



**The 2009 Lebanese Election Results and their Implications:
A Post-Voting Analysis
July, 2009**

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1. Background

The Lebanese parliamentary elections, which took place on June 7, 2009, were arguably the most significant political referendum held in Lebanon’s modern history. The attention given to these elections, from within and outside Lebanon’s borders, was unprecedented. Countries near and far, friends, and foes, showed keen interest in the outcomes of these elections and, in fact, acted as if the two opposing groups, the March 14 and March 8 coalitions, somehow represented their own competing teams. At the center of these elections were two very different camps with diverging visions for the country. On the one side was the pro-democracy and pro-government March 14 coalition, made up of the Future Movement (Sunni), the Lebanese Forces Party (Christian), the Progressive Socialist Party (Druze), and the Lebanese Kataeb Party (Christian). On the other side of the playing field was the March 8 pro-Syria and pro-Iran opposition coalition consisting of Hezbollah (Shiite), Amal (Shiite), and the Free Patriotic Movement (Christian). Both coalitions also include some additional smaller parties such as the National Liberal Party and the National Block Party on the March 14 side as well as the Armenian Tashnag Party, the Marada Movement, and the Syrian National Socialist Party on the March 8 side.

Although winning the elections was undoubtedly Hezbollah's primary goal, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, cleverly assured everyone that his bloc did not aim to increase its share of parliamentary seats, which had numbered 14 deputies before the elections. However, in a speech announcing the party's candidates aired by Al-Manar TV on Wednesday April 1, 2009, Sayyed Nasrallah called the elections "highly important". Furthermore, in rallying his followers, he made it clear that the objective of Hezbollah is indeed "winning the election and obtaining the majority." In another speech on May 22, 2009, celebrating the liberation day, the Hezbollah leader prodded his listeners that "on 7 June when the entire world, the world media, will be watching the elections in Lebanon ... we must be present in every village, township, farm, neighborhood, and city in southern Lebanon ... a festive scene like the festivities of victory, martyrs, and resistors." Elevating the festivities for the elections day victory to the level of martyrdom and resistance, he imagined, would give his supporters the jolt they need to give this landmark event the importance it deserved. One week before the elections, Sayyed Nasrallah again stressed the significance of the elections and announced that a win for him and his allies would bring the country rewards, albeit from a dubious friend. "Iran will help any Lebanese government that requests military aid," he told supporters.

Hezbollah had been participating in the Lebanese parliamentary elections since 1992, but never before had its leadership so publically appealed for support and so vehemently foretold their win. They did not even participate in any Lebanese cabinets until 2005 when they sought ministerial posts for the first time. Without a doubt, there are compelling motives that make this election decidedly different for Hezbollah and their allies. With Syria's troops out of Lebanon - a move that resulted in the waning of their hegemonic aims to control every aspect of life in Lebanon including the elections, from list formations to ballot counting - strong representation of Hezbollah and its proxies in the Lebanese Parliament and future cabinets is crucial for Syria to reassert its influence over Lebanon. Furthermore, a Hezbollah win in the elections would undoubtedly best serve the interests of Iran in Lebanon and the region.

Clearly, the fears exhibited by many Lebanese that a Hezbollah win in the Lebanese elections would give the Iranians a firmer foothold in the region - and would therefore likely lend renewed influence for their Syrian allies in Lebanon - were not unfounded.

2. Pre-Election Predictions

With the results in the Shiite, Sunni, and Druze-majority districts all but confirmed ahead of the elections, Hezbollah well recognized that the race was to be determined in the Christian-majority districts. Their rhetoric advanced ahead of the polls regarding the outcome of the Lebanese elections and their confidence that an opposition win would be largely based on the influence they now had over their allies, most notably Michel

Aoun, the head of the Free Patriotic Movement, suggested that they knew the Christian-majority districts held the key to the election.

Unfortunately, local media outlets, a significant portion owned or controlled by the opposition, also circulated those predictions. Still more disappointingly was the fact that these forecasts were so readily accepted by western media reporters who hastily, and often enthusiastically, propagated them as sure signs of imminent opposition victory. Nicholas Roe, writing on May 6, 2009 in the British *Guardian* newspaper, proclaimed “The end of Lebanon’s Cedar revolution.” According to “western election observers, diplomats and even ardent supporters of the current March 14 majority,” he announced the opposition “will take control of the next four-year parliament when elections are held on 7 June.” Roe even envisioned some positive signs in this projected win. “The West must recognize that a Hezbollah victory in elections could force it into responsibility and disarmament,” he wrote. Earlier in March and contrary to what Mr. Roe reported on the same subject of arms, the Hezbollah deputy leader, Sheikh Naim Qassem, had already declared quite the opposite during a ceremony for the 20th anniversary of the death of Imam Ayatollah Khomeini. These were his words: “We will buy weapons. We will be an armed resistance and we will liberate the land with arms. Let the (U.N.) Security Council take a rest and sleep.”

Later in May, in an interview with the *Financial Times*, Sheikh Naim Qassem was also certain of the elections outcome: “I believe that we will take the majority in the parliamentary elections because we have wide support and during our four years in opposition we always said that we have greater popular support and we believe that these elections will prove that we have this wide popular support.” At the same time, similar sentiments to those of Sheikh Qassem were being expressed in Iran when President Mahmoud Ahmedinajad, merely echoing Hezbollah’s words and stance on the subject, boldly asserted to reporters in Tehran on May 26, 2009 that a Hezbollah-led victory in the parliamentary elections “will strengthen the resistance and change the status in the region.” This reference to military aid is unmistakable: an opposition-controlled government, in case it emerged victorious, would request aid from Iran, a theme that Sayyed Nasrallah would subsequently reinforce to his supporters in the days ahead of the elections.

The Free Patriotic Movement was just as confident of the immense win that awaited their candidates. Michel Aoun, running for re-election in the Keserwan district, often repeated his assertions, at his regular news briefing following his block’s weekly meetings, that on June 8, 2009, a day after the parliamentary elections, the country would witness the “end of the current era.” His son-in-law and heir-apparent, Gibran Bassil, also running for a parliamentary seat in the Batroun district, told his supporters at the end of May that the Free Patriotic Movement would have “the largest parliamentary bloc through which we can combat corruption.” A few days before the elections, Alain Aoun, nephew of Michel Aoun and a candidate for a parliamentary seat

in the Baabda district was quoted in an article published in UAE’s National newspaper: “Our numbers put us in a very good position across the country, not just in Baabda. I think the FPM and our allies in the Change and Reform movement will win around thirty-five to forty seats, if not more.”

Syria, in the meanwhile, was uncharacteristically reticent when it came to overtly forecasting the results of the Lebanese elections. This reticence was despite statements made by President Bashar Assad indicating Syria’s expectation to see the Doha Agreement on a national unity government remain in effect beyond the 2009 elections, regardless of the winner. Although the Doha Agreement would technically expire following the parliamentary elections, Assad’s position was seemingly intended to ensure that the opposition retained their cabinet veto power, critical for keeping control over important issues such as the Hariri international tribunal and the disarmament of Hezbollah. Covertly, the Syrians were sure of a March 8 win, even though there were some press reports alluding to a Lebanese elections’ project run by Syrian security officers, who had formally served in Lebanon during the Syrian occupation, aiming to direct and aid the Lebanese opposition into winning the parliamentary elections. Just in case things did not go as planned, President Assad, in a March 2009 interview with the Japanese Daily News, forewarned: *“if the current majority was to be reelected in Lebanon, it could not govern... this would lead to deterioration of the situation in Lebanon.”*

3. Elections Results

The March 14 coalition scored a clear victory in the Lebanese elections, winning 71 seats out of the 128 total seats in the Parliament. This is 3 more seats than what they had previously held. The March 8 coalition secured 57 seats. The results effectively produced a parliament much like what was in place for the last four years, relegating Hezbollah and its allies again to an opposition status already held and firmly reaffirming the majority status of March 14 (see table below).

March 14		March 8	
Party / Movement / Group	Number of Delegates	Party / Movement / Group	Number of Delegates
Future Movement	29	Free Patriotic Movement (Aounist)	19
Democratic Gathering/PSP	11	Amal	13
Non-Partisan	9	Hezbollah	13
Lebanese Forces Party*	8	Marada**	4
Kataeb Party	5	Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Tachnag)	2
Independents (allied with March14)	3	Baath Party	2
Hunchak Party	2	Lebanese Democratic Party	2
Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (Ramgavar)	1	Syrian National Socialist Party	2
Democratic Left Movement	1		
Jamaa Islamiya	1		
National Liberal Party (Ahrar)	1		
March 14 Total	71	March 8 Total	57

* 3 deputies joined the LF Party block following the elections ** 1 deputy joined the Marada block following the elections
Distribution of parliamentary seats by political affiliation

Despite the pre-election propaganda of the opposition, much of the results were predictable, with some exceptions. The division of election districts in the current electoral law had created the following situation:

1. The Shiite-majority in six districts: Baalbeck-Hermel, Bint Jbeil, Marjeyoun-Hasbaya, Nabatieh, Tyre, and Zahrani, which translate into 28 seats for March 8.
2. The Sunni-and-Druze-majority in eight districts: Aley, Akkar, Beirut-3rd, Dinnieh, Sidon, Shouf, Tripoli, and Western Bekaa-Rashaya, which translate into 48 seats for March 14 (49 seats minus 1 Druze seat left open for the opposition in Aley).
3. The 2nd district of Beirut, containing a mixed Sunni-Shiite-Armenian voters, had already split its 4 seats equally between March 8 and March 14, following an agreement between both coalitions.
4. The Christian-majority districts: Batroun, Baabda, Beirut-1st, Bsharreh, Jbeil, Jezzine, Keserwan, Koura, Metn, Zahleh, and Zgharta, which translate into 47 seats.

Without the Christian-majority district votes, the seat count for March 8 is 31 (28+1+2) and for March 14 is 50 (48+2). This rendered both coalitions short of the 65 seats needed to secure the majority in a 128 seats Chamber. Hence, the confrontation in the Christian-majority districts: Whoever wins the Christian vote would secure the control of the Parliament.

The following are some highlights of the elections results from the 11 hotly contested Christian-majority districts¹:

- Baabda - M14 received 43% of the total votes while 53% went for M8; 87% of the Shiite votes was given to M8 and only 9% was given to M14.
- Batroun - M14 received 53% of the total votes while 41% went for M8; the Free Patriotic Movement candidate received 14,267 votes while the Lebanese Forces Party candidate received 17,541 votes out of a total 32,959 votes casted.
- Beirut-1st - M14 received 52% of the total votes while 45% went for M8.
- Bsharreh - A total sweep for the 2 Lebanese Forces Party candidates, garnering roughly 65% of the votes.
- Jbeil - M14 received 40% of the total votes while 56% went for M8; 92% of the Shiite votes was given to M8 and only 6% was given to M14. Fares Souaid, M14 candidate aligned with the Lebanese Forces Party, received the highest Christian vote.

¹ Based on non-official numbers from multiple non-governmental sources – Official numbers by the Ministry of Interior had not been released yet at the time this report was prepared.

- Jezzine - M14 did not have a list competing in the Jezzine elections. The 3 Free Patriotic Movement candidates won.
- Keserwan - M14 received 45% of the total votes while 52% went for M8; the 30% difference in the 2005 elections between the two groups in favor of M8 was reduced to 7% difference in the 2009 elections.
- Koura - 51% of the total votes went for M14 while 44% went for M8.
- Metn - M14 received 47% of the total votes while 49% went for M8; 2 of the winning deputies come from M14 list. The huge difference in the 2005 elections between the two groups in favor of M8, already diluted in the 2007 by-election, was reduced to 2% difference in the 2009 elections. The Tashnag vote went exclusively to M8.
- Zahle - 53% of the total votes went for M14 while 45% went for M8; 3 of the 7 winning deputies have aligned themselves with the Lebanese Forces Party block.
- Zgharta - 43% of the total votes went for M14 while 52% went for M8. These results are the closest ever in any of the post-Taef elections in both the city of Zgharta and its towns. The Lebanese Forces Party brought to bear its organizational and popular support in favor of M14 list.

3.1 Performance of the March 14 Coalition

Where they succeeded, and with only the Metn district as an exception, March 14 lists won in their entirety. Also, the March 14 coalition secured the majority in the Parliament even without the independent candidates. In fact, the independents proved to be the weakest in these elections.

As expected, the Future Movement performed strongly in the Sunni districts of Akkar, Beirut-3rd, Dinnieh, Sidon, Tripoli, and Western Bekaa-Rashaya. In addition, the Future Movement has the largest number of deputies in the new parliament, guaranteeing Saad Hariri the leading role in the parliamentary majority.

Not surprisingly, the Lebanese Forces Party performed superbly in Bsharreh and very strongly in Batroun, Chouf, Koura, and Zahle. The Batroun win is significant in that one of the defeated candidates is Michel Aoun's son-in-law, Gebran Bassil. The Lebanese Forces Party candidate in Metn, although unsuccessful, held his own with numbers very close to his other running mates. Furthermore, although they did not prevail, candidates allied with Lebanese Forces Party in Jbeil and Zgharta fared exceptionally. While they did not directly field candidates in the other Christian dominated districts, particularly Beirut-1st, the Lebanese Forces Party worked diligently on behalf of March 14 candidates who secured strong wins. In Baabda where March 14 candidates did not win, the Christian candidates supported by the Lebanese Forces Party still had a strong showing. In addition, the Lebanese Forces Party presence was also noticeable in non-majority Christian districts such as in Aley, Akkar, West Bekaa and Zahrani. Consequently, the Lebanese Forces Party is

arguably the most versed in the democratic and civic processes of Lebanon and its efforts are unequivocally correlated with the victory of March 14 coalition.

March 14's win in Beirut-1st, which contains five Christian seats, was an important election message to Michel Aoun who bragged incessantly that he had finally "liberated" Achrafieh throughout the election campaign, even while still in Doha where a consensus for a new election laws were hammered out as part of the Doha Agreement. His own Lieutenant, Issam Abou Jamra, shifted his candidacy from Marjeyoun-Hasbaya to Achrafieh after he was denied a place on Hezbollah's list in favor of a candidate from the Syrian National Socialist Party. Abou Jamra was met with resounding defeat against Nayla Tueni, an independent candidate supported by the Lebanese Forces Party.

The Progressive Socialist Party swept to victory in their traditional strongholds, Shouf and Aley, but not in Baabda. The March 14 list in the Chouf included a candidate from the National Liberal Party (Ahrar), in addition to the Lebanese Forces Party candidate. The Aley list also included a candidate from the Lebanese Kataeb Party. All three candidates received strong support.

The Lebanese Kataeb Party made a strong comeback into Lebanon's politics due to the collaborations and alliances made by its candidates. However, the party fell short in what had been its traditional stumping grounds, Metn. In that district, only 2 of the 8 seats went to March 14 candidates, Sami Gemayel and Michel Murr.

Even though he did not become openly involved in the elections, President Suleiman suffered a symbolic loss in Jbeil in the performance of Nazem Khoury, defeated even in his hometown of Amchit.

3.2 Performance of the March 8 Coalition

There were no surprises in what Hezbollah accomplished in these elections; they achieved victory in all 13 seats they contested. Hezbollah's move to support Aoun against Berri, their long time ally, in the Jezzine district demonstrates willingness to pay a heavy price in order to maintain, even if in the interim, their beneficial alliance with Aoun. This union, which has further exasperated Christian divisions, appears to have cost Aoun significant Christian support.

As is the case with Hezbollah, Amal's performance in its primarily Shiite districts was expected. The party has suffered, however, a loss of 3 seats in Jezzine, which it had taken for granted in all post-Taef parliamentary elections.

Michel Aoun received less than half of the Christian votes in this election, a significant drop from the 70% that he had received in 2005. Aoun's decline in popularity can be directly attributed to his alliance with Hezbollah, regarded as unconstructive by the Christians who resent Aoun's cover for Hezbollah's role in Lebanon, especially the facilitation of Iran's and Syria's regional agenda. Despite this tactic, the Free Patriotic Movement performed very well in Christian districts with significant Shiite votes. Their candidates' margin of victory in Baabda, Jbeil, Jezzine is parallel to the size of the Shiite votes they received. Jezzine was the only Christian-majority district where March 14 did not run a competing list. Nevertheless, the Free Patriotic Movement's win margins in every Christian district have been substantially reduced compared to the 2005 elections. In addition, the March 8 coalition was especially dealt a resounding defeat in Beirut-1st, Batroun, Koura, and Zahle. The Batroun loss was, no doubt, personal and painful in that Aoun has been grooming his son-in-law as his own successor. It is relevant to point out that winning 6 of the 8 seats in Metn was made possible only because of the Free Patriotic Movement alliance with the Armenian Tashnag Party.

The Marada Movement, local to Zgharta, appears on the surface to have made a comeback by returning a complete list of 3 deputies to the Parliament². It should not be underestimated that the vote count was closer than any time before when the election law rendered Zgharta an independent district.

A number of developments regarding the performance of Aoun's allies, other than Hezbollah, are worth mentioning. The Armenian Tashnag Party, although helpful to Aoun in Metn, had a very poor showing overall ending up with two uncontested seats, one in Metn and another in Beirut-2nd, thanks to a pre-arranged negotiation. This is a considerable setback for the Tashnag Party, whose members were aiming for all 6 Armenian parliamentary seats. Also, the entire list headed by Elias Skaff in Zahle was trounced. This defeat is noteworthy too as the Skaff family has been entrenched in the political, social, and economic life of the Beqaa for hundreds of years. More significantly, is the loss of Syrian National Socialist Party candidates in the Christian districts of Metn and Koura, traditional strongholds for them, with their wins being restricted to only 2 seats in the Shiite districts of Baalbek-Hermel and Marjayoun-Hasbaya.

3.3 The Distraction from the Center

There was much talk prior to the elections about a centrist, or independent, bloc that would align itself with President Michel Suleiman. Although the President himself did not openly advocate this position, others seemed to do so on his behalf, most vocally Patriarch Sfeir. The most obvious independent candidates were Nazem Khoury in Jbeil, former presidential advisor and a close friend of the President, Mansour Bone and Farid Haykal Khazen in Keserwan, Michel Murr in Metn, and Edmond Gharios in Baabda. The Patriarch's

² A fourth deputy, Emile Rahme, subsequently joined the Marada block following the elections.

endorsement of the centrists for Parliament was taken by Aoun as a ploy to take Christian votes away from him. In order to compensate, Hezbollah worked tirelessly on behalf the Aoun candidates anywhere it could, but especially in Jbeil, Baabda, and Jezzine, resulting in an almost unanimous Shiite vote for his candidates. Consequently, none of the centrist candidates, except for Murr, found seats in the parliament. This result debunks the premise that the “centrists”, not political parties, will attract large Christian votes. Such an assumption turned out to be totally false.

Besides the fact that the centrist bloc did not materialize, they created a different problem that in the end may have cost the March 14 coalition seats in Keserwan and possibly Jbeil. It was inevitable that the centrists would need to run fusion tickets with the March 14 coalition in both districts in order for the two groups to maximize their chances of winning in the face of the Aoun list in Keserwan and the Aoun-Hezbollah list in Jbeil. Unfortunately, final joint lists were not announced until a few days prior to the elections. This was due to indecision on the part of the independents in Keserwan and Jbeil about aligning themselves with political party candidates which, to the public, may have implied a degree of hesitation, possibly even discord between the two groups. Forming joint tickets between the centrists and the March 14 coalition in Metn and Baabda took place with much less controversy and much earlier in the game.

3.4 Winning the Popular Vote

The 71 seats won by the March 14 coalition represent a 55% ratio of the 128 total number of seats in the Parliament, while the 57 seats claimed by the March 8 coalition represent a 45% ratio.

No one is disputing these results.

However, both Hezbollah and the Free Patriotic Movement have claimed that they have won the popular vote. This logic is flawed and cannot be made under current election laws and parliamentary seat distribution. It should not come as a surprise to anyone that in Lebanon’s confessional system, and based on the Taef Agreement, the Parliament is divided equally between Christians and Muslims, each receiving 64 seats. Because the Christian population is now less than the Muslim population, a Christian deputy is, in some instances, elected by a smaller number of votes than a Muslim deputy is.

4. Analysis and Observations

It is clear that the March 14 alliance has won the parliamentary elections in Lebanon. The results were a blow to the voices of aggression and extremism and welcome news to the voices of peace and moderation. To his credit, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah quickly conceded defeat and announced the day after the elections that he

accepted the results “with sportsmanship and democratic spirit.” The defeat was even more momentous to Michel Aoun, although no one expected him to admit it.

At this point in the nation’s history, it is essential to consider some of the factors that led to these results and to understand the implications they may have for Lebanon, the present competing groups, and for future elections:

1. The Indisputable Significance of the Christian Vote

With the focal point of these elections centering in the Christian districts, it is encouraging to note that, in the end, the March 14 coalition garnered 21 seats from the Christian-majority districts, 6 more than what it needed to keep its control of the Parliament. The Christians, unlike their fellow Muslims, entered the race sharply divided. Michel Aoun, seemingly unaware of the shifting political landscape, expected a repeat of his strong 2005 performance, even bragging that it would afford him a total control in the Christian districts. Although he continues to enjoy strong support, he failed to acknowledge that because of his actions, his popularity has significantly dwindled and the Christian community is again in conflict. His Christian opponents in the March 14 coalition, particularly the Lebanese Forces Party, offered an alternative and a remedy to eternal bickering by remaining focused and consistent in their message of rebuilding state institutions, disarming Hezbollah, reigning in renegade Palestinian factions, and eradicating foreign interferences in Lebanon, most importantly the Iranian and Syrian ones.

2. The Ill-Conceived MOU

The *Memorandum of Understanding* between the Free Patriotic Movement and Hezbollah, an unlikely alliance between a secular party and a religious party, has failed to produce any of its stated goals. Hezbollah, arguably the single most potent threat to state sovereignty, is pursuing its own agenda with more ties to Iran’s regional objectives than Lebanon’s. Aoun, ever preoccupied with his futile efforts to become President, appears satisfied with giving cover to Hezbollah’s arms and advancing a “Third Republic” concept that he has failed to articulate. This reverberation of earlier suggestions for altering the constitutional system of governing in Lebanon to allow equal power sharing by the Shiites, Sunnis, and Christians as opposed to the current even split arrangements between Christians and Muslims did not resonate well with voters.

3. The Infamous “Glorious Day”

A speech delivered by Sayyed Nasrallah on Friday May 15, 2009, at the Martyr’s Complex in the southern suburb of Beirut during a university ceremony may have actually been a turning point in the

minds of voters. Sayyed Nasrallah insisted that “May 7 was a glorious day for the resistance in Lebanon.” He sternly commanded: “We don’t want you to forget May 7 events so that the events of May 5 won’t be repeated.” Of course, he was referring to a deadly and destructive day when the Hezbollah-led opposition invaded the Sunni parts of Beirut wreaking havoc on property and lives. Hezbollah also attempted to invade the Druze stronghold of Mount Lebanon but were met with fierce opposition that inflicted considerable casualties on the invaders. The “We don’t want you to forget May 7 ...” mantra of Sayyed Nasrallah may well have been imprinted in the minds of the voters, particularly the Christians, who watched these events with trepidations and shock regarding the potential danger awaiting them.

4. *The Painful Memories of War and Destruction*

The “events of May 5” that Sayyed Nasrallah does not want repeated is actually a legal Lebanese Cabinet resolution acting against an illegal private Hezbollah communication network that “was the strongest weapon Hezbollah had during the July 2006 war,” according to the May 15, 2009 speech of Sayyed Nasrallah. What probably jogged the memory of many people in Lebanon after that speech, as they contemplated their choices three weeks before the elections, was neither the communication network nor the Cabinet’s resolution against it. Instead, it was the memory of the destructive summer 2006 war with Israel caused not by a Cabinet resolution or popular demand by the Lebanese but by a unilateral decision of Hezbollah’s. This war caused immense human suffering, death, injuries, and material damage and resulted in a huge financial burden for Lebanon from lost revenues from commerce and tourism and for incurred reconstruction cost. Incidentally, there were other vivid reminders of this war during the election period such as the words of Iranian President Ahmedinajad that certain victories “will strengthen the resistance and change the status in the region.” Similar is the statement by Hezbollah deputy leader, Sheikh Qassem, that “We will buy weapons. We will be an armed resistance and we will liberate the land with arms ...” Such statements could only mean the opening of a new front to fight against Israel --on Lebanon soil with a foreign agenda.

5. *The Closing of Beirut’s Center*

Ignoring the consequences of their actions on the livelihood of people, the Hezbollah-led opposition erected a make-shift tent city outside the offices of Prime Minister Fouad Saniora in downtown Beirut from December 2006 through May 2008. Their goal was to force the Cabinet to resign and justified their actions by demanding what they described as “governing partnership” in running Lebanon. The sit-in did not achieve anything, but it cost the country billions of dollars in lost revenues, caused thousands of people to lose their jobs, and forced many commercial establishments out of business.

6. *The Tyrannical Speaker of the House*

Among the failed “governing partnership” practices we may note is the closing of Parliament in 2008 by Speaker Nabih Berri and postponing its sessions as a maneuver to hinder the election of a President. This effectively kept the President’s office vacant for six months. Constitutional experts agreed that the Speaker had no right to repeatedly postpone the presidential election session with an announcement from his office. He must, the experts established, be present in the Parliament’s Chamber of Deputies, and if the required quorum was not available, only then could he postpone the session --none of which occurred. This was not the first time that Speaker Berri had closed the door of the Parliament. He did so in 2007 in order to sabotage the Hariri international tribunal and earlier in 2005 to delay the Parliament from passing legislation freeing from prison Dr. Samir Geagea, the leader of the Lebanese Forces Party who was imprisoned for more than 11 years during the Syrian occupation.

7. *The Assaults on the Head of the Maronite Church*

The relentless attacks launched by Michel Aoun against the Maronite Patriarch Nasrallah Sfeir, outraged many and were seen as desperate moves to mask his own crisis. These attacks also brought back memory of an aggression of a different nature on Patriarch Sfeir and Bkerki by Aoun’s followers in 1989. Actually, the barrage of organized attacks from multiple sources in the opposition against the Patriarch was not surprising; it had become the norm. The fact that not a single member of the Aoun parliamentarians, particularly those representing Keserwan, the stronghold of Maronites, came to his defense was astonishing. The Patriarch, who has consistently defended the Lebanese State and its sovereignty, was not about to yield. One day before the parliamentary elections, he told the nation that Lebanon’s character and identity were under threat, a reference to the actions of Hezbollah and its Iranian mentors.

8. *The Fabrication of False Accusations*

The brandishing of corruptions charges by Aoun against anyone who disagreed with his positions, without providing any solid evidence, was impulsive and capricious. It is true that there is a need to make a statement against nepotism, bureaucratic inefficiency, and to stamp it out rampant corruption at all levels of government in Lebanon, but Aoun himself is allied with some of the most corrupt figures in the country. Furthermore, the Free Patriotic Movement, itself a one man show, has operated as a microcosm of the country’s ills with allegations that Aoun’s immediate family members have focused on consolidating power within the party, controlling its finances, and heading its profitable institutions, such as the OTV, to the exclusion of long time activists and leaders of the party.

9. *The Forbidden South*

The August 2008 killing of Lebanese army pilot Samer Hanna Harb in South Lebanon by Hezbollah, as well as many of the reactions to his murder, were abhorrent. Officer Harb was flying his military helicopter over a hill controlled by Hezbollah when, according to the person who has been identified as the triggerman, his chopper was mistaken for an Israeli aircraft. Michel Aoun, the ex-Army Commander, rushed to the defense of Hezbollah, called the killing “an accident”, and demanded to know who had given the army pilot permission to fly a mission over Lebanese territories under Hezbollah’s control. To add insult to injury, Aoun, in a campaign visit a few days before the elections to Officer Harb’s hometown in the Batroun district, defended Hezbollah and told the residents there that Hezbollah does not have any Lebanese blood on its hands.

10. *The Disruptive Power of Veto*

Blocking one-third of seats in the cabinet was granted to Hezbollah and their allies in the Doha Agreement following the shutting down of the Parliament, the downtown sit-in, and the “May 7 events” of 2008 when Hezbollah went on a violent rampage in and around Beirut. This concession on the part of the majority was primarily made to facilitate the election of a new president for the country. With this veto power, not only was it impossible for any laws to be passed without Hezbollah approval, it was also unconstitutional to do so. However, the more ludicrous reality with this matter is that Hezbollah gained what it wanted by putting the whole country under duress, a strategy its followers may find profitable again in the future, to the detriment of the nation and its populace.

5. *Implications for the Future*

There are lessons for the time ahead that should be gleaned from all this. The victory of March 14 in the 2009 elections signals that the Lebanese want to see their country on the road to security and economic recovery. The events of the last few years in Lebanon have brought about a noticeable maturity in the people’s participation in the democratic process that was not as common in the past. This growth is evident in the Christian community. For the most part, the Christians have voted for complete lists in 2005 and again in 2009. It is also noticeable that the family, or clan, continues to play a lesser role in the Lebanese elections. The results of Zahle would be the most vivid example of this transformation. In all of the Christian districts, party-supported candidates have fared just as well as, or better than, traditional family-supported candidates in hybrid lists. Regrettably, the Christian vote remains split down the middle but it has also coalesced around platforms and ideas.

There is a different dynamic in the other sections of our “house of many mansions.” In these past elections, the Sunnis have shown singular allegiance to the Future Movement; the Shiites have supported Hezbollah and Amal in even greater numbers than they have in the past, particularly in areas outside of their traditional strongholds; and the Druze, not surprisingly, have remained loyal to the Progressive Socialist Party. There is nothing wrong with how the confessional allegiances have come together, but understanding it is relevant for dealing with future challenges. For the time being, however, there are fundamental issues to tackle.

5.1 Incoming Priorities

After the expected and relatively straightforward election of the Parliamentary Speaker, Nabih Berri, and the nomination of Prime Minister, Saad Hariri, serious immediate questions loom:

1. The Cabinet, or Council of Ministers (COM) formation;
2. The Ministerial Statement (the program/agenda for the COM);
3. The work of the National Dialogue Table, convened by the President, especially regarding the National Defense Strategy and the issue of Hezbollah’s weapons; and
4. The awaited constitutional, political, economic, and social reforms.

Equally serious issues will need to be tackled in tandem, including:

1. The overall security situation in the country and the flare-ups that have become common, especially in Beirut and Tripoli;
2. The control of Lebanon’s border with Syria and its formal demarcation;
3. The dismantling of Palestinian military bases outside the refugee camps, the regulating of weapons inside the camps, and the improving of refugee living conditions; and
4. The need to equip and engage the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Internal Security Forces in confronting these complex matters.

The identification and implementation of solutions to the security related matters will require goodwill and cooperation from various parties in Lebanon and the region. With these impending challenges, a relatively new President, a new Parliament, and a new Cabinet, the process of establishing the national agenda and defining its priorities will be of a nuance.

5.2 The Mandate of President Michel Suleiman

President Michel Suleiman is in his second year of office. Although all Lebanese political groups and the international community endorsed his presidency, managing the political equilibrium in the country has been

a balancing act for him. The national dialogue sessions he has convened have not produced any tangible outcomes. The omnipresence of an opposition veto power in the Cabinet has affected many of its decisions and postponed a number of controversial ones. With the failed move to establish an independent parliamentary bloc that would have supported the President in the remaining five years of his term, another approach to strengthening the presidency is needed. Despite setbacks, President Suleiman has so far emerged stronger in his position because he has earned the trust and respect of the Lebanese people as well as the international community for his impartial approach in dealing with Lebanon's instabilities. Furthermore, he is much less vulnerable in his presidential role now that the March 14 coalition has won the elections and pledged to empower the President. How President Suleiman will capitalize on this new reality will have implications for his own remaining time in office and, ultimately, for Lebanon.

5.3 The Future Role of the March 14 Coalition

The mandate given by the people of Lebanon to the March 14 coalition is explicit: strengthen the State, confront militias and chaos, and rule the country. Since 2005, March 14 coalition members have faced assassinations, threats, intimidation, and aggressions. They have also suffered intense disagreements and mismanagement from within. Still, this politically, religiously, and individually diverse group, which is upholding the principles of the Cedar Revolution, carries the hopes and aspirations of the majority of the Lebanese people, whom they must not fail. There is a need to create a more cohesive structure for the March 14 coalition, establish a transparent decision-making mechanism among their leaders, and develop a political program with a clear plan of action for leading Lebanon to a lasting stability. This agenda requires the three pillars of the March 14 coalition to share the responsibility of living up to the expectations of the Lebanese and indeed the friends of Lebanon around the world. Specifically:

1. Saad Hariri, the Sunni leader, head of the largest parliamentary bloc, and now Prime Minister has the principal role of preserving the cohesion among March 14 and must act in consultation with his partners to shape and effect a vision for a new Lebanon.
2. Walid Jumblatt, the Druze leader, ought to return to the convictions he held and displayed in the last five years. He must realize that appeasement has not worked in the past, and understand that a détente with his foes should not come at the expense of those who stood by him in his weakest moments.
3. Samir Geagea, the Christian leader, with the largest Christian bloc within the March 14 coalition, deserves the support and consideration of his Sunni and Druze allies if the Christian component of the Cedar Revolution is to persist.

Whether on Cabinet formation, the drafting of its platform, the defining of national dialogue priorities, or the enactment of state reforms, consultations among the three leaders is crucial.

5.4 The Current and Future Policies of the US toward Lebanon

Overall, in the period running into the elections through now, the policies of the United States have been very successful in dealing positively with the Lebanese situation. The early support given by the US for international election monitors on the ground helped generate interest in this area by Lebanese, European, and Arab groups. The statements on the Lebanese elections made by US officials in both the Administration and Congress, specifically the February 14 statements by President Barak Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, were unequivocally supportive of the democratic process in Lebanon. Visits by a number of US officials - including Assistant Secretary of State Jeffrey Feltman, White House Senior Director for Near East and North Africa Dan Shapiro, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Vice-President Joseph Biden, and Chairman of the House Subcommittee On the Middle East and South Asia Gary Ackerman - demonstrated a solid US commitment to the success of the Lebanese elections. These statements and visits placed a much desired focus on the security and integrity of the elections, and put Syria on notice regarding the need to respect the electoral process in Lebanon as well as the sovereignty of the country. President Obama's speech in Cairo on June 4th was also noteworthy in the same regard.

Future US policies in the region, with similar aims, can have additional positive ramifications for Lebanon:

1. Syria/Lebanon - In its new policy of engagement toward Syria, the US will have the potential to pressure Syria to remain at a distance from Lebanon's internal matters and to promptly delineate and demarcate its borders with Lebanon. The issue of border delineation should be the main focus of the US policy towards Syria in regards to Lebanon at this time.
2. Israel/Lebanon - It is timely and essential that the US Administration assist Lebanon in resolving the pending issues of Israeli over flights in Lebanon, Northern Ghajar withdrawal, and breaking the Shebaa farms deadlock. US Officials have received assurances from the Israeli government regarding withdrawal from Northern Ghajar, but this removal has yet to occur. As far as over flights, there are indications that they have decreased, but this issue is tied to effecting border control with Syria and thus must too be resolved. Regarding the Shebaa farms, the US does not foresee any movement on this issue, at least not before Syria officially recognizes the Lebanese identity of Shebaa and delivers the supporting documents to that effect. In addition, it seems that there are disagreements between the UN and the Lebanese government regarding the borders of the Shebaa farms area. This impasse requires easing.

3. Approach to the March 14 coalition - The US can help in maintaining the group's cohesion and focus. The trust and relations established over the years with the March 14 leaders can be used to provide external counsel on regional developments, as well as on matters of maintaining openness and fairness in the coalition's decision making process including affording the proper role to Christians in the group, especially the Lebanese Forces Party, the coalition's strongest Christian partner.
4. Approach to the Government of Lebanon and its State institutions - The US, in its continuing efforts to sustain Lebanon's sovereignty, democracy, and freedom, has committed more than one billion dollars in assisting Lebanon, especially the armed and security forces in order to maintain stability in the country. The upcoming Cabinet should be expected to assume more responsibilities and to produce better outcomes in security and socio-economic matters. While carefully monitoring the government's performance in these areas and assessing progress toward stated goals, the US should continue its support of Lebanon.

6. Concluding Remarks

An unprecedented 55% of eligible Lebanese voters cast their ballots in the 2009 parliamentary elections. These elections, conducted under the intimidations of weapons outside the hands of state authority, offer hints of a burgeoning democracy that remains elusive in many other neighboring countries. Although carried out under a different election law than the one in place for elections 2005, the results of these elections reaffirmed the previous victory for the majority. The outcome should be viewed as an absolute mandate to the new Parliament and Cabinet to solidify and implement a governing agenda that will yield a truly open and democratic society, with security and prosperity for all its citizens, free from violence and foreign interference.
