



May 19, 2005

The Future of Lebanon

The withdrawal of the Syrian occupation forces from Lebanon would not have been possible without the United States adamant support of the Lebanese opposition and its unrelenting pressure on the Syrian regime. While we congratulate ourselves for this necessary and long awaited phase we do realize that more should be done to consolidate the Lebanese recovery.

The next challenge is to pursue our American Foreign Policy Strategy of standing firmly for the nonnegotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law; limits on the absolute power of the state; free speech; freedom of worship; equal justice; respect for women; religious and ethnic tolerance; and respect for private property.

The President spoke repeatedly of the need in Lebanon for “free and fair elections”, “true representation”, and “the rights of minorities”.

It is crucial at these times of major US involvement in all the Middle East Initiatives promoting freedom and democracy, to ensure that the upcoming parliamentary elections in Lebanon are a successful experience in democracy.

It is a fact that the Lebanese society is a pluralistic society, with a long history of inter-religious conflicts, mixed with periods of stability and peaceful co-existence. It has also been evident that the Lebanese domestic problems would degenerate into full blown wars, mostly because of detrimental regional interference, whereas times of peace were due frequently to the beneficial intervention of world powers in negotiating comprehensive agreements among the different Lebanese factions.

The last serious effort brokered in Lebanon among the various communities, under international and regional auspices, was the Taef Accord of 1989, a new National Pact based on sovereignty, equal power-sharing, pluralism, and the respect of human rights and freedoms. In addition, the Accord aimed to end the Lebanese War which was on-going since 1975. Hence it clearly stipulated the dismantling of all armed militias and the withdrawal of the Syrian forces. It also set an agenda to achieve national reconciliation including a general amnesty to cover the period of the war, and the formation of a government of national unity to incorporate all the different Lebanese factions. An Arab Tri-Partite (Saudi Arabia, Algeria, and Morocco) Committee was established to ensure the application of the Accord.

But in 1990, Syria invaded the totality of Lebanon and gained control of the country’s national decision and has been intervening in all forms of Lebanese life, social, financial, and political. Since then, Lebanon has witnessed a reversal in the process of the implementation of the Taef

Accord: no withdrawal of foreign forces, no disarming of militias, no sovereignty, no amnesty, no reconciliation, basically no end to the Lebanese War, and a perpetuation of the conflict.

Finally, UNSC Resolution 1559, introduced by the US and France in 2004, started to revive Taef and created the proper momentum to get Syria out of Lebanon, and to, hopefully soon, dissolve the remaining militias. But what about the future of democracy and governance in Lebanon? What about the inter-communal relations and the consociational formula of the state?

For the past 15 years, the principle of equal Christian-Moslem participation in running the affairs of the nation has not been applied. Since the end of the war, Christians have been neglected and sidelined: their parties, leaders, militias, their refugees, their institutions all targeted by a pro-Syrian regime supported by the Moslems of Lebanon. Regretfully, it took Hariri's assassination to cause the Moslems to join the Christians in their revolt against the Syrians, and to restore national unity, in face of foreign aggression. Still, a stable future for Lebanon requires true power-sharing and equality among the different communities. This should start by insisting on the proper political representation for Christians and Moslems alike, and by repairing the damages and injustices caused by the Syrian oppression.

In this context, it is constructive to go back to the spirit and text of the Taef Accord. After all, this important agreement intended to solve the Lebanese conflict, and to lay down the foundations for the new Lebanese republic. But it was never fully implemented. Therefore, a Follow-up committee formed by Representatives of the US, France and the Arab League should be established with the mission to help the Lebanese implement the Document of National Entente in its entirety, since the Tri-Partite Committee failed to do so.

And among the most pressing issues that need to be addressed are:

1. Ensuring a free and fair electoral process in the upcoming Parliamentary elections of May-June to allow a true representation of each and every component of the Lebanese society.
2. Releasing all the Lebanese prisoners from the barbaric and inhumane Syrian jails.
3. Disarming all militias, eliminating the security islands currently not under the Lebanese authority, and deploying the Lebanese army and security forces on all the Lebanese territory.
4. Reconsidering all bilateral treaties which were imposed on Lebanon by the Syrian occupier.
5. Reinstating the freedom of all Lebanese political parties under Lebanese laws, particularly the ones banned by the pro-Syrian Lebanese Regime, like the Lebanese Forces Party.
6. Achieving true national reconciliation and turning the page on the Lebanese War by freeing Dr. Samir Geagea.

Now that Lebanon is free from the Syrian occupation, we have a duty and an interest, as Americans, in completing the effort we started with the Taef Accord in 1989 and with UNSC Resolution 1559, in the hope of securing a peaceful and prosperous Lebanon.

Sincerely,

Joseph Gebeily, MD
President,
Lebanese Information Center