

Premises and Positions

Lebanese (Shia) Address the Lebanese

In recent years, the voices of dissent and the initiatives they spawn have both been increasing in volume within the Shia community. Although such voices have diverse backgrounds, all share the belief that political freedom within their community has been stifled by the ominous restrictions imposed systematically via the hegemony being exerted jointly by Hezbollah-Amal. Today, these voices are of one mind with respect to the belief that relative to direct and indirect Syrian and Iranian intervention in Lebanon, Hezbollah's militaristic and supranational political agendas now pose a direct threat to the present and future shared by the Lebanese Shia and the "Lebanese Republic."

The signatories to the statement that follows have concluded jointly that the rampant expansion of authoritarianism and militancy which today dominate Lebanon's Shia community not only run counter to its diverse history, but also threaten its future and that of Lebanon and the greater region. Those who have signed this document consider it their moral obligation as Lebanese—particularly as members of its Shia community—to advance this common analysis for the benefit of their peers and fellow citizens.

The statement that follows outlines the premises behind the conclusions reached by the signatories and their recommendations regarding the crisis Lebanon is facing right now. Importantly, this is not simply a response to an exigent and transitory situation. Rather, the thoughts expressed herein provide a conceptual road map which, if followed, may inspire a comprehensive and long-term revision of the principles that should underpin a common Lebanese platform.

Of note, the document was released June 5, 2013 and received broad media coverage.

Based on the alarmingly critical situation facing Lebanon at this very moment, particularly the grim challenges and dangers our homeland faces as a nation and a State, and in view of the perilous uncertainty that threatens national stability now and in the future, as well as the personal and material security of all Lebanese, the signatories to this document have joined together to adopt and endorse the premises and positions that follow.

Conditions in the country today have convinced these signatories to develop a common analysis of Lebanon, which they hope will enable them to respond in a

collaborative and effective manner to the test our Lebanese nation is now facing. As an entity—a State, an idea and a vision—Lebanon is clearly being subjected to a strenuous and demanding examination. The fact that the parliament chose to extend its mandate exemplifies the deadlock into which our national life has descended. Equally important, it represents an abuse of power.

The signatories to this document define themselves herewith as "Shia," regardless of whether any considers him or herself as such according to doctrine and religious orientation, education, culture or birth

alone. Yet first and foremost, the overriding impetus behind their advancement of this effort is the undivided loyalty they share to Lebanon. Being Shia is, inarguably, just one identity among others, and highlighting that identity does not imply an inherent belief that a distinct, Shia-oriented project or solution is the foundation for this joint effort. Rather, the signatories have chosen to emphasize that identity solely because of the exigent and exceptional circumstances that have befallen the country. Those who have added their signatures and thus have joined publicly to launch this initiative realize the necessity of leveraging this particular identity to address effectively Lebanese citizens in general and Lebanese Shia citizens in particular.

Herewith, therefore, the aforementioned signatories declare their resolve to act collectively, individually and in league with those sharing similar concerns and principles in order to advance coordinated and complementary efforts on the Shia and national fronts. The vision they hold is that by contributing assiduously to the efforts being made by other Lebanese, they will seize every possible opportunity to preserve this entity—this Lebanese Republic.

To that end, those who have signed this document believe that the key factor in the challenges and threats currently facing Lebanon is the decline of the State. This degradation of the State's prerogatives—at all levels—is the result of attacks against Lebanon: direct or indirect, accompanied by violence or achieved by forcing the State to make concessions at the behest of its various political forces. While the signatories recognize that these assaults are being pursued by a number of forces, not all of those involved are equally responsible for desecrating the State. In this sense, the infractions being committed by forces that aim to dominate the Shia community must be met with distinct levels of criticism and

concern. Their past actions and those they are taking today have forced the Lebanese onto a terribly dangerous path, which may provoke confrontations not only among citizens, but also with other entities regionally and internationally.

As Shia and Lebanese, the signatories remind their fellow Shia and Lebanese citizens that power alone, regardless of its perceived might, cannot guarantee a peaceful present or future. They remind their fellow citizens that no matter the breadth of the demographic involved, mere arithmetic can never offer a convincing rationale for any policy that is deleterious to the State. In being frank with themselves and others who are concerned about existing conditions in Lebanon, the signatories herein call for a long-overdue assessment, on both Shia and Lebanese levels, of the consequences of the policies enacted during the last decade.

None of the signatories to this statement is naïve enough to believe that a single revision could rectify the errors that have been and are still being committed in the name of Lebanon and particularly its Shia community. Yet they are convinced that such an action would bring to an end the so-called infallibility of such political practices, an outcome that would indeed help restore our faith not only in politics, but also in the possible emergence of a full-fledged State.

Evidenced by the unrest that typically portends dire circumstances, the spiraling developments in Syria continue to accelerate the pace and effects of sociopolitical tensions in Lebanon. More importantly, this friction speeds the Lebanese ever closer to confronting this moment of truth. Clearly, such an outcome would require them to reformulate the national precepts and references related to their peaceful and prosperous coexistence.

Hence, the signatories to this document enjoin all Lebanese to understand and agree

that the people of Syria should not only have the right to voice their opinions regarding the present and future of their country, but also about its political regime. Such expression, regardless of form, should be possible without external intervention or accusations of treason, betrayal or other suspicions. The signatories to this declaration reiterate their strong belief that nations cannot be built or sustained through oppression and tyranny, and that dictatorships will never protect effectively pluralism and minority rights. The signatories believe as well that the principles of democracy and respect for public and private liberties, through the rule of law and devolution of power, are hallmarks of collective and individual dignity. The signatories thus reiterate these convictions as they hope, on behalf of the Syrian people, that that nation's citizens will find a path, sooner rather than later and with an absolute minimum of additional human and material costs, which will lead them towards safety and security under the auspices of freedom, democracy and respect for human rights.

While some Lebanese insist on ignoring

this decisive moment for Lebanon and beyond, and seem convinced that remaining disassociated from these pivotal events would be in their best interests, the truth is that they will be spared nothing. While they may try, wrong or right, to distance themselves from the affairs of others, they cannot ignore affairs at home.

Based on their concurrence regarding the validity of the above analysis, the signatories below affirm their political and ethical conviction that the only way to face the challenges and contain the dangers threatening Lebanon and the Lebanese is by building a just, capable and sovereign State. That State, Lebanon, must be a State of law comprised of institutions that are truly concerned about the security, interests and welfare of the Lebanese. Such a Lebanon must eagerly embrace development and modernization. That kind of evolution will enable the Lebanese to achieve the real values of citizenship for which they have strived for so long within the framework of a "parliamentarian democratic republic founded on respecting public liberties."

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