A very political reconstruction: governance and reconstruction in Lebanon after the 2006 war

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This paper assesses the political nature of reconstruction in Lebanon in the wake of the 33-day war between Hezbollah and Israel in the summer of 2006. It illustrates the extent to which Arab and Gulf States assumed a major role in the reconstruction effort that followed the fighting. A significant competitive dynamic attached itself to the reconstruction of Lebanon, with external actors attempting to protect and defend their favoured constituencies via reconstruction activities. The reconstruction endeavour reflected Lebanon's internal political divisions as well as wider regional competition. Using the metaphors of 'software' and 'hardware', the study examines how in general many Western states and Western-backed international institutions favoured governance programming (software) while many Arab and Gulf State donors preferred physical reconstruction projects (hardware), often with an emphasis on large-scale, high-visibility infrastructure projects. The paper argues that the latter were able to connect more effectively with the political culture of Lebanon.

Keywords: governance, Hezbollah, Israel, Lebanon, post-war reconstruction, war

Introduction

This paper evaluates the contrasting approaches taken by external parties after the 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel in Lebanon. Broadly speaking, Arab and Gulf State donors invested heavily in physical reconstruction through large-scale programmes to repair infrastructure and housing, showing little interest in governance reforms. This differs from Western states and Western-backed international institutions, which, while funding some physical reconstruction, maintained and intensified an emphasis on governance reforms. The paper seeks to illustrate the extent of reconstruction funding by Arab and Gulf State donors, and to assess the implications of the differing attitudes to governance programming. It argues that many Lebanese failed to see the relevance of continued governance interventions when there were obvious physical reconstruction needs. Moreover, the paper contends that governance programming, despite the millions of dollars devoted to it and the sophistication of the initiatives, was unable to connect with Lebanon’s political culture in the same way as highly visible infrastructural investments.

The study is divided into four parts. The first section sets the context, illustrating the peculiarly destructive nature of the 2006 ‘summer war’ and outlining Lebanon’s complex political heritage and delicate strategic position that conspire to present
benign conditions for the politicisation of reconstruction assistance. The second section looks at the nature, scale, and organisation of reconstruction assistance. The labyrinthine reconstruction structures, and the competing agendas of internal and external reconstruction actors, reflect and facilitate the distortion of reconstruction into a political contest. The third section considers the various motivations of those involved in reconstruction. The fourth section discusses a particular aspect of the reconstruction strategies: governance. It should be emphasised at the outset that the broad categories mentioned throughout this paper (‘Arab and Gulf donors’ or ‘Western donors’) do not comprise discrete groups. Significant variations occurred within the categories. Nevertheless, it is possible to defend the generalisations advanced here.

While Western actors have invested heavily in governance programmes, Arab and Gulf States, despite donating large sums to Lebanon’s reconstruction, have paid scant attention to formal issues of governance. In very simplistic terms, many Western donors, especially the European Union (EU), have sought to influence Lebanon by changing the state’s ‘software’ or modes of governance at the ministry and municipality levels. Many Arab and Gulf States, however, have eschewed software engineering through formal governance programmes and instead have concentrated much of their reconstruction assistance on ‘hardware’ or highly visible infrastructure and physical reconstruction. Iran, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia have spent hundreds of millions of dollars on the reconstruction of bridges, housing, and roads. To continue the analogy, if the polity and society are run according to European-designed software (courtesy of governance programmes), it could be argued that investments in hardware (or the physical dimensions of communities and the state) will yield a lower political return. A closer examination of the Lebanese context, though, reveals that the high visibility reconstruction assistance of Arab and Gulf donors connects more meaningfully with Lebanese political culture. Western-style governance interventions may have less resonance than hoped for by their Western champions.

Many of the observations in this paper are based on interviews with key figures in Lebanon’s government, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), NGOs, municipalities, and the overseas donor bodies of Arab and Gulf States. Given the sensitivities of the issues discussed, interviewees are identified by institutional affiliation rather than by name. The interviews were conducted in December 2006 and January–February 2008.

Context

The 33-day war that followed the capture by Hezbollah of two Israeli soldiers in July 2006 was widely considered as more destructive than previous Israeli invasions or occupations of Lebanon.1 Approximately 1,200 Lebanese were killed and one million were displaced in the fighting, while direct war damage amounted to an estimated at USD 4 billion, plus an additional USD 6 billion in indirect costs (El-Khadem, 2007; Mac Ginty, 2007, pp. 459–461). Israel’s response went far beyond an operation to rescue the two soldiers, although it was goaded by Hezbollah rocket
attacks that landed deep inside its territory and killed 43 civilians (Ruys, 2007, pp. 265–271). Roads, bridges, and public utilities were targeted, and thousands of housing units were destroyed or damaged, particularly in the Shi’a-dominated areas of Beirut’s southern suburbs and in southern Lebanon. Most civilians returned home within hours of the cessation of hostilities in mid-August 2006 (thus averting the humanitarian problems associated with long-term displacement), but returnees faced hazards posed by vast quantities of unexploded ordinance.

Following the civil war of 1975–91, and repeated Israeli invasions, incursions, and occupations, Lebanon was well used to the task of reconstruction (Traboulsi, 2007, pp. 240–246). While international and national actors amassed considerable experience of reconstruction, the primary burden fell on citizens. Because of a mixture of neo-liberal orientation, incapacity, ineptitude, chronic corruption, and deeply ingrained clientelistic politics, citizens were accustomed to the fact that only limited assistance would be available from the state (Hamieh, 2007). With debt servicing alone absorbing more than 16 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2006, the public coffers were under severe strain (UNDP, 2008a). A context of relative state incapacity allowed other actors (internal and external) to play a significant role in reconstruction, including the usual list of international organisations (most notably the United Nations (UN) agencies), INGOs, and the overseas aid bodies of Western governments (such as the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID) and the Swedish Development Cooperation Agency). Uniquely in the Lebanese case, though, two further actors were involved in reconstruction:

- the Arab and Gulf states, which played a very prominent role (financially, politically, and symbolically) in the reconstruction of Lebanon after 2006; and
- Jihad al Bina, the reconstruction wing of Hezbollah, which benefited from an extensive organisation and an ability to tap into the resources of the Shi’a community.

One must view state weakness alongside Lebanon’s deep sectarian divisions. While cleavages among the Christian, Shi’a, and Sunni communities define much of Lebanon’s politics, additional intra-group factionalism and tactical inter-group alliances overlay these splits. The resulting complex political landscape of political dynasties, shifting alliances, and political parties with militias was managed in the post-civil war period by an equally complex power-sharing arrangement (Zahar, 2005, pp. 219–240). Key political positions were allocated according to religious affiliation; thus, the prime minister would be a Sunni, the president a Maronite Christian, and the parliamentary speaker a Shi’a. The delicate power-sharing dispensation unravelled following the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri on 14 February 2005. A number of factors converged to upset the very delicate political balance. First, confessional and political divisions became more visible, with an increase in public demonstrations and counter-demonstrations, and a rise in minor sectarian incidents. Second, the extent to which local political actors were ‘sponsored’ by external forces became more apparent. Third, Shi’a communities became more politically
assertive, especially in airing their grievance that they had been marginalised politically and economically. Fourth, the withdrawal of Syrian troops in 2005 (following US-backed public protests) removed a major post-civil war stabilising factor (Zahar, 2002, p. 567).

Hariri’s assassination magnified already existing dysfunctions in Lebanese politics. Given Lebanon’s position at the fulcrum of a number of regional disputes and dynamics, external actors sought to exploit the situation. It is in this context that the war of 2006 occurred, and post-war reconstruction is best viewed. Indeed, as will be argued below, the post-war reconstruction effort presented an opportunity for external actors to pursue ‘war’ (or at least the battle for influence) by other means.

The architecture of reconstruction
Lebanon’s reconstruction structures are complex. Operating alongside ad hoc governmental committees and overlapping ministerial responsibilities were Hezbollah (particularly its reconstruction wing, Jihad al Bina), bilateral donors (including Arab and Gulf States), international organisations, and INGOs. Crucial to this multiplicity of actors was the limited part played by the Lebanese government. Its ‘neo-liberal tradition in public governance’ meant that ‘it conceptualized its role in reconstruction as “relief”; its involvement limited to paying financial compensation to those who had lost their homes, while the management of reconstruction would be left to individual homeowners and contractors’ (Fawaz, 2007, p. 23). This created space for non-state actors to assume significant roles in reconstruction.

As soon as the fighting came to a halt in August 2006, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah appeared on television pledging that his organisation would help to rebuild homes and compensate those whose homes had been destroyed. Well in excess of USD 100 million in cash was distributed within 72 hours of the cessation of hostilities. Hezbollah seemed the most effective on-the-ground actor as it directed bulldozers to raze damaged buildings and its volunteers staffed registration centres to assess the needs of returnees. The party justified its reconstruction activities as another part of its ‘war of resistance’ and, for many Lebanese, Hezbollah’s reconstruction activism contrasted with the seeming inefficiency of the state.

Western political and media sources voiced concern that Hezbollah’s apparent reconstruction efficiency was due to Iranian funding. Quickly, post-war reconstruction emerged as a site of contestation. While few Arab, Gulf and Western actors publicly justified their reconstruction assistance in terms of matching or thwarting Iranian ambitions, this was an implicit strain running through Lebanon’s post-2006 reconstruction. A week after Nasrallah’s pledge to compensate war victims, then United States President George W. Bush announced that the US would provide USD 230 million in reconstruction assistance. Aid pledges at the Stockholm Conference for Lebanon’s Early Recovery on 31 August 2006 elicited USD 900 million in reconstruction pledges from EU members, Arab countries, and Japan. The major donors were the Gulf States, while the European Commission (EC)’s contributions—European
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Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) and non-ECHO—represented 10 per cent and those of the US approximately six per cent of the total, making them relatively minor players (Ministry of Finance, 2006). In the years following the 2006 war, this dominance by non-Western actors continued, with non-Development Assistance Committee (DAC) states such as Iran, Kuwait, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia playing the key part in Lebanon’s reconstruction. Three key factors facilitated the dominance of non-DAC states:

• First, on-the-ground reconstruction actors in Lebanon reported DAC member states to be slow-paced, wedded to bureaucratic procedures, and prone to attaching conditions to financial assistance. For example, the deputy head of a municipality in Beirut’s southern suburbs reported that working with Arab donors was much easier than working with European donors since European money came with the attachment of conditions and burdensome bureaucracy, such as the need for donor accounts to be registered with the central bank. Many Arab donors tended to circumvent this bureaucracy by disbursing unconditional grants or in-kind assistance.

• Second, non-DAC donors operated with considerable flexibility and were ready to mould an ad hoc architecture of assistance to meet reconstruction and recovery needs in Lebanon. A number of Lebanese interviewees reported that non-DAC donor efforts seemed to have benefited the most affected communities by focusing on large-scale reconstruction projects (whole villages or infrastructure, and budgetary assistance) rather than on basic needs.

• Third, most of the non-DAC donors had an ability to work around the political conflict between the government and the Hezbollah-led opposition. This required a certain deftness and freedom to operate outside of the ‘normal’ confines that apply to many development or humanitarian agencies. While the political crisis was undoubtedly a debilitating factor in Lebanon’s reconstruction, non-DAC donors were able to overcome most of the limitations. Many of these donors had previous experience of operating in Lebanon and so were cognisant of the political situation. The deputy mayor of one Beirut municipality noted that: ‘The Kuwaitis have been helping since 1975. They didn’t come here in 2006 with white hands’.

Post-war donor assistance was channelled to two main purposes: compensation payments for damaged private housing; or implementing reconstruction and rehabilitation projects, such as repairing damaged infrastructure. Iran, Kuwait, and Qatar funded both aspects. In the early phase of recovery and reconstruction, housing compensation was estimated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as the largest direct cost of the war, accounting for 53 per cent (or USD 1.1 billion) of losses. Donors could sponsor a project directly (such as the reconstruction of a bridge), lodge a payment with the government’s account in the Central Bank of Lebanon, and/or provide in-kind contributions (such as, replacement of equipment for schools) (Ministry of Finance, 2006). Importantly, the precise approach differed from donor to donor, resulting in a complex donor environment.
Most of the non-DAC countries (including Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates) worked through the government, which involved signing protocols with the Lebanese government and either opening accounts at the central bank or routing funds through the Higher Relief Commission (HRC), located in the prime minister’s office. Iran, however, used a more direct route that bypassed the Sunni-dominated central government as much as possible. The Iranian Contributory Organization for Reconstructing Lebanon (ICORL) sought to work through the municipalities, the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR), and the relevant ministries.

Kuwaiti pledges totalled USD 315 million. The Kuwaiti approach to reconstruction included the ‘adoption’ of 25 villages in southern Lebanon and 12 high-rise apartment buildings in Beirut’s Southern Suburbs. The adoption scheme included compensation for displaced residents and repairs to infrastructure. Work on infrastructure projects (budgeted at USD 185 million) did not begin until March 2008, although preparatory work in terms of selecting infrastructure projects, finalising designs, and contracting consultants was under way before then. Kuwaiti personnel placed emphasis on long-term development in their reconstruction activities and echoed many of the development ‘buzzwords’ espoused by Western donor organisations. To this end, Kuwaiti-funded infrastructural projects were not to be restricted to the regions heavily affected by the July war. Instead, funds were to be directed to northern Lebanon and west Bekaa with the overall aim of assisting nationwide development.

The Qataris pledged a total of USD 300 million for housing compensation and projects. The Qatar National Relief Committee also took the ‘adopt-a-village’ approach, paying people directly and working through local partners. It adopted the four most heavily targeted villages in southern Lebanon: Ainata, Aita, Bent Jbeil, and Khiam. By February 2008, USD 121 million had been disbursed for housing compensation and projects, with USD 80.9 million spent on housing compensation in the adopted four villages (Ministry of Finance, 2007). Housing compensation, which was paid directly to individual homeowners, was based on assessments carried out jointly by a Qatari field team and the Council of the South, a strategy that expedited the evaluation process. The project implementation mechanism involved the use by the Qatari organisation of an independent team comprising consultants and engineers that contracted local Lebanese suppliers, workers, and service providers.

Following the August 2006 ceasefire, the Iranian government declared its readiness to intervene in all damaged areas/sectors without any funding ceiling. Although no official announcement has been made on the amount pledged to Lebanon, estimates in the Lebanese media suggest a figure of USD 1 billion, granting Iran an enormous reconstruction presence. The ICORL, though, prefers to measure its largess in terms of project implementation. Unlike Kuwait and Qatar, which both signed protocols with the Lebanese government, the Iranians were not keen to lodge their funds with the Lebanese central authority. Moreover, the Iranians had concerns about the inflated costs of government-managed schemes, noting how government estimates of work on the Abou Al Aswad highway in 2000 ran to USD 990,000...
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while the Iranians managed to do the job for USD 97,000.\textsuperscript{19} The ICORL’s preference to work directly with municipalities brought the advantages of greater immediacy and visibility among local communities. However, distance from central government brought a disbenefit in relation to infrastructure projects: since such projects were ultimately subject to the approval of Beirut, the Iranian approach entailed delay.\textsuperscript{20}

Assistance from Saudi Arabia was significant in political and symbolic terms. Crucially, much of its aid was routed through central government, whether in the form of USD 1 billion of support for the central bank in the midst of the war or budgetary support to help the government meet a shortfall in education spending.\textsuperscript{21} A large amount of the Saudi largess was pledged directly to the prime minister’s office, and its allocation was left to the discretion of the prime minister.\textsuperscript{22} This led to disquiet among some observers about a lack of transparency on the part of ‘imperial Beirut’, and the danger of channelling of funds intended for reconstruction to the regular budget.\textsuperscript{23}

Western donors did contribute to efforts to meet Lebanon’s relief and reconstruction needs, although the scale of their interventions did not match those of some Arab and Gulf State donors. DAC members, which faced many demands on their overseas assistance and relief budgets, tended to have a strict view of what constituted the emergency phase of a post-war or post-disaster environment, and may have limited their involvement as Lebanon (without food shortages, and with relatively well-contained sanitation and accommodation situations) constituted a limited ‘emergency’. As will be shown below, the reconstruction and relief interventions by many Western states occurred in conjunction with the pre-existing governance programmes that continued apace (or even intensified) after the 2006 war.

The key point of this section is to convey the complexity of the structures and processes that characterised the reconstruction of Lebanon after the summer war of 2006, and to illustrate the significance of assistance from Arab and Gulf States. Post-2006 Lebanon was festooned with banners, billboards, and posters attesting to the generosity of Arab and Gulf State donors. For example, villages in the south displayed banners thanking the Saudi king while Iranian flags adorned intersections in Beirut’s southern suburbs. This symbolic competition reflects a wider competition among some of the Arab and Gulf donors in their attempts to be seen as demonstrating most solidarity with Lebanon. Given the deeply divided nature of Lebanon, however, it is relevant to ask: with which Lebanon are external donors seeking to show solidarity?

**Donor motivations**

In explaining the motivations of donors, it is necessary to return to the already mentioned regional and international competition. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia aspire to hold hegemonic status in the region. Lebanon’s constitutional conflict of 2006–08 connected with this wider regional conflict. Shi’ite political figures accused the Sunni-led government of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora of being pro-American and pro-Israeli. In return, Sunni figures accused the mainly Shi’ite Hezbollah-led
opposition of furthering Iranian and Syrian interests. To some extent, the involvement of Arab and Gulf State donors in Lebanon’s reconstruction was an extension of this regional power play. While Iran and Saudi Arabia may have been partisan in favouring factions within Lebanon to pursue their strategic interests, Kuwait trod a more delicate path. For it, the chief strategic aim was regional stability and a reconstructed and developed Lebanon was a key to achieving that objective.

Linked to this strategic competition were differing religious and ideological worldviews. Although all external donors professed neutrality vis-à-vis donorship, religious motivations were at work, with Iranian bilateral projects often more prominent in Shi‘ite-dominated areas and Saudi Arabian bilateral projects often more prominent in Sunni-dominated districts. Many donors put forward explanations of solidarity with Lebanon’s predicament. The Iranians, for example, justified their reconstruction assistance in terms of solidarity with other marginalised groups or ‘running to the rescue of the disenfranchised’. The Kuwaitis noted how their historical experience of invasion and destruction (in 1990–91) gave them an affinity with Lebanon. Indeed one observer pointed out how Kuwait seemed to have ‘an affection’ for Lebanon and that many members of its elite had homes in Lebanon.

While it is easy to be cynical about donor motivations and connect them with strategic interests, it is important not to overlook more genuinely humanitarian reasons. A ‘CNN factor’ (or more precisely, an ‘Al Jazeera factor’ or real-time coverage of the war via satellite television) meant that Arab and Gulf States could hardly ignore the destruction on their doorsteps and reconstruction assistance was a way of assuaging concerns among their own citizens about inactivity during the war. A number of Lebanese observers cited ‘guilt’ as a principal factor among Arab State motivations. One noted that ‘Arab States were politically silent for 33 days. They hoped that Hezbollah “terrorism” would be extinguished’. Another accused Saudi Arabia of ‘washing its hands of Arab blood’ by funding reconstruction. For Kuwait and Qatar, however, long-standing development assistance programmes for Lebanon meant that it was logical for them to turn their attention to reconstruction. The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED), for instance, had been functioning in Lebanon since 1966.

The primary point is that a range of donor motivations was operational in Lebanon. Many of these motivations contained an element of self-interest on the part of the donors. Lebanon’s post-war reconstruction was at the centre of a battle for influence and a number of Gulf and Arab States, as well as Western actors, regarded their reconstruction assistance as an investment on which they hoped to make a political return.

**Governance in Lebanon**

**Governance and its critics**

Having looked at the emphasis put on large-scale infrastructure projects by many of Lebanon’s post-2006 reconstruction donors, we now turn our attention to a very different type of reconstruction intervention: governance. Governance refers to the
guiding principles, decision-making processes, and operating procedures of organisations and collectives. As adopted by one of its principal champions, UNDP, governance applies to states, the private sector, and civil society and strives to establish a mutually supportive relationship among all three sectors (UNDP, 1997). The majority of the focus in terms of governance programming, however, has been on the state, particularly ‘reforming’ the state bureaucracy so that it operates in a transparent and equitable manner. The following definitions from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2002) demonstrate the potentially all-encompassing nature of governance interventions:

Governance is the process whereby public institutions conduct public affairs, manage public resources and guarantee the realization of human rights. Good governance accomplishes this in a manner essentially free of abuse and corruption, and with due regard for the rule of law. The true test of ‘good’ governance is the degree to which it delivers on the promise of human rights: civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. The key question is: are the institutions of governance effectively guaranteeing the right to health, adequate housing, sufficient food, quality education, fair justice and personal security?

Governance agendas are by no means new, having played an increasingly prominent role in development and reconstruction programming from the late 1980s. Coinciding with the rise of neo-liberalism, they reflected a number of trends in development, reconstruction, and political interventions by leading states, international organisations, and international financial institutions in developing and post-conflict states. First, they were a sign of the immense power and ambition of intervening agents. Allied to this power and ambition was a perception that Western governance methodologies were superior to traditional or indigenous means of governance (Mac Ginty, 2006, pp. 46–77). Implicit in the prefix ‘good’ (as in ‘good governance’) was the notion that Western governance practices were more advanced and had universal applicability. As a result, the promotion of ‘good governance’ went hand-in-hand with democracy promotion strategies, and the rash of Western-sponsored ‘civil society capacity-building’ programmes found in post-civil war societies (Cox, Ikenberry and Inoguchi, 2000; Hobsbawm, 2005; Zakaria, 2004).

Second, the good governance agenda rhymed with several neo-liberal mores, especially in relation to the shrill identification of corruption as endemic to non-Western governance and the need to eliminate it (Brown and Cloake, 2006, pp. 275–298; Kolstad, Fritz and O’Neil, 2008). Western notions of accountability and transparency were regarded as appropriate for the public sector in developing and post-conflict environments.

Third, the emphasis on governance programming was in harmony with another trend in development and post-war reconstruction: shoring up states. Rebuilding and reforming the state was regarded as a cure-all intervention. It was a bulwark against conflict recidivism, corruption, and the persecution of minorities, and a means to ensure compliance with international trading and regulatory regimes. The
stress on state-building in internationally supported reconstruction endeavours has been so strong that it seems as though it is the only conflict amelioration tool in the international community’s toolbox. In a sense, peacebuilding has elided into state-building, and state-building has elided into governance. Indeed, Sriram’s (2008) phrase ‘peace as governance’ seems to sum up the extent of many peace-support interventions by donor states and international organisations.

Fourth, the emphasis on governance coincided with the ‘technocratic turn’ or the reduction of the aims of the development and peace-support agents into a series of ‘measurables’ or projects and programmes with discrete quantitative ambitions. Thus, in many cases, peace-support operations were translated into a number of technocratic tasks such as reform of the civil service, compliance of commercial law with International Monetary Fund (IMF) strictures, or the adoption of certain international standards (Mac Ginty, 2006, pp. 174–180).

Finally, the governance agenda was in keeping with the growth in the number of development and peace-support actors and the trend towards outsourcing by international organisations (Richmond and Carey, 2005). INGOs, NGOs, and consulting organisations became key agents in the promotion of governance agendas.

Unsurprisingly, the governance and ‘good governance’ agendas and methodologies have attracted immense criticism directed at their apparent cultural inappropriateness, neo-colonial ambitions, technocratic obsession, non-participatory nature, ineffectiveness, and staggering hypocrisy (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Kiely, 1998; Mac Ginty, 2008). Critics have pointed to the contradictions at the heart of the good governance agenda: how it uses the rhetoric of empowerment and local participation but is top-down and exclusionary, or how its neo-liberal instincts pare down the public service provision abilities of the state but bolster many of its other functions.

The critical school of scholars in the realm of peace and conflict studies has noted how good governance ‘reforms’ have been used as a compliance tool to ensure that developing and post-conflict states, polities, societies, and economies adopt Western modes of operation and comply with Western norms (Pugh, Cooper and Turner, 2008; Richmond and Franks, 2007). In this way, the good governance agenda has become both an objective for intervening agents and a condition imposed by them for development and reconstruction assistance.

For the purposes of this study, it is important to note the potentially insidious effects of externally sponsored governance interventions. These are especially relevant in a deeply divided society like that of Lebanon in which minor changes can affect a finely tuned political balance or long-standing and widely accepted political practices. Moreover, citizens and political parties in such contexts are prone to interpret political changes through a confessional lens. While good governance ‘engineers’ may regard their own activities as neutral, or their ‘reforms’ as a way to make operations more efficient or transparent, the politico-cultural impact of such changes may be far-reaching. In isolation, individual governance projects or programmes may seem innocuous, but the totality and incremental effect of a series of governance initiatives across a wide sphere of the polity, economy, and society may
have profound ramifications. Governance interventions have the capacity to influence a wide range of relationships and perceptions that comprise a society and polity: they can affect the relationship between the citizen and the state, the citizen and the market, and the citizen and the community. This is especially the case since many governance interventions manifest themselves at the municipal level and so can filter down quickly to the community level. In a society like Lebanon’s, which rests on a delicate post-peace accord political balance and where clientelism is hardwired into political interactions, the good governance mores of transparency and accountability may threaten traditional and indigenous practices (Hamieh, 2007, p. 53).

Internationally, the scale of the good governance agenda is staggering, as are the resources mobilised on its behalf. A great many of the development and post-war reconstruction tasks undertaken by governments, international organisations, international financial institutions, INGOs, NGOs, and consulting organisations can be categorised as good governance-related. Anti-corruption drives, women’s empowerment programmes, democracy training, new auditing systems for public finances, human rights training for police officers, and thousands of other endeavours fall under the remit of good governance. DFID allocated GBP 322 million to governance programmes in 2006–07, while the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) devoted USD 1.3 billion in 2007 (DFID, 2008, p. 220; USAID, 2007, p. 74). For its chief architects, governance programming is a means to make progress towards achieving other goals. For the UK, the US, and others, these alternative objectives may be political, economic, and security-related. For UNDP, the ‘democratic governance’ agenda provides ‘the enabling environment’ for the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals. In this way, acutely political interventions are justified in terms of reducing poverty, enhancing health care, or improving educational attainment.

**Governance programming in post-2006 Lebanon**

As already specified, Lebanon’s post-2006 reconstruction drive has been notable for the significant role played by Arab and Gulf State donors. Much of their activity could be described as ‘high visibility and high impact’ and was concerned with rebuilding infrastructure, the adoption and restoration of villages, the reconstruction of places of worship, and the funding of repairs to damaged housing (Hamieh and Mac Ginty, 2009). To revisit the analogy deployed at the beginning of this paper, it would seem that Arab and Gulf State donors were contributing to ‘hardware’ or the physical dimension of reconstruction, while showing little interest in ‘software’ or governance issues such as decision-making procedures or the modes of interaction between citizens and the state. For example, a representative of the ICORL stated that his organisation was ‘not interested in the internal affairs of municipalities’. Its only investment in people and procedures was the provision of technical training for the operation and maintenance of Iranian-funded infrastructure or equipment, such as firefighting apparatus or horticultural equipment. One reason why many non-DAC states showed little interest in governance programming in
Lebanon may be that it would have invited invidious comparisons with the situations present in their own polities. Many of the non-DAC states were themselves recipients of UNDP governance interventions through the Programme on Governance in the Arab Region (POGAR) and so may not have felt in a position to promote governance. Furthermore, it is worth speculating that formal governance methods may have also limited the ability of Arab and Gulf States to influence politics in Lebanon through more traditional means.

In contrast to the non-DAC donors, many DAC donors seemed to attach considerable weight to governance programmes. UNDP is the main agent of governance programming in Lebanon, although the EC acts as a major funding body and driver of UNDP’s governance initiatives. UNDP outsources much governance activity to NGOs. A number of interviewees at the municipal level noted how in the aftermath of the 2006 war, European donors either maintained their pre-existing governance programmes or engaged in only small-scale reconstruction assistance. One mayor from Beirut’s southern suburbs asked ‘where are the Europeans?’ and contrasted their apparently small-scale reconstruction activities with the more ambitious, high-visibility interventions by Gulf and Arab States. European governments and the EU did contribute to relief, humanitarian, and reconstruction activities following the war, but they did not allow the fighting to halt their longer-term interest in governance. Some Lebanese observers interpreted this continued interest in governance—when the war revealed more pressing needs—as insensitive.

UNDP’s presence in Lebanon is long-standing and the organisation has been particularly active in aiding public sector capacity-building in the post-civil war era. While many of its endeavours have been geared towards the particular needs of Lebanon (for example, to ‘organise national dialogue on national reconciliation issues’), its activities can also be seen in a regional perspective (UNDP, 2008b). POGAR has been operational since 2000 and is ‘dedicated to the promotion and development of good governance practices in the Arab States’ (UNDP, 2008c). This is complemented by the Sub-Regional Resource Facility for Arab States (SURF-AS), which aims to support UNDP country offices and maximise knowledge sharing across the region. It is important to note that UNDP is not autonomous in its actions. Instead, it is prone to pressure from UN member states, regional organisations, and donor institutions. The EC and UNDP have enjoyed a strategic partnership on democratic governance since 2004 (EC, 2004). UNDP operates in a context of ‘complex multilateralism’ whereby a melange of organisations and interests combine, use one another as proxies, and simultaneously promote national and international interests (Shaw, MacLean and Black, 2006, pp. 3–18). The result is a ‘variable geometry’ of governance programming via which a single state is subject to pressure from multiple sources that often place differing levels of emphasis on different aspects of the governance agenda. Lebanon is thus subject to governance pressures from individual Western states (particularly France, the UK, and the US), the EU, and the international financial institutions, although UNDP and its proxies are frequently the most visible governance agents. There are also, of course, pro-governance pressures.
from within Lebanon, whether individual senior civil servants, politicians who recognise the potential resources attached to governance investments, and politicians ideologically convinced of the benefits to be gained from governance reforms.

The EU has been particularly lively in relation to governance programmes in Lebanon. This governance activism has partly been a function of EU expansion and the related European Neighbourhood Policy, and an increased foreign policy assertiveness (Gänzle, 2008). An EU–Lebanon Cooperation Agreement (1977) and Association Agreement (2006) provided the vehicles for EU governance interventions. Although many of these governance interventions are termed ‘bilateral projects’, there is little doubt that the essential dynamic is one way: the transfer of Western practices to the target state. The 2003 EU Communication on ‘Reinvigorating EU actions on Human Rights and democratisation with Mediterranean partners: Strategic guidelines’ led to a series of bilateral projects: training and technical assistance for the judicial system; the strengthening of Lebanese civil society; human rights micro projects; and initiatives to protect the rights of migrant workers (EU, 2005). EU policy is set out in the EU–Lebanon Action Plan. Although dating from January 2007, the plan did not mention the July 2006 war or the resultant reconstruction needs. This was remarkable given the scale of destruction and dislocation, yet it did underscore the long-term strategic ambitions of EU activities. The aim of the plan was ‘the approximation of Lebanon’s legislation, norms and standards to those of the European Union...to build solid foundations for further economic integration (EU, 2007, p. 2). In addition, it noted that ‘special emphasis must be put on control, accountability and transparency to achieve “good governance”. This requires an update of legislation; especially with regard to the redefining [of] the missions and responsibilities of the Ministries and public agencies and consequently restructuring these organising and mobilising competent and motivated human resources’ (EU, 2007, p. 2).

Lebanon’s indebtedness (amounting to 185 per cent of GDP in 2003 and absorbing 80 per cent of government revenues) provided external creditors with leverage to promote the governance agenda (Saab, 2005, p. 3). The 2001 Paris I and the 2002 Paris II conferences allowed a restructuring of public debt, but also ushered in a reform programme. Citing Lebanon’s failure to adhere to previous IMF reform plans, the UK and the US refused to participate in Paris II, leaving France and the Gulf States to assume the lead role (Owen, 2003). Supported by the European Investment Bank and the World Bank, the reform process was in keeping with neo-liberal interventions in other developing and post-conflict societies and included modernising the taxation system, removing barriers to trade and investment, introducing financial instruments to minimise inflation, and restructuring the public sector. By 2004, however, it was becoming clear that Lebanon was having difficulty in meeting its Paris II targets, with many problems arising from tensions between Prime Minister Fouad Seniora and President Émile Lahoud (Daily Star, 2004). The July 2006 war supplied the impetus to move the reform agenda to another level, presenting international actors with renewed opportunities to press ahead with their governance-related reform and restructuring ambitions.
While the August 2006 Stockholm Conference on Lebanon’s Early Recovery raised almost USD 900 million in reconstruction pledges, much of it in the form of grants, the January 2007 Paris III conference exploited Lebanon’s predicament (Ministry of Finance, 2006). The Paris III conference raised significant sums (USD 7.6 billion) but was very tightly tied to the reform process (Ministry of Finance, 2007). Much of the emphasis was on ensuring accountability and transparency in relation to reconstruction donations, and a number of oversight committees were established to track financial flows and progress with the reform agenda. World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz stressed to Paris III attendees that ‘Lebanon’s needs go beyond reconstruction’ and that the World Bank was prepared ‘to continue and intensify our efforts in assisting the Government to implement its programs, to build institutional capacity, to improve procurement and financial management to undertake sector reforms’ (Wolfowitz, 2007). The Lebanese government presented delegates with a detailed plan in which it underlined its commitment to the reform process. The reform agenda was sold as the fuel that would help ‘stimulate growth, create employment, reduce poverty, and maintain social and political stability’ (Government of Lebanon, 2007). Interestingly though, alongside the usual privatisation agenda, was a commitment to social inclusion.

In May 2007, the IMF approved approximately USD 76 million in emergency post-conflict assistance for Lebanon. The emergency phase of Lebanon’s July 2006 war had long passed, but the IMF justified its aid as a means ‘to protect financial stability, contain the budget deficit, and to initiate structural reforms that are crucial to the success of the authorities’ medium-term reform program for 2007–2011’ (IMF, 2007). The key point is that following the 2006 war, Lebanon was locked into a complex system of externally promoted governance reforms. Many of these were linked to long-standing reform programmes, but overseas governments and the international financial institutions used the fallout from the conflict to press home the urgency or importance of the reform agenda. Lebanese actors, including ministries, municipalities, and civil society organisations, were conditioned to support the governance agenda because of its potential to attract resources. UNDP and its proxies conducted many frontline governance activities. In January 2008, UNDP Lebanon had 41 country office staff and a further 232 contract holders (69 per cent of whom worked on governance issues) (UNDP Lebanon, 2008).

Lebanon’s unique political circumstances magnified the scale and potential of externally promoted governance interventions. The 2006–08 constitutional standoff paralysed government, particularly as many senior civil servants were (or were regarded as) political appointees. In such circumstances, UNDP staff members were often ‘the most effective personnel’, and their position across ministries allowed intra-government communication to continue amidst the political paralysis. In a sense, they constituted a government within the government. Moreover, capacity in ministries and municipalities was frequently low, allowing a small number of UNDP personnel to make a significant difference. This was particularly the case in those southern municipalities that Israel occupied until 2000.
Conclusion

This paper uses the analogy of ‘software’ and ‘hardware’ to distinguish between governance interventions favoured by Western donors that aim to influence the ‘operating system’ at the central and local government level (software), and the more large-scale infrastructural (hardware) reconstruction assistance offered by many Arab and Gulf State donors. One should note that ‘Western’ and ‘Arab and Gulf State’ donors do not comprise discrete categories. There is considerable heterogeneity within these groupings, and all political and social environments are to some extent hybrids. Moreover, it is important not to conceive of Lebanon as a passive entity or a mere victim or beneficiary without agency. Instead, the multiplicity of actors in Lebanon engaged with external actors in a great variety of ways. While some actors cooperated with external actors and actively solicited the resources they promised, others indulged in procrastination, adaptation, and subversion. Different political and community actors within Lebanon perceived the attachment of different incentives and disincentives to engaging with or shunning different sources of reconstruction assistance. The result was a very complex reconstruction and governance environment in which distinctions between actors and their goals were very blurred. In many cases, governance programmes were tailored at the municipal level to become more compatible with the circumstances of each area.

These caveats aside, it is possible to make the generalisation that Arab and Gulf State donors did not seem to display an interest in what would be widely understood as governance interventions. While technically these states are members of the UN and can thus influence UNDP policy, the main drivers of governance interventions were Western industrialised states. This is not to say that Arab and Gulf States did not give advice or signal their approval or disapproval regarding the actions or policies of particular actors within Lebanon. However, this is not the same as a formalised governance programme. By donating significant amounts for ‘big-ticket’ infrastructure projects but not following through with attention to governance issues, one could argue that Arab and Gulf State donors have invested in hardware but not in software. If, as computer experts tell us, software determines how a system functions, one could contend that they risk investing significant amounts of resources but not exerting control over the wider political system.

There is a danger, though, that analysts can inflate the power of governance interventions. Certainly, such interventions have tremendous potential to influence the operation of a state and how citizens interact with the state, the market, and each other. Rather than a mere technocratic or bureaucratic intervention, governance ‘reforms’ hold the potential to alter citizen perceptions—a crucial power in a delicate polity like that of Lebanon. The ‘pinprick’ nature of governance interventions (multiple, often small-scale and low-key projects) may give the impression of a limited impact, but their insidious nature should not be underestimated. They can harbour the potential to change the culture of politics or how the business of politics is conducted. Consequently, governance interventions have the ability to alter the dynamic of power. Ultimately, they may be able to draw states and societies into
the Western political ambit, or acculturate bureaucrats, politicians, citizens, and the media to Western methods, administrative norms, and political worldviews. Governance, according to its critics, amounts to a form of imperialism by stealth. Of course, there may be a difference between the ambitions behind a policy, and its actual effect, and many governance-related interventions may not have had the result intended by their architects. In particular, this may be because of the disjointed and incremental nature of governance projects that may have only limited system-wide ramifications. Governance projects at the micro level may even have a system-reinforcing dynamic if isolated into specific bureaucratic units and if lacking an integrated strategy to maximise their potential.

The events of May 2008 (when Hezbollah seized control of most of Beirut and faced down the government) suggest that Lebanon’s polity and citizenry remained immune to the powers (and charms?) of governance interventions. Despite being the recipient of millions of dollars of governance programming, much of it incredibly complex and aimed at bringing the Lebanese state ‘into line’ with Western expectations, Lebanon’s post-May 2008 political dispensation was decided by brinkmanship, force and the show of force, and decidedly traditional politics. The May 2008 Doha Agreement, through which Hezbollah was readmitted to the coalition government with its power intact, in many respects validated Hezbollah’s approach (Fisk, 2008). The episode illustrated the limitations of governance programming; it had been unable to protect the government. To be fair, governance interventions were not designed to thwart a mini coup, but the apparent ease with which Hezbollah faced down the government through street politics suggests that sustained and expensive governance interventions had little impact on shoring up the resilience of the Lebanese government. Indeed, governance interventions may have even facilitated the lengthy constitutional crisis from 2006–08: they may have helped the bureaucracy to function at a minimal level, but had little bearing on defending or changing the balance of power.

Lebanon’s politics of the post-civil war era (as with its politics of much of the twentieth century) has been based on clientelism, patronage, political dynasties, and the extensive use of symbolism. Orthodox Western governance activities tend to oppose these traditional characteristics in Lebanese politics or fail to connect with them. The reconstruction efforts of many Arab and Gulf States, which were often based on high-value and high-profile infrastructure investments, were able to make more meaningful and politically resonant connections with Lebanese political constituencies. As one interviewee noted, ‘[p]eople have a memory of who helped and who didn’t’.

The authors of this paper assert that the highly visible reconstruction contributions of Iran, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and others have a greater chance of remaining in Lebanese political memory than European-driven governance programming. Many Lebanese saw continuing (indeed intensifying) governance programming as irrelevant when there was a requirement to meet urgent physical reconstruction needs. This was a point made repeatedly in interviews. Arab and Gulf State donors seemed to display a more sophisticated understanding of Lebanon’s
politico-cultural dynamics and calibrated their post-war reconstruction assistance in the hope of maximising the political return. Reconstructing villages, repairing bridges, and providing compensation packages to householders had an immediacy that governance programming was unable to achieve. It made connections to citizens, political parties, and other groups, and because reconstruction assistance was regularly disbursed through municipalities, it oiled the traditional patronage and clientelistic political system. Thus, it reinforced the existing political system (the very system that governance programming aimed to ‘reform’). This ‘traditional’ Lebanese political system was what prevailed in May 2008.

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Endnotes
1 Author interview with the deputy mayor, Beirut southern suburbs, municipality b, 2 February 2008.
2 Author interview with an economist, 8 December 2006.
3 DAC is the principal body through which the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) deals with issues related to cooperation with developing countries. For more information, see http://www.oecd.org/dac.
4 Author interview with the deputy mayor, Beirut southern suburbs, municipality a, 2 February 2008; author interview with the deputy mayor, Beirut southern suburbs, municipality b, 2 February 2008; author interview with the mayor, Beirut southern suburbs, 2 February 2008.
5 Author interview with the deputy mayor, Beirut southern suburbs, municipality b, 2 February 2008.
6 Author interview with the deputy mayor, Beirut southern suburbs, municipality a, 2 February 2008.
7 Author interview with the deputy mayor, Beirut southern suburbs, municipality b, 2 February 2008; author interview with a senior representative of Jihad al Bina, 4 February 2008.
8 Author interview with the deputy mayor, Beirut southern suburbs, municipality b, 2 February 2008.
10 Author interview with a senior advisor to the prime minister, 7 February 2008.
Author interview with a senior representative of the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED), 4 February 2008.

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