

The Call of the Two Sayyeds A 413-word Intellectual and Political Landmark

Without exaggeration, this short text—413 words in its original Arabic form—is destined to become a landmark in the intellectual and political history of the Lebanese-Shia community. At a time when the stakes are high for the Shia community, the Lebanese and their neighbors, this statement sets an example for forthright and bold action.

More than a commentary on the Arab Spring and the Syrian Revolution, the text prepares the Shia and their peers for the long process of reform, starting with an acknowledgment of past events and rationales. Thus, reform is a long, complicated path that necessitates “transparency, dialogue, amiability and criticism” from diverse voices against monopolistic and despotic forces. The Sayyeds’ text focuses on the awakened voices of the Syrian people, whose uprising in Syria—alongside those in Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain and other countries—is confronting a dictatorial regime that has ruled the country for decades. The authors remind us that this is the same regime that imposed its will on Lebanon and the Lebanese people through a thinly veiled, general occupation that endured for almost half of Lebanon’s existence as a country.

In the context of this crumbling regime and the enduring resentment it has caused, and the multitude of additional contributing domestic and regional factors, the dissenting voice of Lebanon’s Shia community is finally being



With Sayyed Hani Fahas to his left, Sayyed M.H. al-Ameen speaks at a press conference held January 24, 2012 to support dissident, anti-Hezbollah Shia cleric Sheikh Hassan Mchaymech, currently imprisoned under the catchall charge “collaboration with Israel.”



Sayyed M. H. al-Ameen at the press conference.



Sayyed H. Fahas speaking at the same press conference.

heard. Today, that collective voice rails against the hegemonic practices of those who seek to suppress positive political diversity.

It is by no means coincidental that the real impetus behind this vocal dissidence, evidenced by the Sayyeds, was the Syrian uprising. Not only is Syria Lebanon’s next-door neighbor, but Syria’s Baathist regime has also counted for decades on the Hezbollah-Amal

duo to act as its Lebanese strategic reserve. Likewise, the directorate of these two affiliated organizations expected the Syrian regime to remain forever a stalwart ally. This symbiotic relationship, however, is clearly unraveling. The Assad regime can hardly defend itself, let alone its old friends who, for their part, are also posting political and strategic failures. These circumstances, which have illuminated the hypocritical and surreptitious dealings of these entities, have sparked the rise of many previously dormant dissident Shia voices. In view of this emerging trend, the statement makes two significant observations:

1) Supporting oppression, regardless of type or location, is anathema to being Shia. Thus, supporting the Syrian regime is inherently “un-Shia.”

2) Concerns held by Lebanese-Shia and others about the effect the fall of the Assad regime may have on the stability and balance of confessional power in Lebanon are misbegotten. Rather, a stable and democratic Syria eventually guarantees a stable and democratic Lebanon. Additionally, the Syrian regime’s protection of the Shia is a myth that must be dispelled aggressively.

The statement also denounces the Lebanese government’s official policy of “disassociation” from the ongoing events in Syria and blames it on the despotic nature of the regime’s allies in Lebanon. In fact, affinity to authoritarian structures is not unique to the Syrian regime; rather, that structure is imposed by the Shia duo (Hezbollah-Amal)

on its own people. The Sayyeds offer a harsh denouncement of the duo’s monopolization and oppression, which it uses to crush dissent in the Shia community. These strong accusations are given particular weight thanks to the stature and religious authority of authors Sayyed Mohammad Hassan al-Amin and Sayyed Hani Fahas. The official title of Sayyed Mohammad Hassan al-Amin is Counselor of the Shar’i Shia Courts in Lebanon, while Sayyed Hani Fahas is

a highly respected member of the Supreme Clerical Committee of the High Shia Council. Aside from the pivotal positions they hold, both men are renowned for their improvements to intellectual and political life in Lebanon and elsewhere in the region. More specifically, Sayyed Mohammad Hassan al-Amin earned tremendous approbation for having launched the Independent Shia Gathering in the aftermath of the 2005 Lebanese uprising, while Sayyed Hani Fahas has contributed tremendously to the sustainment and advancement of Christian-Muslim and inter-Muslim dialogue in Lebanon and beyond.

Finally, it is important to note that despite the criticism it offers, this statement is neither the first expression of Shia dissidence nor the harshest. Others have certainly occurred, led by people from a wide range of backgrounds and ages, using a variety of tools including the Internet, sit-ins, gatherings and public statements, all of which

have demonstrated support for the Syrian uprising. Nevertheless, this text is uniquely important among its “peers” because of the authority of its authors and because it heralds a complete rejection of the enslavement of theology by opportunistic, fallacious and enduring dictators.

Unsurprisingly, this vocal dissidence stems from the Syrian uprising. Not only does Syria border Lebanon but vis-à-vis its alliance with Iran, Syria’s Baathist regime has relied for decades on the Shia Hezbollah-Amal duo as its Lebanese “strategic reserve.” Likewise, this “duo” expected Syria to remain a stalwart ally forever—but that symbiotic relationship is unraveling. Today, the Assad regime can hardly defend itself while its Lebanese “reserve” is suffering political and strategic failures.



“And be thou upright as thou art commanded, and follow not their desires”
The Holy Quran, 42:15

We, the undersigned, Mohammad Hassan El Amin and Hani Fahs, who are widely acknowledged in form and substance for our respective paths, which have embraced moderation, mediation, relativity and conciliation,

In keeping with our humanity and patriotism, Arab and faith-based background and choices, and our fundamental Islamic belonging—which we have never felt the need nor been asked to deny our Shia specificity, particularly since we have always been convinced that Shiism is intrinsically synonymous with the spirit of Islam in terms of monotheism and the call for unity, as well as in terms of doctrinal openness and a systemic penchant for reform—and in accordance with our mutual acceptance of and periodic corrections to the different paths that comprise the wide, universal Islamic space;

In keeping with our Shia legacy, which has always promoted struggle against oppressors—whomever they may be—and support the oppressed—whomever and wherever they may be;

In keeping with our commitment to the obligations associated with our religious status even when it is undermined by obstacles, daily demagogic speeches, political clientelism and feudal relationships that threaten our intellectual, Islamic, Arab and enlightened roles—responsibilities which could only be stymied by arrogant and inflammatory forces and individuals;

In keeping with our well-known penchant for explicitly opposing wrongdoings and wrongdoers, regardless of how near or far away they may be;

In keeping with our past choices, made during the most difficult times to expressly support those who resisted the Zionist occupation of Palestine and Lebanon, and to oppose “domestic occupation” by those who exploited ideals such as the defense of Palestine, professed to “withstand the enemy,” an ideal that runs counter to the will of its people and Arabism in general, and those who defied that will without attempting to distinguish between the oppressors and the oppressed.

We call upon *our* people to be consistently true to themselves and to support the Arab uprisings.

We call upon them to have confidence in the eventual outcome of these uprisings and to be invested in their future, from the perspective of reason and fraternity, particularly with the Syrian people, for their uprising is just and will be victorious in the acknowledgment of God’s will.

This English translation of the joint declaration made August 9, 2012 by senior Shia clerics Sayyed Mohammad Hassan al-Ameen and Sayyed Hani Fahs in support of the Syrian people’s uprising was accomplished by ShiaWatch. While we consider this translation very accurate, the original Arabic text is extremely short and contains numerous connotations, suggestions and references. Thus, we provide this disclaimer to recognize that different interpretations may exist.

We call upon *our* people to support the continuation of these just protests, regardless of any suspicious voices that may call for the acceptance of a compromise which would be unjust for the Syrian people, their militants and their martyrs—as we are all witnesses and martyrs through our anger, grief, pain, support, hope and prayers.

We call for an immediate end to the destruction of the Syrian nation and to the continued slaughter of Syrian citizens—and our citizens as well for in fact, a peaceful future for Lebanon can only be guaranteed if Syria becomes stable and free, and transforms itself into a democratic, pluralistic, united and modern state.

Without any ambiguity or hostility, we hereby declare our wholehearted support for and resolute stance in favor of the Syrian uprising, just as we supported the revolutions in Palestine, Iran, Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen and Libya, and sympathized with the reformist current and popular opposition movements in Iran, Bahrain, Mauritania and Sudan. We also stand ready to support any popular movement against any regime that has resolved to prevent the progress being made toward achieving deep reforms in order to avoid revolution and overthrow.

Truth has come and falsehood has departed, as it is naturally bound to do. Nevertheless, the fulfillment of justice follows a very long and complicated path that is littered with ambushes and traps. Navigating that path successfully requires tremendous patience, wisdom, enlightenment and protection of the bloodshed of martyrs to prevent colonies of vultures from taking possession of it. Justice demands transparency, dialogue, amiability and criticism. To that end, we will not withhold any informed praise or loyal criticism of justice, truth, struggle and martyrdom because of our pure Islamic memory, our belief in God, and the lessons learned from Karbala—the symbol of martyrdom that unites all monotheists and rejoices in Allah despite and against the oppressors.



Sayyed Hani Fahas stands beside a junior Shia cleric arranging candles they lit February 22, 2012 during a sit-in held in downtown Beirut to support the Syrian people.

Beirut, 9th August 2012