senior security official told *The Daily Star*.¹

In response to the destabilization of Lebanon, the goal of the project described herein will be to recruit, train, and enable a cadre of Lebanese university students to play constructive roles as agents of violence reduction and violence prevention. Instead of “importing” wider patterns of conflict into their campuses as happened in the past, the Research and Facilitation Team believes that today’s tech-savvy and cosmopolitan students can serve as “exporters” of non-violent approaches and solutions to Lebanese society at large. As a first step in accomplishing this core objective, Lebanese students participating in this project will draft an agreed “Declaration on Violence Reduction” consisting of a set of principles, each tied to (that is, followed by) a specific implementation measure.

In short, the ultimate “deliverable” of this project will be a consensus framework and standing forum enabling Lebanese university students to become a potent element for peace and stability, not only within their campuses but, even more importantly, across the broader landscape of Lebanese society.

The Project

The working title of the project is, “Lebanese Students as Peacemakers: Consensus-Building in Universities and Violence-Reduction in Society.” This designation encapsulates the shared ambition of the Research and Facilitation Team, namely empowering the rising generation Lebanese university students to become the vanguard of a new Lebanese national consensus.

In its initial phase, the “Students as Peacemakers” project will consist of a workshop in which university students representing divergent and contending sectarian groups—as well as politically unaffiliated and secular Independents—will join together to search for common ground. In the first instance, students from The Lebanese University and Saint Joseph University will explore possible solutions to a range of politically and socially contentious issues. The core objective will be for a group of twenty to twenty-five students to build trust and learn skills as a prelude to joint activities that will help stabilize campus life in the short term and Lebanese society in the long term.

The inaugural workshop will take place at UMD in the form a Winter Term (January) 2015 course on Multitrack Diplomacy. Students from Lebanese University and Saint Joseph University will enroll in UMD’s Multitrack Diplomacy course and, having completed the class, will receive the standard UMD academic credits. The students will then remain at UMD for three or four additional days, working intensively to draft a

¹ “Schools Could Set the Stage for Strife: Security Official,” *The Daily Star*, 30 November 2013 (available from [<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2013/Nov-30/239454-schools-could-set-the-stage-for-strife-security-official.ashx#ixzz2rC0SrmtJ>]; accessed 2 December 2013).

consensus document and action plan geared toward the reduction of violence on Lebanese campuses and in local Lebanese communities.

Approximately three months after the end of the Multitrack Diplomacy course and the associated supplemental workshop, members of the UMD/CIDCM Research and Facilitation Team will visit Lebanon to continue working with the student trainees and to evaluate the state of project implementation. Additionally, the UMD partners will explore the possibility of conducting a follow-up workshop in Beirut (based on the availability of funding).

Next Steps

To formally launch the “Students as Peacemakers” project, the Research and Facilitation Team will prepare a project diagnosis and prognosis (parts 1 and 2). Subsequently, a detailed plan (part 3) will be drafted that will reflect a process of building trust, skills, and consensus among participating Lebanese students; this plan will also incorporate ideas for the implementation of specific reform measures.

Also by late February 2014, the Research and Facilitation Team will also prepare a budget that will cover some transportation and housing costs associated with the January 2015 Winter Term course on Multitrack Diplomacy, as well as compensation for project staff. Requests for support will be submitted to potential funders such as the United States Institute for Peace. Two funding procedures will be considered: first, the project’s Lebanese partners will submit funding requests and when sufficient funds are secured, the UMD members of the Research and Facilitation Team will be hired as subcontractors; and second, this process will be reversed.

CIDCM and Lebanon

The home institution of the UMD members of the Research and Facilitation Team—the Center for International Development and Conflict Management (CIDCM)—can draw on a strong tradition of applying conflict resolution techniques and activities in a Lebanese context. A Lebanese-American scholar, Edward Azar, founded CIDCM in the early 1980s, and much of his theoretical and applied work was inspired and guided by his personal experiences as a Lebanese. Most significantly, in 1984 Azar organized two pioneering problem-solving workshops designed to enhance stability in Lebanon which served, in effect, as preludes to the official Taif Accord (1989) that ended the Lebanese civil war.²

² In a detailed study of the forums organized by Professor Azar under the auspices of CIDCM, the scholar George Irani concludes: “...the steps and recommendations included in the declaration issued at the end of the second workshop (October 1984) have some similarities with the essential elements of the Taif Accord.” See Irani, “The Maryland Problem-Solving Forums: Edward Azar’s Lebanon,” in *Paving the Way: Contributions of Interactive Conflict Resolution to Peacemaking*, ed. Ronald J. Fisher (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), p. 73.

As Irani intimates in his essay, additional research is needed to clarify possible linkages between Azar’s unofficial (second track) diplomacy and the official (first track) diplomacy that

Appendix: List of Conflict Resolution Documents

The following documents, listed chronologically, were major efforts by Lebanese (in some instances working with non-Lebanese partners) to draft agreed principles of peace-building to end their country's internal conflicts.

- 1975 National Dialogue Committee (see Irani [2005], p. 69)
- 1976 Constitutional Document of President Faranjiyyah (see Irani [2005], p. 69)
- 1976 Riyadh & Cairo Arab summits (see Irani [2005], p. 69)
- 1978 Lebanese Parliamentary Document (see Irani [2005], p. 69)
- 1980 Fourteen Points of Consensus for a National Accord (see Irani [2005], p. 69)
- 1983 Geneva & Lausanne National Reconciliation Conferences (see Irani [2005], p. 69)
- 1984 Ministerial Declaration of the National Unity Government (see Irani [2005], p. 69)
- 1984 First & second Azar/CIDCM problem-solving workshops (see Irani [2005], passim)
- 1985 Damascus Tripartite Agreement (see Irani [2005], p. 69)
- 1987 Presidential document entitled "Main Principles for Solving the Lebanese Crisis" (served as a background paper for the drafting of the Taif Agreement) (see Salem [1995], pp. 241, 272, 275 ff.)
- 1988 National Covenant Document (see Irani [2005], p. 73)
- 1989 Taif Agreement

Bibliography

- American Task Force for Lebanon (ATFL). "Working Paper: Conference on Lebanon." 1991.
- Azar, Edward E., Harold E. Saunders and I. William Zartman. "Mediation in Middle East Conflicts." The Maxwell Summer Lecture Series for 1986. Syracuse, NY: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, 1987.
- Azar, Edward. *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict*. Hampshire: Dartmouth Publishing, 1990.
- Irani, George Emile and Laurie King-Irani, eds. *Lessons from Lebanon: The Relevance of Acknowledgment, Forgiveness and Reconciliation to the Resolution of Protracted Inter-Communal Conflicts*. Unpublished manuscript.

eventually culminated in the Taif Accord. One possible line of inquiry would be to trace contacts between Azar and his colleague Elie Salem, who in the 1980s served as Lebanon's foreign minister and then as a foreign policy adviser to the president of Lebanon (during the early phase of Salem's government service, Azar likewise served as a presidential adviser and therefore the two certainly knew each other). In his memoir, *Violence and Diplomacy in Lebanon: The Troubled Years, 1982-1988* (London: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 1995) Salem writes (p. 272) that "the Taif Agreement was essentially what [senior Syrian diplomat Faruq al-]Shar' and I had agreed on in the Damascus Discussions [of January-June 1987]."

Irani, George Emile. "The Maryland Problem-Solving Forums: Edward Azar's Lebanon." In *Paving the Way: Contributions of Interactive Conflict Resolution to Peacemaking*, ed. Ronald J. Fisher, 65-77. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005.

_____. "Pulling Lebanon Together, 1975-2008." PAPERSIEMed no. 6. Barcelona: European Institute of the Mediterranean, November 2008.

Salem, Elie A. *Violence and Diplomacy in Lebanon: The Troubled Years, 1982-1988*. London: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 1995.