

Lebanon: A fragile or failed state?

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Next week, the Lebanese people will be commemorating the Civil War that erupted on April 13, 1975, and ended with Taif Agreement in 1990. It's the first time this year we hear people who lived the Civil War saying that those times were much better than the current catastrophic circumstances. The Beirut Port blast lasted a few seconds but left as much destruction as the years of violence during the Civil War. It's the year where we witness the Civil War's imagery around the corners of Beirut without the presence of armed conflict.

There are toxic narratives by all political leaders, media, and societal levels that are deepening mass distress and depression. Political analysis and politicians' discourse are full of threats that Lebanon is on the brink of failure. The question is: How do we describe the current status of Lebanon? Is it a weak state? Is it a fragile one? Is it a failing or failed state? Is it a collapsed state?

According to the "Users' Guide on Measuring Fragility" published by German Development Institute and United Nations Development Program (UNDP), there is not a universal definition of fragility as it is a complex and multifaceted concept that includes qualitative and quantitative dimensions. "There is a consensus around the OECD definition of fragile states expressed in the Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations: States are fragile when state structures lack political will and/or capacity to provide the basic functions needed for poverty reduction, development and to safeguard the security and human rights of their populations."

There are several indices on state fragility that set indicators to measure the level of any state's fragility. If we take for example the "Fragile States Index" by The Fund for Peace, there are 12 indicators within four dimensions (Cohesion, Economic, Political, and Social). The indicators vary from Security Apparatus, Factionalized Elites, Group Grievance, Economic Decline, Uneven Economic Development, Human Flight and Brain Drain, State Legitimacy, Public Services, Human Rights and Rule of Law, Demographic Pressures, Refugees and IDPs, to External Intervention. All data on such indicators is currently irrelevant in Lebanon due to the dramatic deterioration of such indicators in the past few months. Robert I. Rotberg introduced in his book "State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror" a conceptual framework for failed and collapsed states based on international case studies. With respect to Rotberg, state failure is man-made and not accidental. The state slips from fragile to a failed one when it cannot deliver the positive political (public) goods to its residents. "The government loses legitimacy, and the state itself becomes illegitimate in the eyes and in the hearts of a growing plurality of its citizens."

In addition, a failed state cannot control its borders and lacks authority over regions of its territory. The atmosphere of security decreases and the criminal violence increases. Citizens lose their trust in the judiciary system and cannot rely on it against the state.

Deteriorated and destroyed infrastructure and the privatization of effective educational and health systems are other indicators for state failure. There will also be scarcity in the essential medical and educational equipment. Citizens' well-being will not be anymore the responsibility of the state. There will be no safety nets where the basic needs are not met with widespread of hunger and shortages of food. The social contract is simply broken between citizens and the state. Corruption is widespread and devastatingly increasing in a destructive manner. GDP declines and inflation soars. Smuggling turns to be the widespread business. "When state failure becomes complete, the local currency falls out of favor and one or more international currencies take its place. Money changers are everywhere, legal or not, and arbitrage becomes a steady international pursuit." The failed state becomes a collapsed state when the public goods are not anymore provided by the state but by private or ad hoc means. There is a vacuum of authority, and the security is guaranteed by the strong instead of the state.

After briefly outlining the dimensions and indicators of different types of states and following up what's happening in Lebanon, it is time to pause and admit that we are not weeks or days away from being a failed state; however, Lebanon has already been a failed state and is on the verge of total collapse.

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