



## LEBANESE INFORMATION CENTER

### **The 2014 Lebanese Presidential Elections: A Historic Opportunity for Lebanon and the United States**

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The confrontation in Lebanon between the pro-sovereignty March 14 coalition (M14) and the Hezbollah-led March 8 groups (M8) will reach a crucial and decisive point with the upcoming presidential elections. The objectives of the two groups could not be further apart. M14 seeks a president committed to a democratic Lebanon, free from foreign armies and militias, a Lebanon that will abide by international resolutions and uphold the principles of freedom, independence, and sovereignty. M8, on the other hand, desires a president committed to the regional objectives of the Iranian and the Syrian regimes. It seeks a president who would provide political cover to Hezbollah's imposed diktat over the country and support the organization's use of Lebanon as leverage in Iran's international disputes, regional conflicts, nuclear aspirations and sponsorship of terrorism.

M14 enjoys wide popular support, but lacks the military and financial means to confront Hezbollah and their cronies who threaten, intimidate and assassinate them. Meanwhile, Hezbollah continues to (a) impose its diktat on the majority of Lebanese through violent means, (b) violate national agreements and international resolutions, (c) drag Lebanon into regional wars, and (d) conduct terrorist and criminal operations all around the world.

The advent of a strong president from M14 presents a critical opportunity to shift Lebanon's course of events in a more favorable direction and curtail the influence of Iran, the Assad regime and Hezbollah. More specifically, a strong president from M14 would work towards:

- disarming Hezbollah and banning all weapons outside the control of the Lebanese army and security forces,
- building state institutions,
- upholding international resolutions, specifically UNSCRs 1701 and 1559,
- delineating the Lebanese-Syrian border,
- deploying the Lebanese Armed Forces throughout Lebanon,
- sheltering Lebanon from Iran's and the Assad regime's transgressions, and
- creating an international status for Lebanon as a promoter of peace and an ally of the free world.

In the few days before the issuing of this paper, Dr. Samir Geagea, one of the pillars of M14 and Hezbollah's staunchest opponent, officially announced his candidacy to the presidency. The LIC welcomes the candidacy of Dr. Geagea in light of his positions and unwavering commitment to the principles of the Cedar Revolution.

Hezbollah and its consorts will try to block the election process until they get a president to their liking. The Hezb will threaten violence and attempt to assassinate Members of Parliament and intimidate others. Simultaneously, Hezbollah will approach Lebanese, regional, and international players, suggesting alternatives such as postponing the elections, amending the Constitution, or even worse, negotiating a so-called “consensus candidate” which, in the actual balance of powers, will end up being one more president subservient to them.

It is imperative that the United States, acting in its own interest and the interest of its friends and allies, adopts the objective of defeating Hezbollah and securing a victory for the group's opponent, i.e. M14, in the upcoming elections. Consequently, the US with the assistance of its friends and allies in the international community should:

1. Insist on holding the Lebanese presidential elections on time, in a free and democratic process, according to the constitution, without undue amendments, and with no foreign interference.
2. Assist in providing the necessary security environment by making sure that Lebanese armed and security forces, namely the Lebanese Armed Forces, Internal Security Forces, and those security and intelligence services not infiltrated by Hezbollah, fulfill their basic mission of guaranteeing the security of the elections, including the safety of and freedom of movement for the members of parliament.
3. Endorse the candidate who will strengthen governmental institutions, expand state authority, secure borders, confront militias, implement national agreements, principally the Taef accord and the Baabda declaration, and respect international resolutions mainly UNSCRs 1559 and 1701.