

## The “Embassy’s Informants” Show Solidarity with Each Other

In a show of solidarity with each other, several figures of “Feltman’s Shia” organized a protest yesterday. Invitations to this function were sent by the “Lebanese Civic Coalition,” at least six of the founders of which were mentioned in WikiLeaks documents.<sup>1</sup>

By Sabah Ayyoub

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Full of confidence, he would be sitting in the middle of the room with other participants of the “protest.” At the podium, he might have given a speech and received the applause of the audience. As he rambled on endlessly about his patriotism and noble goals, he would be interrupted suddenly by security forces. They would call his name out loud: “Lokman Slim, you are under arrest on charges of cooperating with the Israeli enemy.” Afterward, he would be handcuffed and escorted outside.

Ali al-Ameen would rush to the microphone in an effort to continue what Slim, his colleague in the “Lebanese Civil Coalition,” had started.<sup>2</sup> He would defend all of his communications as well as the funding he received from the U.S. Embassy, and he would give instructions on how best to serve our people of the South. But Reema (from the South) would silence him by standing abruptly in the center of the room.<sup>3</sup> She would shout, “How could you give information about the Resistance during a phone call with a representative from the U.S. Embassy even before the earsplitting noise of the July Israeli raids had faded, attacks that destroyed houses while their residents in Dahyeh and in the Southern villages were still inside?” The embarrassment would be obvious on al-Ameen’s face, and the cameras would swing immediately towards Reema, whose words disclosed the real event.

Yet none of that happened yesterday at the Press Syndicate conference in Beirut. The event, titled “A protest in behalf of solidarity with independent Shia personalities against slander and threats,” was organized by the “Lebanese Civil Coalition.” However, very few people responded to the invitation—which left the room more than half empty.

Lokman Slim was present, but no one arrived to arrest him. On the contrary, some were shouting in his defense. When I mentioned to the participants that “Slim acknowledged meeting with one of Benjamin Netanyahu’s counselors in Washington,” they replied instantly, “That is not the topic of our present discussion.”

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<sup>1</sup> Lebanese Civic Coalition: A cross-confessional, pro-democracy initiative comprised of a significant number of Shia members.

<sup>2</sup> Ali al-Ameen: Lebanese Shia journalist originally from South Lebanon. The son of senior Shia cleric Sayyed Mohammad Hassan al-Ameen and a member of the Lebanese Civic Coalition, he was among those targeted in *al-Akhbar*’s smear campaign.

<sup>3</sup> Rima: a pseudonym for the author of the article.

“But how could it not be?” I reiterated. “The contact that took place between Slim and the Israelis was mentioned in the WikiLeaks cables published in *al-Akhbar* newspaper. After all, are you not gathered here today to refute the so-called fabrication the paper made against you?”

Those speaking from the podium became clearly uneasy [about my comment] and advised me to address my question to Slim personally rather than to them.

“But he is a founding member of the “Lebanese Civil Coalition” which is responsible for inviting us here today. As a coalition, what is your stance regarding the actions of your colleague?”

Finally, former MP Salah al-Harakeh tried to rescue the situation: “If this information is found to be true, if that meeting actually occurred, if this happened... then we would refuse [to accept] it.”<sup>4</sup>

Afterwards, Al-Harakeh quickly gave the floor to his colleague, Hareth Sulaiman, who addressed me directly.<sup>5</sup> “You are frightening. The pens you use are associated with the [weapons] silencers and explosives that were transported by Michel Samaha. You frighten those you believe may share your moral opinions. You write to make ends meet yet you struggle to make ends meet.” He added, “Why do you forbid the Lebanese from meeting with Feltman yet permit [them] to [meet with] Khamenei?”

Such was how Sulaiman accused a journalist of murder and bribery while at the Press Syndicate, in the presence of its head, Mohammed Baalbaki, who gave no response. Interestingly, [Baalbaki] opened the meeting by offering his “sympathy” for “those harmed by the articles published by one newspaper... I won’t mention its name,” he said with disdain, “but all of you know it.”

Next, Salah al-Harakeh noted the group’s “rejection of this prejudicial campaign based on reports that overlooked some of the Christians and Shias in the March 8 coalition.”

A statement was read following those [comments]: “*Al-Akhbar* newspaper [published] fabrications. They used excerpts from [the WikiLeaks documents] to change their [original] context, actions intended deliberately to tarnish and cheapen the otherwise impeccable credentials of independent Lebanese Shia personalities.” The statement continued, “Regrettably, we must state that we are more than a little suspicious of Hezbollah’s response to those excerpts, such as by remaining silent or withholding any condemnation.” The statement continued, “Indeed, we take exception to any form of politics that places the Lebanese confessions, namely the Shiite confession, in a position that opposes the Arab Spring revolutions.”

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<sup>4</sup> Salah al-Harakeh: Lebanese Shia legal consultant and former MP, originally from Bourj al-Barajneh (Beirut’s southern suburbs). A member of the Lebanese Civic Coalition, he was among those targeted in *al-Akhbar*’s smear campaign.

<sup>5</sup> Hareth Suleiman: Lebanese Shia professor of chemistry at the Lebanese university. Originally from Bednayeel (Bekaa), he is a member of the executive board of the Democratic Renewal Movement.

For his part, Ali al-Ameen underscored his “rejection of terrorist logic and [disbelief] of how some could commit murder or call for someone’s death only because they see you as a traitor.”

As it was, no one came to arrest [Slim], who wore a floral tie and brimmed with confidence as he sat among the participants. He refused to speak with me in person; instead, he drew a business card from his pocket and asked that I communicate with him only through email. Lokman Slim made no attempt to explain his “raging desire to communicate with the Israelis, which he expressed to the Americans after visiting Washington, meeting with Benjamin Netanyahu’s councilor and agreeing to start a serious relationship with him.” After all, that much was made clear in one of the Embassy’s cables. It seems everyone evaded my question.

Finally, the “solidarity” event was adjourned amidst countless insults and accusations directed at me by some of the participants. Before I left the room, former MP Misbah al-Ahdab approached me with his beautiful face and charming smile.<sup>6</sup>

“Shame on you!” he said.

But why hadn’t al-Ahdab been sitting in the front row applauding and smiling like the rest of them? It may be that the answer can be found in the WikiLeaks cables themselves.

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<sup>6</sup> Misbah Ahdab: Elected MP for Tripoli in 1996, 2000 and 2005. A member of the executive board of the Democratic Renewal Movement.