

# Experts: Civil War causes must be studied to avert new conflict

### Veterans say next generation could repeat same mistakes unless facts examined

By Wassim Mroueh  
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: With Monday marking the 40th anniversary of the start of Lebanon's Civil War, veterans of the conflict say a thorough discussion of its causes is required to prevent future conflict.

"If we want to avert another war, we should know the factors that make a war, not just [the horrors of war]," said university professor Fawwaz Traboulsi, a well-known historian. "The horrors have never helped people or restrained people from waging other wars."

"Rather than remembering the causes, we are asked to remember the violence. My suggestion is that we should do the opposite, we should forget the violence and remember three things: causes, responsibilities and then the war itself," Traboulsi told The Daily Star.

The Civil War, which killed tens of thousands and inflicted immense destruction, ended in 1990 following the signing of the Saudi-brokered Taif Accord a year earlier. But many issues related to the conflict remain unresolved, including the fate of an estimated 17,000 people who went missing and who are widely believed to have been executed by various rival militias.

Lebanon has yet to publish a unified history of the conflict, and the anniversary of the war has been marked only by statements from Lebanese leaders in which they stress the need to avoid another conflict.

"There is a prevalent amnesia concerning the war [...] The official policy of the Lebanese ruling class is that the war is not only over but the war is past, and there is no need or it is even illegal to talk about it," Traboulsi said, adding that this was understandable as those who started the

war are now part of this ruling class. While expressing his support for the ongoing efforts by families of the disappeared to learn the fates of their loved ones, Traboulsi also said that people had a right to know why the war happened in the first place and who was responsible.

"We talk about those who led the militias during the war. But before that, could something have been done to avert it?"

Traboulsi noted that among the factors which led to the Civil War was the disinterest of the ruling class in pursuing socio-economic reform, despite the social unrest that took place across the country in the decade preceding the conflict.

For several years during the war, Traboulsi served as the deputy general-secretary of the Organization for Communist Action in Lebanon, one of the many groups which participated in the fighting.

"I think one very important lesson is that nobody wins in a civil war, and so everything should be done so that you do not reach a situation of a civil war. The [second lesson is] there is no civil war ... in which you do not end up enlisting foreign aid and getting outside powers into your own country, until you reach the stage where you do not control the fate of your country ... this is the situation of Lebanon now."

Traboulsi said this phenomenon is particularly prevalent in sectarian conflicts like Lebanon's.

Karim Pakradouni, former leader of the Kataeb Party, a major participant in the conflict, echoed Traboulsi's statements, saying a thorough examination of the war's causes is required in order to prevent the next generation from falling into the same trap. "We agreed on ending the war, but we neither engaged in reconciliation nor did we examine the causes of the war," Pakradouni said. "We have not made the required revisions in order to prevent a new war."

The former minister said that this required self-criticism, something he said the Lebanese do not like to do. "The Lebanese also have this habit of forgetting and jumping over things -

I don't know if it is a blessing or if it reflects immaturity," he added.

Pakradouni said that reconciliation should be manifested in an agreement on reforms and the building of a strong state, and emphasized the role of the president.

"On the 40th anniversary of the Civil War, my conclusion is that Lebanon needs a strong president for a strong state," Pakradouni said. "You need a strong president who can enact reforms and build a strong state and institutions. I think the experience of late President Fouad Chehab should be made use of, in terms of [government] planning."

Pakradouni also stressed the importance of resolving the cases of the disappeared, saying it was of paramount importance.

A commission formed to investigate the fate of the missing by the government of former Prime Minister Salim al-Hoss issued its final report in July 2000.

### 'We have not made the required revisions to prevent a new war'

The report stated that none of the disappeared or missing had been found alive in Lebanon, but that several mass graves existed in the country that have not been exhumed.

After a long campaign, the families of the missing finally received the full details of the investigation's report last September.

They have demanded that Parliament pass a draft law to allow the formation of an independent committee to investigate the cases.

Assaad Chaftari, a former Lebanese Forces commander, has acknowledged that he has information which could help reveal the fates of some of the disappeared.

However, he said he would only reveal the information as part of a national plan, in which other parties also reveal the information they have on the cases.

"Maybe I have some information but not much. But I can't reveal it

alone, it should be a national issue," Chaftari told The Daily Star. "If only one person reveals the information he has, it will appear that only one party committed these acts and that others did nothing."

Chaftari is currently the general coordinator of Wahdatouna Khalasouna, a gathering of civil society organizations and activists who work for strengthening civil peace and protecting human rights.

The organization Wednesday launched a yearlong campaign, which kicks off on April 13 with the aim of commemorating the war and advocating for a better future.

There remains concern that many of the factors that contributed to the 15-year Civil War are still present in the country.

Pakradouni highlighted the fear of settling Palestinians in Lebanon which remains an issue.

"The problem of Palestinian refugee camps still exists ... Now we also have the problem of 2 million Syrian refugees on Lebanese territories which no one is addressing," Pakradouni said. "There are existential issues that need to be resolved."

Traboulsi argued that the socio-economic inequalities which contributed to the outbreak of the Civil War were actually exacerbated after the end of the conflict, but said he did not believe that they could in themselves ignite a new civil war.

"I think we're lucky because you don't have two armed forces [to fight a war], Hezbollah exists, but it is the strongest force in the country. Nobody is willing to venture to push the Army to fight Hezbollah," Traboulsi said.

"The people who defend social justice are weak, the forces against sectarianism are weak, [but] regional actors who had an interest in the war in Lebanon don't seem to have an interest [now]."

Pakradouni also ruled out the possibility of a new Lebanese civil war erupting soon.

"I don't think anybody is ready to try it again. It turned out that no one in Lebanon can defeat or subjugate the other."



In this Oct. 13, 1976, file photo, a Palestinian Fatah guerrilla fires his machine gun at Syrian troops, near the resort town of Bhamdoun, mount Lebanon.