

Priorities for peace in Lebanon: opposing outlooks from 8 & 14 March Alliances

Conversations with two prominent Lebanese figures associated with 8 and 14 March Alliances, respectively.



Ali Fayyad (8 March Alliance/Hezbollah MP)

Key sources of tension in Lebanon: internal and external

Unlike other countries in the region, Lebanon has

been unable to accommodate contradictory influences within a viable constitutional framework. The Lebanese government has not taken into account recent socio-political changes. These elements have led to a series of crises that have endangered the country's security and political stability.

Foreign crises and disagreements on key strategic questions have become internal conflicts that have engaged all Lebanese factions, threatening both their own stability and the country's institutions. The Lebanese crisis has become a mixture of internal and external factors, made up of intertwining political, constitutional and confessional elements.

There are three major areas of tension. First, resistance against Israel should be established as a condition for national sovereignty and accepted as a fundamental Lebanese characteristic that will endure as long as the threat from Israel remains. Resistance must be part of any accord between elements of Lebanese society. This does not forbid other elements from the right to express their concerns. In fact, this subject should be discussed within the framework of the National Dialogue [launched in 2006 to tackle the differences between March 8 and March 14 Alliances]. This should seek to establish guarantees that resistance serves the interests of all Lebanese people and poses a threat to none of them.

Second, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) is unconstitutional and illegal. It undermines Lebanese judicial sovereignty and puts Lebanon at the mercy of foreign influences. And it is exacerbating internal divisions. It must be shut down.

Third, the relationship between Lebanon and Syria must be respected as an essential bond. The two countries are linked by a common history and a mutual border. Syria is Lebanon's economic driver and our main pillar of support against Israel. No Lebanese party must be implicated in violence or civil war in Syria, as this would spill over into Lebanon. The future of the Syrian political system is a matter for Syrians to handle.

The Taif Agreement and the stability of Lebanon's political system

The Taif Agreement is almost dead in the water. It is no longer able to manage relations among Lebanese people. Despite including mechanisms to promote due process, it has been unable to overcome Christian or Muslim confessional obstacles and has proven too inflexible: Christians have rejected the abolition of political confessionalism; while Sunnis wish to stick with the Agreement in its current form. There may be a desire to see political reform among certain elements, but to see this desire take shape Sunnis, Shia, Christians and Druze would all have to agree. Any reform ignoring these elements would create a crisis and cause more instability.

Responses to internal and external challenges: developing the social contract

Hezbollah's relations with Iran and allegiance to the *Wilâyat al-Faqîh* [rule of the Muslim Jurist] are part of our religious, cultural and social customs, as enshrined in the Constitution. These do not challenge our political engagement with the Lebanese social contract. Acts of resistance are linked to the defence of the Lebanese people. They are a necessity and are not part of a confessional identity. They could have been developed outside the Shiite faith.

Our Constitution calls Lebanon a 'final homeland'. But it does not exclude that its identity will evolve. This identity began as a mixture of Arabic and Lebanese elements; of freedom and coexistence. To this we must now add resistance and openness. All of these values respond to Lebanon's geopolitical situation.

Priorities for building peace

We have two choices before us: either the creation of a democratic state based on citizenship, with the abolition of confessionalism and the protection of community rights through the establishment of a Senate; or broadening the concept of consensual democracy.

The first option implies a centralised state and a president elected by universal suffrage. This would enable him to overcome confessional power. This option seems difficult given the refusal of Christians to contemplate the end of confessionalism.

The second option seems more realistic. It appears feasible and calls for serious reflection. But the principles of such a consensus would have to be defined. I believe in four such principles: 1) creating a proportional voting system; 2) granting veto power to communities; 3) ensuring a major push for administrative decentralisation; and 4) the formation of large coalitions.



Samir Frangieh (member of the General Secretariat of 14 March Alliance and a former MP)

Key sources of tension in Lebanon: internal and external

Regional factors are vital.

The foundation of the state of Israel encouraged the rise of military dictatorships in the region and exacerbated problems for minorities. Regional instability has threatened Lebanon especially due to the inability of the Lebanese people to found an autonomous state.

Since the signing of the National Pact in 1943, the state of Lebanon has been seen as a power-sharing agreement between different communities. In my opinion, however, Lebanon is much more than this: it has delivered a strong message to all those wanting a union with Syria or a return to the French mandate, that Lebanese people wish to live together.

The Taif Agreement and the stability of Lebanon's political system

The Taif Agreement rests on two principles:

- » that it is impossible for the Lebanese to live for long while at war
- » that it is impossible for the warring parties to live separately, each according to its own rules

The difference between the National Pact and the Taif Agreement is that Taif was not shaped by political forces. It emerged from the failure of previous attempts such as the 1976 Constitutional Document of President Frangieh and the 1985 Tripartite Agreement between militias under Syrian sponsorship. It was essentially devised by three men: Rafiq al-Hariri [businessman and future Prime Minister]; Hussein Husseini [speaker of parliament and a major Shiite figure]; and Mar Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir [the Maronite Patriarch]. But the political culture at the time of Taif remained communal, while Syrian support for Taif prioritised its own immediate interests.

Although the Taif Agreement ended the war, it did not promote any efforts to address collective memory or dialogue between the parties. Taif designed a mechanism to establish a state that would provide rights to citizens and guarantees to communities. This required a senate to represent the communities along with a parliament to

represent the citizens. Taif put on the national agenda the reform of the public administration which had become the door through which communities could permeate the state through patronage. It called for the adoption of an electoral law based on large constituencies encompassing mixed (Christian and Muslim) electorates, and freezing out radical elements.

Responses to internal and external challenges: developing the social contract

Today, community interests subsume general interests in Lebanon. But civil society has been developed and deserves support. On 14 March 2005, one month after the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri, people took to the streets spontaneously in numbers far beyond the expectations of the political leaders who had called for protests. It is this popular strength, shared by all parties, which must be called upon to start a dialogue.

We are seeing the end of an era. The Arab Spring did not conform to the Iranian project to represent the Muslim world on the global stage. Consequently, it will also bring about the end of the Hezbollah project. The Arab Spring dealt a body blow to Israel, too, as Tel Aviv no longer has a monopoly on democracy in the region. In Lebanon, we must focus on issues that can bridge the gap between proponents and opponents of the Iranian project, such as the campaigns to protest violence, or to support environmental protection or the abolition of confessionalism.

Priorities for building peace

Building peace is our responsibility. This is what Saad al-Hariri had attempted to do by inviting Hezbollah to return to the National Dialogue in the summer of 2011, saying: your project is failing, join us in building the state together. If we can avoid war between Sunnis and Shiites, we will have overcome this difficult period and will become a model for progress in the region.

The Arab Spring has brought Sunnis to power: they must now show their peaceful intentions. The overarching challenge is to channel Islamist currents into Muslim democracies based on the Christian democratic model in Europe. It is time to show that extremism is behind us.

Saad al-Hariri's proposal must therefore become a concrete plan for dialogue, initiated either by the President of the Republic or by civil society. Once started, this tide will be unstoppable.

Interviews by Scarlett Haddad, journalist at L'Orient-Le Jour in Lebanon