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Analysis

Human (in)security: Palestinian perceptions of security in and around the refugee camps in Lebanon

Taylor Long and Sari Hanafi

Based upon over 20 hours of focus groups and in-depth interviews with diverse representation from three Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, the authors analyse Palestinian perceptions of both Lebanese and Palestinian security institutions, detailing the ways in which conventional, state-centric approaches to security by both parties have been insufficient. Special attention is paid to the new security regime in the Nahr al-Bared camp, which was destroyed in 2007 during a protracted battle between the Lebanese army and the militant Islamist group Fatah al-Islam. This is because the Government of Lebanon has made clear its intention that this

regime serve as a model for the country's other 11 camps. Ultimately, the authors argue, Palestinian human security is inextricably linked to Lebanese sovereignty and national security, and the improvement of Palestinian human security will yield tangible security benefits for Lebanese and Palestinians alike. Rather than presume to speak on behalf of all Palestinians in Lebanon, the authors have instead opted to present detailed—and sometimes contradictory—quotations from Palestinians interviewed on such subjects as arms, violent extremism, Lebanese–Palestinian relations and the protection of human rights.

Taylor Long is a consultant at Pursue Ltd, where he specialises in research and programme implementation related to the role of development assistance in reducing violent conflict. He lives and works in the Middle East and is a graduate of New York University and the American University of Beirut.

Sari Hanafi is Associate Professor of Sociology in the Department of Social and Behavioural Science at the American University of Beirut. He is the editor of *Idafat: The Arab Journal of Sociology* and the author of numerous books relating to Palestinian refugee life.

Introduction

Hussein, a boy of 13 or 14, has recently joined Ahmed Jibril's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—General Command, a Palestinian militia in the Beddawi refugee camp. Tonight he has guard duty. Wearing his new uniform and with a gun in hand, he waits and watches. But as the hours wear on, he gets tired and naps until his 15-year-old brother comes to relieve him. Hussein goes downstairs to the arms depot where an army cot has been set up to spend the remainder of the night. However, he forgets to extinguish his candle [. . .] Two hours later, the place goes up in flames, the boy suffocates, his body is burned, and only an emergency response by the community prevents a cache of ammunition from exploding and taking other lives. The next day, Hussein is buried, and a notice of his death circulates about the camp: now he is 18 years old, a hero, a freedom fighter and a martyr.¹

Nearly two months after the defeat of Fatah al-Islam by the Lebanese army in Nahr al-Bared, a token number of displaced persons are permitted to return their homes in the 'New Camp', where only minimal fighting is reported to have taken place. Residents are shocked to discover their homes burned, looted and vandalised. Some find racist, anti-Palestinian graffiti signed by Lebanese army commando groups; others find human faeces in their cookware. Despite formal complaints made to Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and Defence Minister Elias al-Murr, there will be no official investigation into this systematic and degrading destruction of Palestinian property by Lebanese security forces.²

As these anecdotes suggest, Palestinians in Lebanon today suffer from a lack of human security, that is, they have neither 'freedom from fear' (violence) nor 'freedom from want' (economic insecurity). This has been the case for decades. The objective of this paper, however, is not to document the ways in which Palestinians in Lebanon lack human security or civil rights, including the right to work and to own property, for this has already been done.³ Rather, this paper seeks to examine the intersection between human security and conventional state-centric security as it relates to Palestinian refugee life in Lebanon today. This approach permits us to consider both paradigms as interdependent rather than mutually exclusive and to put into context some of the greatest impediments to providing Palestinians and Lebanese alike with security. It also permits us to look at

security questions in holistic terms, to see how any improvement in security must be a co-operative effort by both Lebanese and Palestinians.

This analysis draws upon a series of focus groups held with stakeholders in the 'Ayn al-Hilweh, Nahr al-Bared and Beddawi refugee camps in the spring of 2009. What residents of the camps have to say about the behaviour of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), the Internal Security Forces (ISF) and their own security committees is illuminating. In the pages that follow, we provide some background on Lebanese military and police relations with the Palestinians before recording the opinions, 'in their own words', of refugees. This is followed by a similar review of Palestinian security structures and a summary of focus group participants' comments on these shortcomings. Finally, in conclusion, we review commitments made by both the Government of Lebanon and the Palestinian leadership to promote human security in the camps and ask why this approach has not yet been taken seriously by either party.

Methodology

This article draws off source material from a series of four focus groups of roughly four hours each held between March and May 2009 in the Palestinian refugee camps of Nahr al-Bared and Beddawi in northern Lebanon and 'Ayn al-Hilweh in southern Lebanon.⁴ The focus groups consisted of 61 adult Palestinians of diverse age, gender, relative socioeconomic status, religiosity, political affiliation and professional and educational backgrounds. All together, the focus groups included 23 females (38 per cent) and 38 males (62 per cent). Twenty-one participants were from Nahr al-Bared (34 per cent), 22 were from Beddawi (36 per cent) and 18 were from 'Ayn al-Hilweh (30 per cent). One focus group was made up of 18 Palestinians between the ages of 18 and 24, all of whom resided in the Nahr al-Bared or Beddawi camps.

In the convening of each session, the authors sought representation from as many significant political and religious organisations within the community as possible. In attendance were members or representatives of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), Fatah, Hamas, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), Islamic Jihad, the Vanguard for the Popular Liberation War (*Al-Sa'iqa*), the Association of Palestinian Religious Scholars, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the Nahr al-Bared

Reconstruction Committee (NBRC), the General Palestinian Women's Union (GPWU), the Family Guidance Centre (*Bayt Atfal al-Samoud*), the Palestinian Youth Organisation (PYO), the Palestinian Scout Association and the popular and security committees of each camp, among others. Participants were selected based on their potential to represent others in their community and for their ability to speak to a carefully prepared series of questions related to conflict, security and governance.⁵

Lebanese military and police attitudes toward Palestinians

The attitude of the LAF and the ISF toward the Palestinians in Lebanon must be considered within the complex history of both institutions. And while this context does not justify the alleged mistreatment of refugees by Lebanese soldiers, it does go some way toward explaining the conditions which make it possible. Lebanon has long struggled with the task of asserting itself as sovereign, in the Westphalian sense, over all its territory. First as a colonial state (1918–1943), then through a lengthy civil war (1975–1990), Israeli occupation (1982–2000) and Syrian tutelage (1990–2005), Lebanon has had scant opportunity to establish itself with an army or police presence across all of the country. Furthermore, since the signing of the Cairo Agreement in 1969 (abrogated in 1987), Lebanese security forces have essentially forfeited their right even to enter the Palestinian camps, much less to assert their authority within them.⁶ Today, the state has yet to extend the rule of law over the 12 remaining camps, and only since 2006, in compliance with UN Security Council Resolution 1701, has the LAF deployed south of the Litani River.⁷ Also, in terms of military strength, Lebanon remains far outmatched by Syria and Israel, its only two neighbours and onetime occupiers. The Security Council, furthermore, is justifiably concerned regarding the undemarcated, unpoliced and porous character of the Lebanese–Syrian border.

Nevertheless, the army has managed to maintain itself as a bastion of national unity and has played a largely positive, stabilising role during recent episodes of civil and political unrest including the 2005 'Cedar Revolution' (*intifadat al-istiqlal*), the 2006 war with Israel, the 18-month occupation of the downtown area of Beirut by opposition forces, the 2007 battle with Fatah al-Islam in the Nahr al-Bared camp and during the armed Hezbollah-led takeover of western parts of Beirut and some of the Chouf Mountains in May 2008. The LAF, furthermore, has played an essential role in keeping the peace during

prolonged periods, since 2005, when Lebanon has had either no president or no functioning government.

These complex conditions have prompted the army, as well as the civilian government and some international donors, to focus exclusively on enhancing a conventional security apparatus in Lebanon, i.e. one that emphasises the military defence of state interests and territory (national security).⁸ Some donors and policy analysts argue for building up the LAF's defence capabilities so as to undermine the logic of Hezbollah's arms. If the public believes the LAF are capable of protecting it from foreign (Israeli) attack, these experts suggest, then Hezbollah, which presents itself as the sole armed Lebanese resistance to Israel, will face an enormous challenge to its present legitimacy. However, critics of this argument contend that the LAF is still a fragile institution; that in maintaining a balance between competing power blocs in Lebanon, it therefore is not exclusively under governmental control; and that it has split along sectarian lines in the past. Both approaches, however, problematically presuppose the external nature of any threat and make it more difficult for Lebanese military commanders to establish a framework for warding off sectarian conflict or insurgencies (intrastate security) or for the protection of individuals from non-military threats like poverty or lawlessness (human security).⁹

Palestinians have suffered because of this. Despite their lengthy history of being *in* Lebanon, the Palestinians are not *of* Lebanon and therefore have been interpreted by the LAF, in more or less uncompromising terms, as an *external threat to national security*. As a result, neither the government nor Lebanese security forces have made a genuine effort to incorporate the Palestinians, along with their existing security and governance structures, into a comprehensive plan for internal peace and the mutual protection of Lebanese and Palestinians alike.¹⁰ In short, a commitment to meaningful partnership has been absent.

For example, a recent study of the LAF, which discussed at length the army's battle with Fatah al-Islam, reported: 'The LAF knew in advance that it could come under attack [from Fatah al-Islam], but it felt obligated to act in reaction to an external attack'.¹¹ Rather than take preventative police measures against the threat that Fatah al-Islam posed, in co-ordination with the ISF and the security committee in Nahr al-Bared, the army willingly risked the sort of all out confrontation that ultimately took place and led to the deaths of over four hundred.¹²

To understand this, one must not underestimate how important the support of the Lebanese public is to the army. With varying degrees of dysfunction in the operations

of government since 2005, the army has at times felt compelled to act more or less autonomously. When doing so, it has utilised public opinion as its compass, instead of acting in direct co-ordination or compliance with the prime minister and his cabinet. The army, in the best interests of the country, for example, has refused to intervene in internal conflicts between loyalist and opposition blocs and has therefore gained the trust of both parties.¹³ On the other hand, the LAF also seems to have taken a cue from the deep-seated prejudice many Lebanese hold for Palestinians, which is in favour of keeping the Palestinians socially, politically and economically marginalised.¹⁴ Consequently, the LAF did little to discourage the misconception that Fatah al-Islam was a uniquely Palestinian phenomenon and a product of the camps, rather than a heterogeneous salafist–jihadi group of diverse national origin, which also appears to have garnered in the past some measure of support from both sides of Lebanon’s political spectrum and not just from select Palestinians in the Nahr al-Bared camp.¹⁵

Palestinians—including those interviewed for this research—tend to discuss the LAF more so than other security forces, such as the ISF, the General Security (*al-amen al-‘aam*) or the State Security (*amen al-dawla*). This is because the army is the most visible representation of Lebanese security in and around the camps; and also, because the army is perceived as being far more popular among Lebanese than other state security forces, Palestinians regard its treatment of them as a reflection of Government of Lebanon policy and Lebanese public opinion. For decades the camps have been regarded as jurisdictionally ‘exceptional’—outside the jurisdiction of any Lebanese municipality—and therefore outside the jurisdiction of the police (ISF).¹⁶ In principle, this has meant that the security of the camps falls under the purview of the army; yet in practice, it has meant that the Palestinian factions have maintained control inside the camps, while the army has set up checkpoints and other mechanisms of containment around the camps and at their entrances.

Today, however, jurisdictional issues have become somewhat more confused, as the Government of Lebanon indicated in 2008 that—at least in Nahr al-Bared—some policing responsibilities would be transferred from the LAF to ISF.¹⁷ This transition has been neither quick nor easy—the army regards protecting Lebanon from a perceived Palestinian threat as central to its purpose—and there is little reason to expect this to change in the near to intermediate term. A ‘tapestry of multiple, partial sovereignties’, therefore, currently exercises police power over the Palestinians.¹⁸ Residents of all camps, for example, continue to be investigated and arrested or detained variously by the LAF, the ISF,

by the camps' security committees and sometimes by individual factions. Therefore, despite a general Palestinian unwillingness in the conversations which follow to differentiate between the two, who by sight can only be distinguished by the colour of their military fatigues, it is necessary to clarify several key differences in the mandates of the ISF and the LAF with regard to the Palestinian refugees.

With the exception of Nahr al-Bared, neither the police nor the army may be found inside the camps, and it is principally the army which may be found at the entrances of the camps. Here, the LAF maintain checkpoints to monitor the movements of Palestinians and others in and out of the camps, to try and apprehend wanted persons who are believed to reside in some of the camps, to prevent the entry of building supplies deemed illegal by the Government of Lebanon and, perhaps most importantly, to inscribe Lebanese hegemony on Palestinian life in the country.¹⁹ Given its greater strength and presence in and around the camps relative to the ISF, it is not surprising that the LAF are responsible for roughly 80 per cent of the arrests of Palestinians, while the ISF are responsible for the remaining 20 per cent.

For their part, the ISF have expressed a willingness to extend their jurisdiction to the camps where, when and if the LAF are prepared to cede some of their authority. The ISF has also agreed to a model of community policing which,²⁰ though initially rejected by Palestinians as a form of intelligence gathering, is nevertheless demonstrative of the ability of the ISF and its leadership to consider new and potentially more effective policing techniques. Millions of dollars in US assistance have gone towards training the ISF in principles of community policing—not just for use in Nahr al-Bared and other refugee camps but across the country. Yet, despite these seeming advances in policing, Palestinians—like many Lebanese—remain less confident in the ISF than the LAF, which is regarded as a protector with greater legitimacy.

In Nahr al-Bared, including the 'New Camp', where both the LAF and ISF have a presence, Lebanese security forces have taken on additional responsibilities, including patrols, intelligence gathering operations, and issuing citations for building code and other municipal violations. The Ministry of the Interior has also allegedly cracked down on unregistered NGOs in Nahr al-Bared, including the Nahr al-Bared Reconstruction Committee (NBRC), as under Lebanese law Palestinians do not have the right to form their own associations; instead they must form a Lebanese NGO, which includes strictures pertaining to non-Lebanese membership, direction and employment.²¹

Palestinian perceptions of Lebanese security institutions

It is within this context of policing, which is sometimes harsh but which has also been shown to reduce violent conflict in some instances, that focus group participants in this study discussed security provision in and around their camps. Perceptions were generally negative. In short, participants did not believe that either the Government of Lebanon or the country's security forces were committed to genuine partnership in ongoing negotiations regarding the status of the refugees, their living conditions and, perhaps most pressingly, security arrangements in and around the camps. One DFLP affiliate in Nahr al-Bared had this to say:

There is a Lebanese tendency, intentional or unintentional, planned or unplanned, to keep the camps outside the scope of the law and as safe havens for fugitives and outlaws [...] It is natural [for the Lebanese government] to encourage unhealthy phenomena if they have Palestinian ties, to allow in foreigners where Palestinians are a minority and to portray the camps as a threat to Lebanon's security, stability and peace. We paid the price [in Nahr al-Bared], and the residents of 'Ayn al-Hilweh and other camps are also paying the price for this Lebanese mindset. This needs to be resolved. Hence, our only concern is addressing this issue, but this requires Palestinian–Lebanese dialogue to put our fears and their fears on the table. What are you afraid of? Us? And what about our demands as Palestinians in your country? None of them have been realised. Why? Where is the problem in calling for Palestinian–Lebanese dialogue? An official dialogue with a unified Palestinian authority, which includes all the Palestinian factions and political groups, with the Lebanese government under the sponsorship of the president of the republic—why hasn't this happened? Because there is no Lebanese who will respond to the Palestinian demands which have persisted for 60 years. We support sovereignty and the rule of the law. This is something we have been saying since before the destruction of Nahr al-Bared. Let us find a formula which keeps the camps in perfect condition. Nahr al-Bared

As articulated by this man, many Palestinians believe that the Government of Lebanon actively avoids engaging with the Palestinian refugees or their leaders. Residents of Nahr al-Bared said they felt they cannot begin to work with the army or other representative of

the Government of Lebanon without first creating the proper climate for dialogue. As one man suggested:

We want good ties with the army but ties on the basis of respect. Nahr al-Bared

Another agreed. The Government of Lebanon must keep the promise made by Siniora in May 2006 as part of the US\$ 16 million ‘Camp Improvement Initiative’ (CII) to improve conditions in the camps if it wants Palestinian co-operation:²²

These are not hotbeds of terrorism; these are hotbeds of deprivation and corruption. When matters are corrected, a good relationship prevails, but all promises and priorities spoken of in the past must be implemented. Nahr al-Bared

Residents of Nahr al-Bared complained that the government had deliberately focused on Lebanese national security at the expense of Palestinian human security. The access and permit regime currently in place, for example, was perceived to have been designed specifically to retard the economic recovery of the camp. Nahr al-Bared was once a major economic hub in northern Lebanon. Given severe restrictions on Palestinians working in the Lebanese labour market, the shops in the camp were the only available source of income for many refugees. However, the LAF implemented a strict checkpoint regime outside the camp, which required residents to present both their official government ID and an identical special permit issued by the military in order to enter the camp. In addition, non-residents were required to obtain special permission from the army to enter the camp, effectively cutting the Nahr al-Bared market off from its clientele. As a result, Lebanese stopped visiting the established market in the camp and instead began to frequent a new Lebanese market in nearby ‘Abdeh.

Especially in Nahr al-Bared, the chief complaints of focus group participants concerned the LAF’s checkpoint regime. Residents attributed many of the camps problems—even some of their domestic problems—to the checkpoints and to the behaviour of the soldiers who man them. They said the arrangement was humiliating:

Currently the way people enter the camp is humiliating. You pass the inspection point and get searched twice, three times and even four times occasionally within a limited distance. Nahr al-Bared

If at the inspection point they tell you, ‘Walk off dog’ you must swallow it, because you cannot tell him, ‘Could you please not call me dog,’ because then you would be arrested for assaulting an officer on duty! Nahr al-Bared

If a man is stressed out as a result of the checkpoints, he goes home and takes it out on his wife and son because they are weaker than him. Nahr al-Bared

Residents said that LAF soldiers treat all Palestinians like potential criminals or terrorists. All persons and vehicles going in and out of the camps were subject to heavy searches, and there were allegations of harassment and abuse at the checkpoints. The LAF's assertion that these checkpoints were in place for their own protection—to prevent a resurgence of Fatah al-Islam or other terrorist organisation in the camps—did not sit well with the focus group participants:

It seems that eliminating terrorism is going to eliminate the people in the end. At first, [the Lebanese] said that it was the camp—or the residents of the camp—who were the victims of terrorism, but now, the camp and its inhabitants have become the victims of the army! Nahr al-Bared

Why is it that I can go anywhere in Lebanon without anyone asking me where I am going, but when I reach Nahr al-Bared, I become an accused criminal who must be searched four or five times at the same time? The other day I was at the Ministry of Defence. I swear to you it doesn't have as many security measures as the camp. Nahr al-Bared

In spite of this, most agreed that their community was willing to do what was necessary to ensure the security of the camps, provided the army agreed to scale back its imposition of prison-like conditions around the camps:

We say these tough security measures are unjustified when there is a state of co-operation between the residents and the army. The army's security measures must be reduced to maintain the dignity of the residents. Nahr al-Bared

Let us cancel the permits, reduce the [security] measures, and let us discuss our rights and obligations. If we approach the present circumstances in this spirit, then there will be no more problems. Our problem [now] is essentially with the army. Nahr al-Bared

The Lebanese state deals with the Palestinian camps from a security perspective, and this is something that we reject. There are rights; we have rights and then we have obligations. 'Ayn al-Hilweh

Some of the most pessimistic participants predicted that a continuation of the status quo will lead to a breakout of armed violence between some Palestinians and the LAF:

If this [the current security regime] does not change [. . .] the young men speak of countless incidents, events and arguments—about the behaviour [of the soldiers] and [their] humiliation—as if another war is on the horizon. The indignation of these people will lead to a point where people will have no other choice but explosion. Are we meant to reach such a point? Nahr al-Bared

The problem with the Lebanese security arrangement, furthermore, is not just limited to outside the camps. Lebanese military intelligence has heavily infiltrated the ‘New Camp’ of Nahr al-Bared and in other camps, such as Beddawi and ‘Ayn al-Hilweh, the army has adopted a policy of ‘instrumentalisation’, whereby officers of the Lebanese military intelligence are alleged to use threats to coerce factional leaders and Palestinian security personnel to deliver wanted persons to the justice authorities. This arrangement, however, is neither one of collaboration nor co-operation, as the Palestinians tasked with making an arrest enjoy no official cover from the Lebanese state and therefore face a Catch 22-type situation. They can comply with Lebanese authorities and deliver a wanted person to the army, but it is likely that they too will be arrested or detained. Several members of Palestinian security committees said they had personal experience of this:

Sometimes a big part of our security problems are caused by the military intelligence and the Lebanese state as they exert pressure on some people here in the camp by detaining one person while letting another go, and then they provoke a battle to resolve the problem, and all this creates reactions by turning the Palestinians against one another. ‘Ayn al-Hilweh

The security committee requires two conditions: Palestinian unanimity and a Lebanese cover, yet neither one is available. Nahr al-Bared

When the state wants someone, the Palestinian factions are perceived by the state as armed gangs! When are they going to deal with us in a different way? ‘Ayn al-Hilweh

We [members of the security committee] suffer from a lack of external political cover [. . .] If any resident of the camp is in trouble, [for example] if he has harmed someone and been jailed by the security committee, he could sue me

with the state and I would become the fugitive [...] In other words, the security forces here do not enjoy the real legitimacy they need to play a complete role. Beddawi

If someone assaults or points a gun at someone and I arrest him, I would be wanted by the law. On this matter, we have tried everything. They [the Lebanese army] told us this is a political issue, that we cannot protect the security committee because members of the committee are not legitimate. Legitimacy only belongs to the state and its law enforcement, and this is a problem facing the brothers in the security committee. Beddawi

Perhaps the most disheartening feeling shared by Palestinians was the perception that their community faced an existential threat in Lebanon. This is not unreasonable, given the fact that some refugee families in Lebanon have been displaced as a result of war as many as three times in a generation:

Among the Christians in Lebanon, there are probably two factions that demand expelling or murdering the Palestinians, and they are well-known, and if they have the opportunity, they will not hesitate to attack and annihilate us. Beddawi

Palestinians are deprived of all human rights, whether in regard to work, health, education, safety, residence or shelter. Palestinians live in constant fear. Beddawi

You see that we, the Palestinian people, are persecuted by everyone. Regardless of whether we are in Lebanon or Egypt, we are persecuted. This is why we need weapons to defend ourselves. Nahr al-Bared

Palestinian perceptions of Palestinian security institutions

Of course, the Government of Lebanon, LAF and ISF are not solely to blame for the curtailment of Palestinian human security. Existing Palestinian security structures within the camps—both official and unofficial—are far from ideal. Following the expulsion of the PLO leadership from Lebanon in 1982, the refugees were left virtually without direction. In northern and eastern Lebanon, then under Syrian control, pro-Syrian factions like

Abu Musa's Fatah al-Intifada emerged to take control, and in southern Lebanon, the remnants of Yasser Arafat's Fatah were pulled into a protracted battle with Amal militiamen. By the close of the Lebanese civil war in 1990, nothing which resembled the once-united Palestinian leadership remained. Instead, each camp was administered by a popular committee, which consisted of representation from each party or faction within the camp, and a security committee, which reported to the popular committee. Both committees were expected to co-ordinate their affairs with Syrian military intelligence, which kept close tabs on affairs in the camps and pursued a policy of 'encouraging inter-Palestinian rifts and blocking any possibility of direct negotiation between the Lebanese government and the [Palestinian Authority's] local representatives'.²³ This continued until the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005, during which time the pro-Syrian 'Alliance' (*Al-Tahaluf*) led by Hamas emerged and became a powerful player in inter-Palestinian politics.

Today, theoretically, a popular committee and its associated security committee govern each camp. Working together, the PLO and *Al-Tahaluf* are expected to keep the peace and generally administer the camps in co-ordination with UNRWA and the Government of Lebanon. In most of the Palestinian camps in Lebanon today, however, both parties have such divergent ideas about how the camp should be run that there are now two security committees, one loyal to the PLO and one loyal to *Al-Tahaluf*. Some factions and some security committees are better than others, but none enjoy any real legitimacy. It is generally agreed among Palestinians that these committees rarely come to any consensus on important issues, do not have widely accepted legitimacy and, in short, do more to enable factional infighting and bolster patron–client politics than they do to promote Palestinian unity.²⁴

The major reservations that Palestinians in Lebanon have regarding their own security institutions revolve around two major axes: (1) the question of Palestinian arms, if and how they should be controlled; and (2) inter- and intra-factional fighting and the implications this has for the security of the camps more generally.

Most Palestinian heavy weaponry was decommissioned in the 1980s following the departure of the PLO. However, like many Lebanese in the post-Taif period, Palestinian individuals and parties/factions held on to their small arms and light weaponry. Today, all weapons held by Palestinians outside the camps—particularly those held by the PFLP-GC in two military camps near the Lebanese–Syrian border—are of great concern to the Government of Lebanon. Some Lebanese officials have also called for the disarmament of

Palestinians inside the camps, though as most focus group participants made clear, this is unlikely to happen in the immediate future.²⁵

In general, the attitudes of focus group participants on the subject of Palestinian arms were mixed. On the one hand, many participants regarded the weapons of the Armed Struggle Committee (*Al-Kifah al-Musallah*) as well as the arms of individual factions as an absolute necessity, given the history of violence directed at them. Weapons were seen as key to obtaining the right of return, necessary for defence against future Lebanese or Israeli aggression and a source of pride in the face of the perceived indignity of being a refugee:

We cannot and we will not give up our arms until we get the right of return back. 'Ayn al-Hilweh

No one can expect us to put the Palestinian weapons away after [the massacre in] Sabra and Shatila, because then who would defend us? 'Ayn al-Hilweh

The lesson learnt from [Nahr] al-Bared was not to give up our weapons. After they [the residents of Nahr al-Bared] lived that humiliation, they told us [in 'Ayn al-Hilweh] never to give up our weapons; one of them even went so far as to say that he misses seeing a weapon. 'Ayn al-Hilweh

I say that the issue of weapons is a matter of dignity, because I don't sense that there is a dialogue between us. Beddawi

Were it not for the weapons inside the camps, we would have ended like Sabra and Shatila. They would have attacked us. Arms protect us, but at the same time, we do not know how to use them. We should give them to those whom know how to use them. Beddawi

But, some focus group participants also argued that current security arrangements put guns into the hands of too many young and untrained boys/men, promoted a culture of violence over one of education and self-betterment and discouraged finding non-violent solutions to political or other problems:

The Palestinian revolution came [in the 1970s], and frankly, this is where the destruction of the Palestinian intellect began. The Palestinian cause was limited to the gun and this was the foundation of destroying the Palestinian community. 'Ayn al-Hilweh

Naturally, we are with organising and controlling the arms and not allowing kids to bear arms so they won't kill one another. 'Ayn al-Hilweh

Our political organisations have armed us chaotically and savagely. Frankly everyone has a weapon at home, and no has been taught how to use those weapons. Beddawi

Young children are learning how to handle weapons. You see a little kid this tall walking the street carrying a weapon taller than him; how could this be? This is so wrong [. . .] I believe that a certain category should be trained on how to use weapons. However, when you train kids on using weapons, then where is the innocence of childhood? Beddawi

Some also suggested that weapons had done little to help the Palestinian cause in the past and were unlikely to help in the future:

In Sabra and Shatila, there were weapons, but people abandoned them at the dump out of fear of the Christians and Jews. They had weapons back then, and how many families survived? We were among them. And look at Nahr al-Bared. There too we had weapons, and look what happened! Nahr al-Bared

No matter how many weapons we have in the camps, we cannot challenge the Lebanese state; we cannot challenge anyone. Beddawi

Closely related to the subject of Palestinian armaments, participants in the focus groups had conflicting opinions regarding the role that the factions play in providing security, though most agreed that this splintering of the nationalist cause undermined Palestinian bargaining power with the Lebanese state:

In the past, factions used to include educated and intellectual people, who used to do good things for the faction and even finance it with their own money. But now, some of the factions seek protection by recruiting savage thugs. Some of the factions here operate on a low level, behaviourally and morally, compared to the rest of the community. Also, I think that the factions are more involved in provocation than in unified work. Nahr al-Bared

Where do I point my gun? Whose chest shall I aim it at? Why do I keep it? If I have a fight with Abed right now, I would carry my gun, go out to the street, and we will both point guns at one another. The greatest problem is that there is

no system that stops or deters me from doing something like this. Each one of us belongs to a political organisation that protects us, and if we commit a crime, our organisation will cover our backs. Beddawi

I want to speak frankly; whoever enjoys good ties never gets arrested by the security committee, unlike the poor and helpless. Thus if you do not take advantage of your social status and ties to the factions, you will be marginalised. Beddawi

Still, some participants—and members of security committees in particular—insisted that the situation in the camps would be worse without the factions:

The factions have their advantages, serving the people inside the camp and acting as a buffer because without them, there are people who would have swept through the camp long ago, but the factions are always standing in their way. Beddawi

Whenever there is a problem and we need security, they immediately respond. Beddawi

In fact, one young man went so far as to suggest that the demise of Nahr al-Bared was a result of there not being enough guns in the right hands:

Nahr al-Bared shows how important the factions are for our people. In Nahr al-Bared [. . .] the people abandoned the factions and the revolution. Everyone became preoccupied with his trade. The number of those capable of using weapons dropped significantly as did the number of those who were organised and trained. As a result the number of strangers in the camp increased manifold and the residents of the camp could no longer recognise them. Nahr al-Bared

Conclusion: commitments and conceptual problems

In its June 2009 newsletter, the Lebanese–Palestinian Dialogue Committee (LPDC) recommitted the Government of Lebanon to following a ‘human security programme’ in the reconstruction of Nahr al-Bared and to bettering the living conditions of Palestinian refugees throughout Lebanon.²⁶ These good intentions were first announced by Siniora a year earlier at the international donor conference in Vienna, where it was agreed:

*The Government will ensure that the security situation in NBC does not return to the status quo ante and will provide the Palestinian population with security under the rule of law. It will also treat them justly, fairly and with respect to their dignity and human rights. The Government will promote conflict prevention and maintain a balance between state and human security.*²⁷

This commendable vision, however, has not yet been realised. On a practical level, both the LAF and ISF do understand the human security framework and have utilised it, for example, in the aftermath of the July 2006 war with Israel, as they assisted in clearing rubble, neutralising unexploded ordinance, delivering foodstuffs and providing other sorts of aid to those most in need. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), likewise, has incorporated into its mission a human security agenda, setting an example. Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, however, have not benefited from these positive interactions between civilian and military personnel. Instead, they continue to be subjected to harsh and sometimes cruel treatment by the LAF and ISF, and they remain socially, economically and politically marginalised by the Government and people of Lebanon more generally.²⁸

As non-citizens, Palestinians appear to have lost, in the well-known words of Hannah Arendt, 'the right to have rights'.²⁹ Academics have long made the case that 'human rights' should perhaps more accurately be called 'citizens' rights', as 'without citizenship or nationality somewhere a person lacks many fundamental rights, including perhaps most fundamentally the right to a place in the world where one's opinions are significant and one's actions effective'.³⁰ In a twenty-first century world order determined almost exclusively in terms of citizenship, refugees frequently slip through the cracks, as has been the case with Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Indeed, even the UN and other bodies involved in international development and the global advancement of human rights sometimes overlook the particular situation of the refugee. For example, the recent United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) publication *Promoting Human Security: Ethical, Normative and Educational Frameworks in the Arab States* problematically omits any reference to refugees—Palestinian or otherwise—in its nearly 200 pages.³¹ If experts like this can commit such a glaring oversight in the theoretical literature on human security in the Middle East, it should come as little surprise that the LAF and ISF might also struggle with how the concept of human security

should be interpreted vis-à-vis the Palestinian refugees and how a human security programme might best be implemented with these vulnerable individuals.

This, of course, does not excuse the mistreatment of refugees or the mismanagement of their camps by the Lebanese government or its security forces, or for that matter, the mistreatment of Palestinians by their own security institutions. But, it does shed some light on how international donors, concerned with both the human security of Palestinians and the national security of Lebanese, should approach this problem. Given the sensitive nature of the refugees' legal status with regard to Lebanese domestic politics, it is unlikely that Lebanese security forces will make any significant adjustment to their outlook on the refugees in the near future.³² At best, as one senior ISF official said concerning laws restricting Palestinian access to the labour market, the authorities 'will let these laws sleep'.³³ Managing them exclusively as a security threat, it will continue to afford Palestinians rights only as privileges, to seek to limit refugee movement in and out of camps and to deny the legitimacy of Palestinian governance and security institutions. The LAF and ISF must therefore be convinced that Palestinian human security is intrinsically tied to Lebanese national security. Only by improving Palestinian life and legitimising Palestinian governance and security structures will Lebanon succeed in promoting security and stability in and around the camps, and eventually, extending Lebanese sovereignty over the camps. Likewise, it must be stressed that ignoring Palestinian human security will no doubt imperil Lebanese national security once again, just as it did in 2007.

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Endnotes

1. Focus group, Beddawi, 25 April 2009. Names have been changed throughout for the protection of participants.
2. Focus group, Nahr al-Bared, 26 April 2009. Hereafter, focus group quotes are referenced by camp and, where appropriate in the text, by gender and position/profession. See Hanafi and Sheikh Hassan, 'i'adat i'mar mukhayam nahr al-bared wa-hukumatu', 40; and Amnesty International, 'Lebanon: Amnesty International Calls for Inquiry into Reports of Looting and Abuses at Nahr al-Bared Palestinian Refugee Camp', 31 October 2007. Available at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE18/015/2007/en/dom-MDE180152007en.html> [Accessed 15 November 2009].
3. See, especially, Djebbi, 'Les réfugiés Palestiniens'; and Hanafi and Long, 'Governance, Governmentalities, and the State of Exception'.
4. For camp demographics, see Jacobsen, *Socio-economic Situation of Palestinian Refugees*, 219–230.

5. The authors use material from these same focus groups to discuss Palestinian perceptions of governance in a related article, Hanafi and Long, 'Governance, Governmentalities, and the State of Exception'. For more on the relationship between local governance structures and camp security, see this article.
6. This agreement was abrogated by the Lebanese government in 1987, but the precedent it set for relations between the army and the camps should not be underestimated. To a large extent, the LAF, ISF and Palestinian factions behave as if the agreement is still in force with the presence of the LAF in Nahr al-Bared simply an exception.
7. Approximately 10 per cent of Lebanon lies south of the Litani River. This area, from 2000 to 2006, was under the control of Hezbollah, which unofficially co-ordinated its security policies with the Lebanese government and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), a contingent of some 15,000 UN peacekeepers first deployed along the Lebanese–Israeli border in 1978 in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 425.
8. Paris, 'Human Security', 98.
9. Ibid.
10. Hanafi and Long, 'Governance, Governmentalities, and the State of Exception'.
11. Nerguizian, *Lebanese Armed Forces*, 14.
12. The fighting lasted for over three months, after which, according to Lebanese Minister of Defence Michel al-Murr, 40 Palestinian civilians, 168 Lebanese soldiers and at least 222 Fatah al-Islam fighters were reported killed. The Lebanese Ministry of Defence, Press Release, 10 September 2007.
13. Gaub, 'Multi-Ethnic Armies', 5–20.
14. Haddad, *Palestinian Impasse in Lebanon*.
15. Rougier, 'Fatah al-Islam'; Rosen, 'Al Qaeda in Lebanon'.
16. For more on the 'state of exception', which prevails in the Palestinian camps in Lebanon, see Hanafi and Long, 'Governance, Governmentalities, and the State of Exception'.
17. Government of Lebanon, *Common Challenge*, 51.
18. Hanafi and Long, 'Governance, Governmentalities, and the State of Exception'. Lebanese must also sometimes grapple with this indistinction. During times of unrest, such as the 2007–2008 series of bombings which plagued Lebanon, the LAF are sometimes granted policy powers by the MOI, and both LAF and ISF will jointly man checkpoints in Beirut and throughout the country.
19. For more on the symbolism of checkpoints, see Jengathan, 'Checkpoint', 69.
20. The Government of Lebanon document, *Common Challenge*, explains that 'community policing in NBC context entails the presence inside the camp of a culturally and politically sensitive ISF that will work to reduce the fears and tensions that existed prior to and after NBC conflict. Such type of policing will promote community engagement, partnership and proactive problem-solving. [...] The ISF police officers will be exposed to the political history of the Palestinians refugees in Lebanon, and will be trained to better understand the cultural and social specificities of the Palestinian community. Moreover, officers will be trained on problem solving, conflict resolution, and communications skills', 51. For a critique of this police system, see Hanafi and Sheikh Hassan, 'i'adat i'mar mukhayam nahr al-bared wa-hukumatu', 41.
21. Sayigh, 'Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon'.
22. LPDC, 'Camp Improvement Initiative'; Personal communication, 17 June 2010.
23. Rougier, *Everyday Jihad*, 11.
24. Hanafi and Long, 'Governance, Governmentalities, and the State of Exception'.
25. Hezbollah is particularly keen to prevent total Palestinian disarmament for two reasons: (1) an armed Palestinian presence lends credibility to their claim to be 'the resistance', fighting against Israel with and for the Palestinians; and (2) because the continued presence of armed Palestinians effectively forecloses public debate regarding Hezbollah's own, much heavier weaponry.
26. LPDC, *LPDC Newsletter*.
27. Government of Lebanon, *Common Challenge*, 51.
28. It is worth noting, however, that at the time this article went to press, the Justice and Administration Commission of the Lebanese Parliament was deliberating on four proposed changes to the law as it relates to Palestinians, including the right to work, to own property and to receive social security. This followed a vote called by Progressive Socialist Party Walid Jumblatt on 15 June 2010, where after failing to obtain the required votes to pass, it was sent to the commission. Lebanese Christian parties, including the Lebanese Forces, the Phalange and the Reform and Change Movement voted against the amendments, while MPs from the Druze Democratic Gathering, the Shi'i Amal and Hezbollah and Sunni Future Movement generally supported the amendments.
29. Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*.
30. Gibney, 'Statelessness and the Right to Citizenship', 50.
31. Chourou, *Promoting Human Security*.
32. Hanafi and Sheikh Hassan, 'i'adat i'mar mukhayam nahr al-bared wa-hukumatu', 37.
33. Personal communication, 16 November 2009.

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