

## THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN TRANSITIONAL STATES: THE CASES OF LEBANON, ISRAEL-PALESTINE

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**Editor**

Owing to the constantly changing environment and the complexity and variety of elements involved in a transitional situation, leadership is based on both traits and process and leaders are both born and made. Leadership is not static; it is a continuous process and ever-changing relationship between several different factors. Therefore, there is a need for a constant balancing of different characteristics of leadership and adjustment of leadership styles to continuously changing situations. Decision centrality suggests that it is simply impossible to hold a public vote on every political issue; even in a democracy, more often than not, leaders make decisions without any direct input from the electorate. Leadership has a very significant role in transitional processes, given the ability of the leader to shape and define the future of a country and its structures.

What are the main leadership challenges in transitional environments, and how do leaders cope with them? Which skills and characteristics are necessary for successful leadership in transitional processes? Leadership is a human-centered activity comprising a number of elements—leaders, followers, and context—all with different characteristics and attributes. However, the main factors that distinguish effective leaders often lay largely outside the control of an individual leader (circumstances, resources, etc). Although leadership is only one of the elements of conflict transformation and transition, it impinges directly onto the other various transformations, such as structural transformations. Leadership, however, can also be part of the problem either on a personal or on a group level. On a personal level, because the predominant role of a leader might be his own survival and not the resolution of a conflict and a

transition to peace and on a group level, because the conditions, real or perceived, may not be seen as ripe for a favorable resolution and transition.

A transitional process is one of instability and uncertainty, as key actors seek to determine their positions within the new structures. Still, most transitions in the end take place or are finalized at the top, with a relatively small number of people making final decisions. Furthermore, the initialization, at least of the implementation phase, also takes place at the top. There can, of course, be, and there are, bottom-up mass movements initiating change, and there can be contacts at grass roots level initiating or pressuring for peace processes. But still, at some point, there is top-down decisionmaking at the strategic leadership level to legitimize the transitional process. In this sense, either a bottom-up or a top-down led process, the onus lies with the political leadership to formalize a transitional agreement.

Asymmetric leadership of radical political movements operates within an environment of uncertainty and risk as part of daily operations from a position of weakness compared to conventional leadership. The survivability of this type of leadership relies on flexibility and adaptability to the situation and the environment. The top-driven nature of political transitional processes, combined with the associated uncertainty, signifies that leaders are crucial in shaping the process.

The analysis tests the previous concepts of leadership on U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. The United States has alternated a foreign policy in the Middle East of cooperation and confrontation, and, as a result, often seemingly rational foreign policy decisions have failed to deliver the expected

outcomes. Partiality and unfairness can hurt both the realist part of the U.S. foreign policy agenda by diminishing its actual power, as well as the idealist portion of it, and by undermining U.S. appeal as the embodiment of certain ideas and values.

What kind of leadership would U.S. foreign policymakers prefer a host country to have? In the sense that, if foreign policymakers were facing a strong leadership in a Middle Eastern country—although this strong leadership could, on the one hand, be less compromising—it could affect its own people and state more effectively, and it could also have more influence and shape the reactions of other people and states. If, on the other, U.S. policymakers were facing a weak leadership—although this weak leadership would be more malleable and possibly more prone to reach an agreement in a peace process—it could not really affect the actions of its own people; it would not be able, for instance, to maintain support and implement an agreement. Consequently, often U.S. foreign policymakers chose to support “reliable” leaders, which, in its turn, led to the promotion of preferred political systems. This emphasizes the extent of versatility required of effective leaders in terms of style and approach.

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