

## Hostage secrets

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The long-running saga of 11 Lebanese Shiite hostages in northern Syria continues to provide an exercise in bad governance, since one of the most fundamental aspects – transparency, is absent from the scene.

If one tunes in to the statements of Lebanese politicians, one will hear a series of reassuring statements, usually focused on the notion that “everything is fine” and “everything will be fine.”

Joining this chorus of people talking in vague terms about releases being on the way are Turkish officials. Meanwhile, there is another confusing set of signals, coming from the rebel Free Syrian Army, which often stresses that things will not be as easy as some people might expect.

But on the other hand, even talking about the FSA in the context of the kidnapping is a dangerous exercise. There have been conflicting statements about the degree of approval and responsibility by the FSA spokesmen who pop up in the media. When it boils down to it, even identifying the actual kidnapers and who exactly speaks for whom is no easy task. It's a case of everyone offering opinions, but no one taking enough responsibility for what they say.

From Turkey, the rhetoric from officials is that everything is fine and we are doing our best, but the reality is that there are mysterious political moves afoot, preventing a resolution. This is irrespective of the linkage to Hezbollah, and the age of some of the hostages throws another level of doubt into the whole claim that they have some explicit, active position with the party.

In short, all of the mysterious layers mean that transparency is required from all sides, and especially Turkey.

In the past few months, Turkish officials and sources have had the most information on the extended hostage situation. On the surface, it would appear that Ankara has nothing to gain by seeing this crisis continue, but this is where the notion that a key, secret factor is playing a role in blocking a resolution.

The release of one of the hostages this weekend means that in theory, some sort of deal can be worked out for the rest, but a good deal of transparency is needed, along with some quick action. Until Lebanese officials can step in and facilitate a solution, they will remain prey to the implications of the kidnapping. When a second, individual kidnapping took place in Syria, also in mysterious fashion, there were revenge kidnappings in Lebanon and a general destabilization of the situation in the country.

Officials must stop playing politics with people's lives, because it is a case of playing with fire. These politicians might think it's somehow prudent to say nothing, but they must reassure the families and the public, and come clean about what exactly is taking place, or risk even further deterioration at home.