



USIPEACE BRIEFING

Reconstructing Gaza – Lessons from Lebanon

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BACKGROUND

Last week's international donor conference to address the question of humanitarian assistance to Gaza underscores the myriad challenges confronting the process. Namely, how should the international community respond to the complex issues surrounding assistance in post-conflict recovery and reconstruction, particularly when several key donors reject any contact with Hamas, the governing authority on the ground? By any estimation, the Gaza reconstruction process will face several perplexing issues:

- How can billions of US dollars be effectively, transparently and accountably dispersed in a coordinated way, when several key donors and the Government of Israel reject any moves that will bolster the fortunes of Hamas, whom they classify as a terrorist organisation?
- What impact will an emerging Palestinian National Unity Government have on the mechanisms for overcoming many donors' reluctance to deal directly with Hamas?
- What opportunities and challenges does the reconstruction of Gaza pose for a rapprochement between Hamas and Fatah?
- Who will lead the reconstruction process and how will meaningful activity take place in the face of severe restrictions on access and movement?
- With Hamas in power in Gaza and Israel refusing to consider opening their common borders until kidnapped Israeli Defence Forces Corporal Gilad Shalit is released by Hamas, how is meaningful recovery and reconstruction even possible?
- In the absence of a credible political process, what use is reconstruction anyway if it merely returns the population of Gaza to their pre-conflict socio-economic imperilment?

Lebanon faced a similar situation following the 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel.

In an effort to provide insights into the challenges posed by Gaza reconstruction, this USIPeace Brief focuses on reconstruction efforts in neighboring Lebanon to draw out a number of post-conflict reconstruction lessons. While context specificity is central to any conflict analysis¹, and while the conflicts differed vastly, they also pose common challenges to those responsible for post-conflict recovery and reconstruction. The comparisons underscore the fundamental truth that reconstruction is, at its core, a political rather than purely technical process, and ownership of it will be contested.

Lessons Learned About Assistance:

1. Restricting contact with a key reconstruction actor militates against effectiveness.

In both Gaza and Lebanon, parties (Hamas and Hezbollah respectively) proscribed by some key donors are also part of the governing structures through which local and international assistance must be disbursed, making coordination of these efforts problematic to say the least. The Gaza case is further complicated by the fact that a contested government confuses distinctions about which Palestinian faction is the legitimate governing authority. The central lesson from the Lebanon experience is that by proscribing contact with Hezbollah, the key international donors reduced the effectiveness of reconstruction efforts.

2. When governmental reach does not extend to all conflict-affected areas, the assistance efforts of other actors will prove more effective, resulting in an increase of support for those disbursing assistance.

The result of Lebanon's contested confessional politics and its lack of presence, access and support in conflict-affected areas, the Government of Lebanon's assistance programs proved less popular than Hezbollah and regional (e.g. Qatari) initiatives. The Government of Lebanon had limited reach in the Shi'a strongholds of the South, the southern suburbs of Beirut and the Bekaa. Its lack of influence on the ground impacted and severely limited the effectiveness of the government's response in areas enjoying strong opposition support. Those who dispersed cash quickly to those in need garnered considerable support. The construction wing of Hezbollah, Jihad al-Binaa² reacted promptly, dispersing cash payments in areas it controlled within days of the cessation of fighting³. The Government of Lebanon was unable to do this in many areas devastated after the 2006 conflict and its multi-stage payments took months longer to be distributed. A similar challenge faces the Ramallah-based Palestinian Authority. A suggestion for using the proposed Palestinian National Unity Government to address this challenge is explored below.

3. Parallel efforts reduce effectiveness.

Politically divided and heavily indebted by the post-Civil War reconstruction effort, the Government of Lebanon appealed for international assistance after the conflict in 2006⁴. Donors adopted a variety of approaches in response. Many Western donors channeled their funding through central Government. Its two reconstruction organs, the Council of the South⁵ and the Council for Development and Reconstruction⁶ were complemented by the inter-ministerial Higher Relief Commission⁷. Yet given the peculiarities of Lebanon's confessional system,⁸ and fears of financial mismanagement, many of the key regional donors such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE bilaterally adopted and then undertook the reconstruction of villages, schools, mosques and hospitals. Such decentralized efforts, though seemingly effective, serve to undermine

government credibility, stability, reconciliation and the reconstruction process as a whole. In a survey following the second tranche of compensation payments in Lebanon 30% of respondents were very satisfied with the contribution of Qatar, 33% with Jihad al-Binaa, while only 4% expressed satisfaction with the Lebanese Government's Council of the South. 62% stated they were very dissatisfied with the Council of the South.⁹ Tellingly 57% of the population in the south of the country viewed the central government less favorably for its role in the reconstruction effort.¹⁰

In Gaza in 2009, inter-donor competition will only serve to exacerbate intra-Palestinian conflict. A factionalized reconstruction process that adopts favored communities rather than a needs-based approach will militate against the effective alleviation of the humanitarian crisis and sow the seeds for future conflict.

The implications of these two lessons for reconstruction in Gaza are vital. Hamas is proscribed by some donors as a terrorist group, yet remains in control of the Gaza Strip. Meaningful reconstruction progress is unlikely to be achieved by simply transferring sums of money over the heads of Hamas to individual Gazan bank accounts. In addition, channeling all funding through Fatah is likely to limit the effectiveness of delivery on the ground in Gaza given Fatah's minimal footprint, as well as exacerbate intra-Palestinian conflict as it will appear that Fatah has benefited from the suffering of Gazans. International donors appearing to reward Fatah, therefore implying a commonality of interest between Israel and Fatah (given that both enjoy a common adversary, Hamas) is likely to prove counter-productive.

If, as the Lebanon case argues, a unified political leadership resulting in credible governmental reach is a prerequisite for efficient and effective reconstruction, a Palestinian National Unity Government offers a possible solution for the reconstruction of Gaza. A unity government would enable a single Gaza needs assessment and a single reconstruction masterplan, supported by one agreed international lead individual to co-chair one reconstruction trust fund. This was not achieved in Lebanon and the result was a less effective post-conflict response. The recommendations for a Gaza Reconstruction Commission, an international reconstruction chief and a Gaza Reconstruction Trust Fund¹¹ draw on lessons identified after previous reconstruction efforts in Gaza. The announcement of a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Gaza Reconstruction Fund is a positive step.

4. Border management is necessary but not sufficient.

Border management lies at the heart of both Lebanon and Gaza's recent conflicts with Israel.¹² Israel seeks to stem the flow of weapons into Lebanon and Gaza to Hezbollah and Hamas respectively, weapons that are then used in confrontations with Israel. In Gaza, Hamas demands the borders be opened to break the economic blockade on Gaza. At the same time, Israel conditions any

meaningful opening of the borders, the pre-requisite for reconstruction to take place, on guarantees that weapons will not continue to flow across Gaza's porous border with Egypt.

Thus, in order for reconstruction activities to take place on the required scale, Israel and Egypt will have to improve access at Gaza's borders. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) approximately 120 trucks cross per day cross into Gaza, compared to 475 per day before Hamas's electoral victory in 2006.¹³ Israel is unlikely to authorize an increase in the number crossings unless an effective border management regime with international expert inputs is implemented. Yet a border regime that enables movement of reconstruction materials but disrupts the flow of weaponry will be extremely challenging to construct, particularly given that most of the weapons are not smuggled across licit border crossings. In addition, many of the materials required for reconstruction (e.g. pipes, wire, cement) are dual use.

As with Hezbollah's military capability, a technical improvement in border management capabilities and destruction of smuggling tunnels will not in itself solve what is fundamentally a challenge of political will. For example, many of the cruder missiles fired into Israel are manufactured in Gaza, obviating the need for smuggling any key components. Similarly, Hezbollah's weapons and military capability cannot be degraded solely by more or better border crossings. They must be considered as part of the wider complex political relationship between Lebanon and Israel. In Lebanon the weapons of Hezbollah's Resistance are considered an intrinsic part of the national defence strategy. In his inaugural speech last year President Michel Suleiman, the former Commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces, talked of the need to utilise the capabilities of the Resistance. It should be no surprise that after two years of German-led international assistance to improve Lebanon's border regime, no weapons have been interdicted. The United Nation's report on Lebanese border management noted that despite 'disconnected islands of progress' efforts had 'no decisive impact on overall border security'.¹⁴ As such, any opening of the borders to Gaza to enable its reconstruction is more likely if it is considered as part of a political process rather than as a technical border management issue.

5. Support is needed to build institutional capability and accountability.

The Government of Lebanon had limited institutional capacity to deal with the consequences of the 2006 war. Following the cessation of hostilities in 2006, the UN Development Programme instituted a \$800,000 project to establish a Reconstruction and Recovery Unit in the Lebanese Prime Minister's Office to help address this. The international boycott of Hamas will mean that no such technical assistance—although greatly needed—is made available on the ground in Gaza.

The widespread destruction of Palestinian ministries in Gaza, institutional decapitation and the resulting destruction of records, information and human

capital as well as the exclusive channeling of international assistance in recent years through Abu Mazen's office have emasculated the Palestinian Ministry of Planning. The economic catastrophe has all but destroyed the private sector. A rapid assessment of Palestinian institutional capability and an audit of absorptive capacity in both Gaza and Ramallah will help identify how and where coordinated planning for recovery and reconstruction can take place. Reconstruction efforts should address the limitations of institutions in terms of technical capacity to implement reconstruction projects.

Lebanon's reconstruction effort underscored the need for transparency and accountability. A survey revealed that 22 % of Lebanese experienced corruption first hand in relation to their housing compensation claim after the conflict in 2006¹⁵. In order to counter this, the criteria, grant amount, originator and recipient of all donor funding should be a matter of public record. Donors should consider measures to insure this kind of transparency in the Gaza reconstruction.

6. Ensure that donors honor their pledges.

The vast sums promised for Gaza reconstruction, USD1bn from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and USD300m from the United States, are clearly welcome. But pledges are frequently not met in full. At Sharm al-Sheikh, Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora highlighted that Lebanon still requires \$500m in reconstruction funds pledged but not yet received.¹⁶ In the wake of the conflicts in Lebanon and Gaza, the human misery, loss of hope in any political or peace process and the attendant radicalisation underscore the urgency of following through on financial commitments. The current global economic crisis may only exacerbate the difficulty of fulfilling pledges. When sufficient funding is not provided in a timely manner, the consequences are predictable. A cycle of indebtedness ensues as individuals borrow to finance reconstruction, and the most vulnerable are further imperiled, returning to live in unfit and unsafe dwellings through lack of credible alternatives.

7. Reconstruction should address the underlying root causes.

The post-2006 donor conference in Stockholm and the Paris III donor meeting, at which \$940m and \$7.6bn respectively for Lebanon were pledged, were an acknowledgement of Lebanon's immediate post-conflict needs and longer-term chronic indebtedness. The challenge of Gaza is far greater than any injection of cash can address. It encompasses short-term relief, recovery as well as longer-term economic development, in essence an answer to the question of whether Gaza is economically viable. Gaza was chronically economically marginalized before the conflict.¹⁷ If efforts are not focused on addressing the longer-term needs, the short-term efforts are likely to be futile and Gaza will slip back into conflict. Human security concerns are central in this respect. A reconstruction push in Gaza that does not address the root causes of the catastrophic economic situation for the population of Gaza will be nothing more than the prelude to

further conflict, with magnified destructive consequences for Palestinians and Israelis alike.

CONCLUSION

The challenge in Gaza is about more than reconstruction. The infrastructure can be rebuilt. In both Gaza and Lebanon there is real experience of post-conflict reconstruction, the tragic legacy of years of conflict-related destruction. While donors can discuss the merits of bilateral and multilateral trust funds, coordination mechanisms, objectively verifiable indicators of impact and integrated border management best practice, Gaza is best understood as a stabilisation challenge, encompassing as it does security, governance and development challenges. Post-conflict best practice¹⁸ returns to the same themes, identified from Freetown to Mogadishu and Gaza City. These principles focus on clarity of aims and objectives, local legitimacy, common purpose, coherence of effort, accountability, pragmatism, effective and impartial communication and a regional focus. With donors having met in Sharm al-Sheikh to address the question of Gaza reconstruction, the temptation is to adopt a mechanistic, one size fits all solution to a purely technical reconstruction task. This approach should be avoided. Given the conflict dynamics, a detailed conflict assessment needs to be undertaken. In the rush to rebuild what was destroyed, it should be remembered that the major catalysts for this conflict were political and economic. As such, the reconstruction effort must ensure that viable employment initiatives form part of the post-conflict stabilisation plan. This was very much a man-made humanitarian disaster. If the underlying issues are not addressed, unfortunately renewed conflict would seem inevitable.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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¹ For more on conflict analysis, see

http://www.conflictsensitivity.org/resource_pack/chapter_2__266.pdf

² www.jbf-lb.org and www.jihadbinaa2006.org. The motto of Jihad al-Binaa is 'together we resist, together we rebuild'. Since 14 March 2008, 906,697 people have visited Jihad al-Binaa's official website.

³ On the role of the Gulf States and Jihad al-Binaa in the reconstruction, see Ginty, Roger Mac (2007) 'Reconstructing post-war Lebanon: A challenge to the liberal peace?', *Conflict, Security & Development*, 7:3, 457-482.

⁴ For information on the Government of Lebanon's recovery and reconstruction efforts, see

<http://www.rebuildlebanon.gov.lb/english/f/default.asp>

⁵ <http://www.councilforsouth.gov.lb/>

⁶ <http://www.cdr.gov.lb/>

⁷ <http://www.rebuildlebanon.gov.lb/english/f/Page.asp?PageID=46>

⁸ See by the same author

http://www.usip.org/pubs/usipeace_briefings/2008/0530_peace_lebanon.html

⁹ *Ibid*, page 26.

¹⁰ Sultan Barakat and Steven A. Zyck with Jenny Hunt, *Housing Compensation and Disaster Preparedness in the Aftermath of the July 2006 War in South Lebanon* (York and Beirut, Post-war Reconstruction and Development Unit, on behalf of the Norwegian Refugee Council, Dec. 2008), p. 36.

¹¹ Sultan Barakat with Steven A. Zyck and Jenny E. Hunt 'The Reconstruction of Gaza – A Guidance Note for Palestinian and International Stakeholders', Post-war Reconstruction and Development Unit, University of York (2009). Available at

<http://www.york.ac.uk/depts/poli/prdu/pub.%20Reconstructing%20Gaza,%20Barakat%20et%20a%5B1%5D.,%20Jan2009.pdf>

¹² Alistair Harris 'Bordering on the Impossible: Securing Lebanon's Borders with Syria', RUSI Journal, October 2007, Vol. 152, No.5.

¹³ See <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportID=83211> for details of the UN Secretary-General's Special Humanitarian Envoy, Abdul Aziz Arrukban's first visit to Gaza on 1 March 2009.

¹⁴ <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Lebanon%20S2008582.pdf>

¹⁵ Sultan Barakat and Steven A. Zyck with Jenny Hunt, *Housing Compensation and Disaster Preparedness in the Aftermath of the July 2006 War in South Lebanon* (York and Beirut, Post-war Reconstruction and Development Unit, on behalf of the Norwegian Refugee Council, Dec. 2008), p. x. Available at

http://www.york.ac.uk/depts/poli/prdu/pub.NRC%20Housing%20Compensation%20and%20Emergency%20Preparedness_Dec2008.pdf

¹⁶ http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=2&article_id=99786

¹⁷ According to a recent report, 1.1 million of Gaza's population of 1.5 million are dependent on food aid and that between June and September 2007, largely as a result of the Israeli and Egyptian isolation of Gaza, the number of households earning less than USD1.20 per day 'soared from 55% to 70%. Amnesty International, Christian Aid, CAFOD, CARE, Medecins du Monde, Oxfam, Save the Children UK and Trocaire, *The Gaza Strip: A Humanitarian Implosion* (2008), p.7 cited in *The Reconstruction of Gaza – A Guidance Note for Palestinian and International Stakeholders*, Post-war Reconstruction and Development Unit, University of York, (2009).

¹⁸ See for example *International Peace-Building for the 21st Century: The Tswalu Protocol and Background Papers*, Royal United Services Institute Whitehall Report 2-08 (2008). Also Post-Conflict People, <http://www.postconflictpeople.org/>