

**Lebanon's Second Republic:  
Prospects for the Twenty-First Century**

*Kail C. Ellis, ed.*

*Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2002. 236 pages.*

It has now been over a decade since Lebanon's long civil war ended. Indeed, the new constitutional structures that emerged from the war – Lebanon's second republic – will soon have a longer life than the war itself. This book examines both the depth and sustainability of Lebanon's new-found stability and brings together both academics specializing in contemporary Lebanese affairs as well as several Lebanese professionals. It is divided into three sections: Lebanon's future in the context of the Middle East peace process, questions of sectarianism and identity within Lebanon, and selected questions relating to social justice and economic performance in the postwar world. The book is also flanked by an introduction and an epilogue written by Ellis.

The volume first examines the regional and global contexts in which Lebanon finds itself. Modern Lebanon has always been vulnerable to external interference in its affairs. Hafeez Malik argues that in the nineteenth century, it was the competition between the great powers that led to

the creation of Lebanon's religiously based sectarian political system, which was a departure from the longstanding reliance on tribal networks as a way of structuring political life. In the twentieth century, paralleling this global competition for power, now articulated through cold war logic, was the emergence of fierce competition for regional hegemony between Nasserism, Palestinian nationalism, and Israeli irredentism, all of which penetrated, destabilized, and eventually contributed to the breakdown of the Lebanese polity.

This book clearly states that today, these destabilizing regional and global influences have subsided for the time being and have been replaced by American acquiescence to Syrian hegemony over Lebanese affairs. In an interesting article on Israeli-Lebanese relations, Kirsten Schulze adds Israel to the list of powers acquiescing to this geo-strategic situation, having, in effect, abandoned any larger projects aimed at fostering the creation of a Christian ministate to its north. As Ellis stresses, however, Lebanon's resultant stability remains grounded in uncertainty, since it is a hostage to progress in the region's overall peace process.

The second part focuses on Lebanon's cultural and religious heritage. The contributors argue that sectarian identities have become more entrenched in the postwar world. Paul Nabil Sayyah's article explains this phenomenon with respect to the increasing challenges faced by traditional elites, as well as the underlying social patterns of coexistence between religious communities, from such new religious movements as Hizballah, which are questioning Lebanon's "pacted" system of power-sharing. Further contributing to this predicament, argues Nabeel Haidar, is Lebanon's educational system, which has largely failed to forge a strong sense of Lebanese, as opposed to communal, identity. Thus, the people continue to view their particular religious leader as their "political mediator" instead of looking to the state.

Perhaps the most pointed example of these hardening communal barriers is found in Julie Peteet's excellent article on the Palestinian community in Lebanon. Highlighting a new war and a postwar process of "othering," she argues that Palestinian relations with the Lebanese have become more socially and spatially polarized, a development that has reversed a more blurred prewar reality. Camp borders are now "brutally" defined and the extent of Palestinian working rights have been increasingly restricted, both of which have contributed to a dramatic deterioration in the community's socioeconomic well-being. Mona Khalaf's article on the status of women in postwar Lebanon paints a similar picture of marginalization, character-

ized both by the “feminization of poverty” as well as by the entrenchment of legal discrimination, symbolized by the difficulties in reforming Lebanon’s religiously controlled personal status laws and courts.

The third section deals with a variety of socioeconomic problems. Wassim Shahin’s article on the Lebanese economy provides a stark statistical analysis of its poor performance, though it only alludes to some of the underlying causes, such as “inefficient allocations,” namely, corruption. More pointedly critical articles – indeed, along with that by Peteet, the volume’s best – are Fuad Hamdan’s examination of Lebanon’s ecological crisis and Michael Davie’s critique of Lebanon’s postwar plans for urban reconstruction. Hamdan refers to Lebanon as “drowning in its own waste,” plagued by a corrupt Council for Development and Reconstruction and a weak Ministry of the Environment. Davie similarly refers to the country’s “chaotic” urban landscape, where development is increasingly determined by the trade-offs among Lebanon’s sectarian elites. By excluding the possibility of grass-roots participation, this reality contributes to what Davie calls “a social deficit” in postwar Lebanon.

This is not a comprehensive examination of Lebanon’s second republic, for there is a very glaring omission: the formal political process, namely, elections, Parliament, and the judicial system. Instead, the book gives a great deal – and in my mind undue – attention to questions of Muslim-Christian relations and dialogue. This deflects attention away from the real sources of sectarianism in Lebanon: entrenched elite power. Ellis also provides no editorial justification for why some topics were included and others were omitted. Presumably, these were simply the ones that emerged from the conference, sponsored jointly by Villanova and the Lebanese American University in 1998, on which this collection is based. In addition, many of the articles have a subjective feel to them, for they were written by Lebanese who are actively involved in the processes they describe. While extremely useful as potential primary source materials for scholars, this makes them somewhat less useful as pieces of objective analysis.

Furthermore, this volume lacks a rigorous analytical focus, preferring instead to play it safe at a higher level of generalization and pragmatic prescription. To describe Lebanon as being a “hostage” to the peace process, for example, exaggerates its own lack of empowerment, however constrained it might be by outside forces. The contributions of Peteet, Hamdan, and Davie address the country’s real fault lines in a more explicit manner: lamenting the predominance of elite alliances that, at present, determine the direction of much of the country’s reconstruction processes, and arguing

instead for promoting “non-violent and democratic models of social transformation.” It is this “democratic deficit” in Lebanon, found at the political, economic, and social levels, that is the main obstacle clouding its prospects in this new century.

These criticisms aside, however, this volume has a number of excellent contributions and reaches some sensible, if scattered, conclusions about the challenges that Lebanon faces.

Paul Kingston  
Department of Political Science, University of Toronto  
Toronto, Canada