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Ethics and Politics: Response to the Plight of Syrian Refugees

Impact of the continued influx of Syrian refugees on the
infrastructure, peace and security of Jordan and Lebanon

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Introduction

Jordan and Lebanon face today a serious security threat due to continued influx of Syrian refugees into their territories. The rise of extremism within both countries will undermine regional peace and security, if not addressed immediately. The international community will meet multiple challenges ahead if radicalization in the host countries forces authorities to resort to security measures inside and outside camps. This would indeed make the already acute humanitarian tragedy catastrophic.

The paralysis of the UN Security Council- due to Russian and Chinese vetoes-is exacerbated by Western countries resignation and submission to the Russian-Chinese policy of blocking. Instead of dramatizing a dramatic situation, it has become business as usual for the Security Council.

The history of repatriation testifies to a lengthy stay of refugees in the host countries- decades in most cases if not permanently. It testifies to radical and extremist organizations mushrooming - be it Taliban or al Qaida, in Pakistan or whatever name they are given elsewhere. Lessons of the past have taught us that the hosting communities will be vulnerable to extremist mindset and their propaganda. This is part of the dangerous mosaic of the overlap of a humanitarian tragedy and a radical threat to peace and security.

Refugees constitute now fifth of the population in Jordan. Syrian refugees numbering over 580,000 out of which only a third live in camps and the rest are dispersed in Jordanian cities. 2300 people cross into Jordan every single night through 48 illegal crossing points.

There has been a lot of abuse both by refugees towards other refugees and some refugees have capitalized on the opportunity of relative lawlessness starting in Syria and coming across the border.



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There are indicators of an increase in the radicalization in the camps as a result of poor conditions. Jordanian authorities have very serious security concerns on the one hand but at the same time they don't want to find themselves in conflict with any of the parties across the borders nor does Jordan want to become a base of operation.

Water and sanitation are major issues particularly in both Zaatari and Mrajeeb Al-Fhood refugee camps in Jordan. There are reported atrocious abuses particularly of women, young girls and boys, including forced prostitution and rape inside some camps. Services for education are seriously stretched. Every school in Jordan has two shifts.

In Lebanon, there are 1 million Syrian refugees, 80,000 Palestinian Syrian refugees and 42,000 Lebanese returnees who do not live in camps but reside in over 1,400 localities. Like Jordan, Lebanon is facing strained local capacities and enormous pressure on their infrastructure.

Schools and hospitals in Lebanon are unable to respond to the growing needs which require direct financial support from the government. Hosting communities directly affected by the arrival of Syrian refugees are now vulnerable. Lebanon fears it could become breeding grounds of extremism and radicalism. Implications of the Syrian crisis on its territory are deeply felt with the increase of violent prone areas in many major cities.

The Syrian crisis has already had implications on Lebanese territories through an increase in Violent Prone Areas (VPA) across Tripoli, Sidon and some parts in Beirut as well as to armed clashes on the Lebanese-Syrian borders. The weakened infrastructure had already led to the existence of extremist groups posing a real threat to the country and the region. Refugees, and even host communities in some areas in Lebanon, are slipping into extremism and fanaticism.

By the hour, hundreds of Syrians are fleeing their country. Lebanon's non-hermetic borders and its liberal welcoming environment make Lebanon a preferred destination.



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In addition to the 300 to 400 thousand Syrian workers in Lebanon originally, around 585.000 Syrian refugees registered before the UNHCR by July 5, 2013.

According to statements from the Presidency of the Republic, the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Social Affairs (which was granted leadership regarding the matter) based on General Security reports, the total number of both registered and non-registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon amounts more than 1.2 million.

This represents more than 25% of the Lebanon's population! Not to mention around half a million Palestinian refugees in the camps. The discrepancy between UNHCR registration and actual numbers is due to lack of registration. In December 2012, the number didn't exceed 175.000. Today it's 4 times more (233% increase in 7 months). Any escalation on the ground in Syria will have direct and dangerous effects. 77% of the displaced are women and children.

GDP was growing at a rate of 7% in 2010 (prior to the Syrian turmoil). It dropped to less than 2% in 2012. Tourism contracted by 24% in 2011 and a further contraction of 16% in 2012. Exports dropped to -1%. Unemployment has increased from 8.6% in 2010 to 10.3% in 2012.

Main challenges for Lebanon at this stage are clear on the Political- Security level: porous borders' clashes; difficulties in implementing the National Dialogue commitments (the "Baabda Declaration" of June 2012); escalation of sectarian conflict; increase of the rate of petty theft and crimes; increased rates of illegal activities (drugs, prostitution, women trafficking, child abuse...); escalation of extremism. If Lebanon's needs are ignored, the country could easily become major breeding grounds for extremism.

On the Social and Health level, the challenges include: spread of epidemics and diseases due to unsanitary conditions; intense pressure on primary and secondary health care;



increased pressure on the already limited social welfare; lack of infrastructure to absorb the needs; lack of adequate shelter (unorganized spread of tents); increase of the rates of unemployment; increased competition with the most marginalized Lebanese.

The region is enduring a different kind of refugee crisis that is affecting social fabrics in the countries neighboring Syria, pressuring acutely the infrastructure, and thrusting the tense competition on the job market. A longer term approach to link and combine humanitarian aid to developmental aid has been lacking.

Investing in humanitarian aid in Syria would reduce pressures on neighboring countries. UN agencies and International organizations are trying to reinforce and enlarge their relief structures, despite the difficulties to access, in territories that are not subject to violence and belligerence.

The UN has issued the largest ever appeal in its history for Jordan and Lebanon for 4.4 Billion dollars for the UN and 0.8 billion for Jordan and Lebanon's national programs. The efforts of the international community to mobilize funding have significantly accelerated in 2013. But not much, however, was done to build on the momentum gained at the Kuwait conference to ensure that pledges made are delivered as well as to engage non-traditional donors.

Recommendations

The UN Secretariat and members of the international community, UN Security Council included, could and should focus on the situation in Jordan and Lebanon as one that constitutes a threat to international peace and security.

There is a need to reach out to Jordan and Lebanon on a number of things. One, of course, is the humanitarian situation and the refugee needs. But there is also a necessity to work in more unconventional ways to help to reach out to the communities that are affected by this crisis through combining efforts of UN agencies such as OCHA, UNDP and UNHCR or by reaching out directly to the World Bank, the European Union and maybe the private sector which could help get to accurate and faster solutions. It is not only an economical issue. It is a social and political problem as well.

OCHA and UNDP should work together with UNHCR, UNICEF , ESCWA and others to take actions to link emergency aid and development needs.

The UN community must not resign to paralysis. It must find a way out of the paralysis by doing something it can do. And what it can do is to reach out to Jordan and Lebanon.

Member States, particularly Security Council members need to mobilize the World Bank and the European Union so that they get solutions and results. They should point the situation beyond the humanitarian aspect into the area of infrastructure and development.

Some Security Council members are board members to UNDP, UNHCR, WFP, and should pass on to their colleagues on the boards member and to their own governments



that it is essential now to take up the unconventional approach to combine humanitarian with infrastructure.

Connecting humanitarian assistance to recovery and development inside the UN system is one part of what must be done, but mobilizing the WB, the EU and the private sector too, is fundamental for resources and the higher probability of reaching out. The UN and its agencies should do their part with their own competitive advantages but it has also to mobilize others in order to translate this into funds.

Sustainability is key. Support by the UN, regional partners, GCC, Europeans, donors and especially the media, has to be sustainable.

Jordan and Lebanon must organize their own capacity for channeling assistance to communities. They must factor in, and plan for, the expected diminishing aid over the years once the magnitude of the situation subsides and refugees settle in for years to come. They must not be in denial regarding the inability of Syrian refugees to return for at least 10 years- if they return at all in masses.

The Security Council should send political messages for reassurance to the countries that are affected by the crisis: support of the political process, and of course support to the refugees. Of equal importance is extending support to the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Jordanian Armed Forces as long as they remain a factor for stability.

The idea of a visit by Security Council members to the region must be reactivated and serious plans should be put in place soonest possible. As figures of refugee numbers have increased, the pressure is mounting. The ethics of non-action are questioned. A visit by members of the Security Council to Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey is now necessary morally and politically.



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The challenge in dealing with the GCC countries is moving the conversation away from the security conversation alone. They are fairly focused on viewing the conflict in Syria in terms of the wider implications on the regional security issues. Gulf States need to recognize that security is not just the equipment and the hardware; security is also the contribution to the solutions and investing in what would contribute directly to security on the longer term.

The Gulf States, despite individual and often ideologically conditional support to various groups, for the longest time have had the ability to change the face of poverty in the region and remove large chunks of extremism. They are called upon to take an active role in addressing the plight of Syrian refugees, sharing the burdens with neighboring countries, investing in human capital, and opening their doors to resettle refugees in their territories.

Tensions between refugees and hosting communities are tremendous particularly as competition for jobs increases. GCC countries should open up their job market to Syrian refugees.

Palestinian refugees in Syria are registered with UNRWA. When they go to Lebanon or Jordan, are they UNHCR's or UNRWA's problem? This is one of the technical UN inter agency issues that require more clarity for people's registration.

Neither Beirut nor Amman can be held solely responsible and therefore responsive. It is neither a Syrian-Lebanese nor a Jordanian-Syrian bilateral matter. An urgent international conference is much needed to address the impact on Lebanon, Jordan and the region.

Both EU and GCC countries must begin to offer temporary shelter to Syrian refugees because the capacity of Lebanon and Jordan has been exhausted. Simply put, neither country can cope alone. Germany has made a limited offer of resettling 5000 refugees.



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This should encourage both European and Arab countries to follow suit. It is high time for serious steps to allow both Jordan and Lebanon to be a transit host to other destinations. This is an essential component of burden sharing and collective responsibility.

UN agencies and international organizations presently active in Syria could reinforce and enlarge their response and relief structures inside the Syrian territory, namely in the regions that are not subject to violence and belligerence and hence encourage displaced Syrians to return to their hometowns. Investing in humanitarian aid inside Syria would definitely reduce the pressure on neighboring countries.

The international community's commitments, such as through the Kuwait Pledging Conference of January 2013, should be translated into substantial funding. The Regional Response Plan (RRP5) should be accelerated.

Lebanon initially requested \$180 million. The government has lately requested \$449 million under RRP5. Schools and Hospitals are unable to respond to the needs if they are not financially supported by the government. Direct support to the government is recommended along with international organizations (IOs) and NGOs assistance.

Host communities, mainly municipalities, can offer direct and immediate results provided their infrastructure is enhanced. Direct International assistance to local hosting communities is a strategic high priority. A coordinated and transparent process must be envisaged to that end.

There is a need to avoid overlapping and inefficiency. A network between IOs and local CSOs is essential. A monitoring mechanism is essential in order to assure donors and encourage them to think unconventionally.

Enhancing borders control is also a must. The international community committed to that, years before the Syrian turmoil. It is now an absolute necessity.



Support and assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces is highly needed in order to maintain order. The LAF are refraining from any political involvement. The absence of a ruling government, the unfortunate postponement of parliamentary elections and the VPAs (Violent Prone Areas) make that an emergency.

Divisions between the Lebanese are somehow linked to the Syrian conflict. As long as there is no end in sight for the Syrian crisis, Lebanon should remain seriously committed to the Baabda Declaration (article 12: "Lebanon should seek to avoid the negative repercussions of regional tensions and crises in order to preserve its paramount interest, national unity and civil peace..."). Lebanon is not party to the 1951 UN convention relating to the status of refugees. Establishing such a status today would run into the broad fear of unlimited stay. In the back mind of Lebanese people, this could mean a lot in terms of demography.

If Beirut is ready to take its share of responsibility in this extremely delicate issue, then the international community is called to bear its share too. The Lebanese borders will no longer contain the repercussions of this numerically unprecedented influx of people into an already vulnerable environment.

Conclusion

Despite the paralysis in the UN Security Council, it is dangerous to treat the current situation as business as usual. The current situation in Syria and its neighboring countries poses a serious threat to regional peace and security. This is a dramatic situation that needs to be dramatized. Long term planning and sustainable support must be humanitarian, developmental, political as well as conscious of the security perils. There is still a need for an international conference that would highlight the issue of Syrian internally displaced and refugees in Jordan and Lebanon. A visit by UN Security Council members to Jordan and Lebanon is more needed than ever before.

If the international community does not move quickly, the repercussions will multiply by several folds on the security front. The humanitarian/security situation has become so bad that the pressure on the infrastructure means that cases are numbered in terms of regularization, schooling, weapons, human traffic, and the growth of extremists and militants. What looks now manageable because it comes under the security umbrella will not be sustained if developments force major security operations in the refugee camps and in cities. Syrian-Syrian tensions are increasing but there is also a growing tension that is Syrian- Jordanian and Syrian-Lebanese.

The Security Council must find a way to secure humanitarian assistance into Syria. Donors must do more both for the internally displaced and for the refugees in neighboring countries.

The stress on the institutions in both Jordan and Lebanon cannot be overstated. Both countries must be rewarded for their open doors policy. Alone, neither country can cope. The bulk of refugees in Jordan and Lebanon are women and children. Education and children's protection from abuse and human rights violations must be at the core of international aid and attention. There is a need to focus on building capacities of the



government in Jordan and Lebanon and the local communities in order to deal with the challenge.

The repatriation of Syrian refugees is not expected before less than 10 years, if in fact repatriation takes place at all in most cases. It is time to move actively toward a longer term approach because it will be a very long time before refugees could go back to Syria. This requires mobilizing for more innovative funding both from traditional and new donors. GCC countries in particular must be more forthcoming within a coordinated umbrella and with direct aid to both Jordan's and Lebanon's governments, and in supporting the local hosting communities infrastructure and municipalities. Municipalities can be considered as the local communities between the government and the CSOs. This is something to explore with donors.

In terms of Lebanon the pressures are really acute and you'd have to look at the totality of the Syrian crisis and its impact on Lebanon - politically divisive, border incursions, violence, sectarian tensions etc.

VPAs are becoming more challenging as they spread almost all over the country. There are clashes on the borders, in Tripoli, Sidon, and in some areas in Beirut. This requires the support of the Lebanese army and the police. The sentiments of the communities are now as such that the municipalities are putting a night curfew because of the criminality and the tensions between the two communities in some cities (kidnapping, friction, and so on)

This is a demographic nightmare for Jordan and Lebanon - both very sensitive and vulnerable countries. In Lebanon, there is no empowered government to do some of the really important things needed at the present moment by putting into place new structures to deal with the refugee issue and coordinate with the international community.



This is a different kind of refugee crisis which the UN system and the Global system have to respond to resolutely. The spillover of the Syrian crisis into Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq carries along the dangers of the rising political tensions and destabilization. Collapse of security, social, political and economic institutions threatens the very infrastructure of Jordan and Lebanon if the dramatic plight of the Syrian refugees is not taken up seriously. This humanitarian tragedy poses now a serious threat to regional peace and security which needs to be addressed politically.

Beirut Institute's policy paper was prepared by Raghida Dergham.



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Note

Beirut Institute's policy paper is based on ideas that transpired during its third Off the Record Luncheon UN Security Council Luncheon Series that was held in July 8, 2013 in New York. This meeting was the second installment of the institute's Off-the-Record Exclusive Policy Circle series entitled "Ethics and Politics: Response to the Plight of Syrian Refugees".

Raghida Dergham, Beirut Institute's Founder and Executive Chairman presided over the meeting. HRH Prince Rashid El-Hassan, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Hashemite Charitable Organization and H.E Ziyad Baroud, Former Lebanese Minister of Interior were the guests of honor. In attendance were H.E Deputy Secretary General and members of the UN Security Council, HE Ambassador Rosemary DiCarlo Deputy Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the UN and President of the UN Security Council for July, HE Ambassador Gary Quinlan Permanent Representative of the Commonwealth of Australia to the UN, HE Ambassador Sahebzada Ahmed Khan Deputy Permanent Representative of Islamic Republic of Pakistan to the UN, HE Ambassador Aghshin Mehdiyev Permanent Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the UN, HE Ambassador Sylvie Lucas Permanent Representative of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg to the UN, HE Ambassador Gert Rosenthal Permanent Representative of the Republic of Guatemala to the UN, HE Ambassador Eugene Richard Gasana Permanent Representative of the Republic of Rwanda to the UN, HE Ambassador Philip Parham Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the UN, HE Ambassador Kyung-Hoon Sul Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the UN, Mr. Mario Oyarzabal Deputy Permanent Representative of Argentina, Mr. Omar Kadiri Deputy Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Morocco to the UN, Mr. Philippe Bertoux Political Counselor at the French Mission to the UN. Sir Derek Plumbly, Special Coordinator of the UN for Lebanon and HE Nawaf Salam, Ambassador of Lebanon to the UN were special guests. Both Russia and China were invited but declined.

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