

POLITICS

Since its independence in 1943, modern Lebanon was founded on the basis of the unity of its people and coexistence that is mentioned in its constitution and that was later known as the non written Pact. Then, the will to live together was renewed in the National Reconciliation document better known as the Taef Accord. In 1988, fifty-eight members of parliament signed in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia a Lebanese national reconciliation document, which was later known as the Taef Accord, proclaiming the end of the Lebanese civil war. At that time, this accord was the best one could ever reach under the shadow of the circumstances prevailing in the country. One should study anew thoroughly the texts of the Taef Accord to see the cons and pros of this agreement, in the light of developments and activities witnessed on the Lebanese scene. If the Taef Accord has rallied the majority of the local forces within the Lebanese plural society, and was approved by most Arab countries and had the benediction of the regional and international states, one should not separate the internal situation from its external environment, and should be aware that events in the region have a great impact on that situation. In the current flow of events, the Lebanese should find an internal formula that would realize a sort of unity based on a series of minimum required issues. This unity should find its sources in the National reconciliation document; and the civil society should recognize the importance of such work, on the intellectual and practical levels, in order to implement such an agreement, even if the authorities fail to do it. Society, and not only the State, is responsible for the national reconciliation and coexistence as well as the revival of the civil society. Here it is important to state that the unification and cohesion of civil forces will be reflected in a positive way, on the basis of the relationships among the multiple categories of the society on the one side and the three state powers on the other; it is also based on the relationship between Lebanon and its immediate environment as well as the outside world.

Thus, we believe it is necessary to elaborate a fundamental project that would pave the way for a comprehensive national renaissance that would treat main issues and questions pertaining to the Lebanese national affairs at its two levels: the internal and external; starting from the Lebanese crisis passing through the electoral law and the Lebanese Syrian relations, not to mention especially the opposition to Syria. We should also work very seriously on tackling the economic situation in its entirety, the most important issue of which is finding a solution to the public debt and its management.

The deteriorating economic situation impels Lebanon, in the current circumstances, to direct all incomes to serve the public debt, which reached 185 percent of the General Domestic Product.

Thus, in what follows, we shall present the basis of what we think will ensure a global renaissance through the tackling of tragic crises that Lebanon has witnessed.

Internal Political Situation

What is required from the Lebanese, today and more than ever, is to work for a general intellectual, political, social, and economic renaissance that would not eliminate lessons learned from its past history but will transcend it to a promising and positive future. It is beyond doubt that Lebanon is part of this great Arab world on the geographic, historical and political levels as well as on the levels of conflicts, the most important of which is the Arab Israeli conflict; however, this does not mean that the Lebanese should not work on such a renaissance, which takes into consideration some of the Lebanese peculiarities and international changes, like liberal pluralism on the religious, intellectual, political, social or free market economy levels.

However, we should first admit that Lebanon is still suffering from an identity crisis, which is exploited by some forces in their relations with the Arab environment and other states. This led, and is still leading, to great internal tensions between many of the political religious and social institutions. The Lebanese experience has proved that some political forces are still relying on Arab or international forces to exercise control over the country, ultimately leading to the eruption of internal crises as well as to the limitation of the Lebanese capacity to launch real internal changes; such changes would serve the Lebanese citizen and his community. Such forces are also exploiting the heritage of tribalism, sectarianism, or regionalism. In return, it is beyond doubt that the Lebanese people are capable, when the will exists, to concentrate on internal reforms, and try to reduce the influence of external powers on the internal situation and launch a true, sincere, and constructive dialogue. It is true that the national reconciliation accord, elaborated through an entente among international Arab and national powers, guarantees the basis of coexistence, and finds a solution to the identity crisis, in principal, by consecrating the Arab belonging of Lebanon. However, the implementation of such an agreement cannot be realized without the Lebanese themselves.

In addition to the abovementioned issues, one should review the way we tackle some of the internal main aspects such as tribalism, sectarianism, confessionalism, the loyalty to the leader, regionalism, and the surrender to religious men; we thus should work to transform these aspects into positive forces, through the entire implementation of the articles of the national reconciliation document.

Problem Number One: Implementation of the Taef Accord

The Taef Accord was an expression of a Lebanese, regional and international arrangement related to the balance of powers, internally and internationally. Its importance resides in putting an end to the civil war, the reunification of the government, the country and the army, and the dissolution of the militias as well as the amendment of the constitution. However, the big bane of this accord is that not all its articles were implemented. Its partial implementation is the reason why many forces reject it. Indeed, such an equilibrated accord should fully implemented. One should not implement some of the articles in a biased manner, ignoring the others, because this contradicts the accord in text and spirit.

What is the solution then?

What follow are the most important points that should be implemented to solve this problem, and we shall deal with them in detail later:

- Elaborating a new balanced and just electoral law that the Lebanese would consider the best means to achieve their representation in political life.
- Creating the National Council for the Elimination of Confessionalism, and starting progressively to work for the elimination of political confessionalism from texts, as well as from judicial, political, and religious establishment.
- Reforming public education and reducing the cost of education
- Supporting the independence of the judiciary for the sake of protecting the people's civil, political, and legal rights; and this is done by respecting the laws pertaining to the third authority, ensuring total transparency and permanent supervision, including civil and media supervision if necessary in the first phase.
- Activating the National Economic and Social Council in order to deal with the economic crisis.
- Exercising the authority of the state on all Lebanese territories by the use of its own forces and taking into consideration the regional factors and obligations due to the conflict with Israel.
- Putting an end to the issue of the displaced.

Problem Number Two: Confessionalism and Absence of Dialogue

The Third Republic does not yet deserve its name, and one should not call it such as it is still a state where sectarianism, confessionalism and political allegiance to the leader prevail. The public institutions relevant to the state have become sectarian as well as the posts of the President of the Republic, the Speaker, and Prime minister. All have good relations with rich people as was mentioned above in the Introduction.

The prerogatives of the three powers have been concentrated in the hands of their heads on the alleged argument that they represent their religious communities. When in fact they are exploiting their institutional positions to extend their influence within their communities, and thus remaining in power with the help of their community.

Whereas the Lebanese constitution stipulates on the necessity of abolishing the confessional system, which was supposed to be a temporary and limited measure, confessionalism along with people who benefit from it that were the product of civil war and its consequences, have succeeded in controlling all of the state's institutions since the independence of Lebanon. The exception is the brief Presidency of Chehab which one might call rightly the second republic but which alas did not last long due to many reasons, the most important of which is the 1967 Arab defeat and its consequences on the Arab world including Lebanon.

If the Taef Accord has adopted a new formula that is more just in the distribution of powers among the religious communities, one should not ignore the

negative results due to the keeping of the confessional system: on the humanitarian level the confessional system violates human rights, justice and equality, and on the political and legal levels it creates an imbalance in the Lebanese constitution which calls for the equality of citizens and the non-discrimination on religious, political, social and economic grounds.

The basic and ideological stand of the party sees that confessionalism was and remains, a main issue on which are based many beliefs, political, partisanship and religious trends, which resulted in the eruption of many crises in the name of confessional and sectarian protection. It resulted also in long term conflicts; and we are still suffering from the negative implications of such conflicts at the political, economic, social, institutional, administrative, and judicial levels.

As for the problem today, it resides in the way of going from the theorization phase to pragmatic execution and this is done by differentiating between confessionalism and the religious concepts. Religions in Lebanon are a source of wealth, variety, and plurality. They form the values of the Lebanese society. Any religion in Lebanon calls for justice, equality, love, and cooperation for the interest of the society and other religious communities. The Lebanese are attached to their religions and consider them to be the source of their values and morals. However, confessionalism is a great evil that does not unite the Lebanese if misused, but, on the contrary, it separates them, and this is contradictory to the values of all religions. Furthermore, confessionalism hampers national dialogue since it huddles up inside the confessional cocoon and weaves threads that prevent constructive dialogue with the other. Thus, the talk on coexistence has been transformed into a slogan painted in glowing colors.

What is then the solution?

We should call all Lebanese parties to take part in a national dialogue, in order to rectify the imbalance prevailing at all levels. Since the Taef Accord, the successive governments did not work seriously and wholeheartedly to remove the obstacles that hamper the holding of a sincere and effective inter-Lebanese dialogue.

It is important to have a brave and honest dialogue, working for the rectification of the imbalance in the political work and thought as well as in the bilateral relations with Syria. The Lebanese should also tackle the dialectic relationship between the religious and the political. The Lebanese constitution is a secular constitution, not a religious one, as it is not based on a particular religious legislation. Hence, it is the duty of the political system and the religious communities to separate the political from the religious and to not mix them. The Lebanese constitution, even if it gives each religious community its full rights, does not stipulate any particular religion for the state; furthermore it does not consider the state law to be a divine one, but a result of man-made legislations in man-made institutions.

The Lebanese society has suffered a lot from intellectual, political, ideological stands regarding secularism and the issue of separating religion from state. The Lebanese system is one of a kind. Although it is not a system based on religion, its

main reference is religion and confessional balance. Nowadays, there exist numerous political and social groups calling for a secular system that is not based on religion, a system, which respects religion in the private and public fields relative to the affairs of each religious community. Confessionalism causes the estrangement of the Lebanese from one another and leads to the increase of fanaticism. Since there are groups who believe that the abolition of confessionalism, in a country where 18 religious communities coexist, would lead to an imbalance between those communities, and since such stand stems from the fear of one or more communities controlling the others, such fears should be dealt with when confessionalism is abolished by adopting measures we shall mention later.

Here it is noteworthy to admit that confessionalism expresses a destructive entity crisis and therefore it should be dealt with most seriously and rationally.

Today's officials have become the protectors of confessionalism, since they are benefiting from the stirring up of fanaticism pretending that they are serving their religious community. They are capable of transforming questionable issues into ones special to the religious community. This paralyzes the capacity to fight against misgovernment, corruption, bribery, and thus applying objective scales for good governance, transparency, and questioning. Thus, abolishing confessionalism rectifies the behavior of officials without fearing that such rectification would result in a problem among religious communities.

Here are some of the issues that should be dealt with directly in order to abolish confessionalism in the next phase:

- 1- Abolish the declaration of religious belonging of the citizen when conducting official business, because this would compel him to remain under the authority of the leader of his religious community.
- 2- Forbid the exploitation of sincere religious sentiments for narrow political objectives.
- 3- The non exploitation of confessionalism that could create among citizens a pyramidal organization that would lead to the weakening of solidarity, unity, and national belonging.
- 4- Reject confessionalism, as it would generate a feeling of permanent frustration and repression, because of the discrimination it causes that is illustrated best in barriers that would prevent access to public service according to competence. For example, only one religion can accede to the presidential post, and another one to the speaker's post, and a third one to the prime ministerial one. As for the members of smaller religious communities, they are forbidden to accede to such positions and other important ones.
- 5- Refuse confessionalism because it consolidates clientelism, and decrease the role that one should play in public services according to his competence.
- 6- Abandoning confessionalism, as it paralyzes the authority of the state, and maintains the disassembly of government and subject it to competition among religious communities and their leaders.

Such subdivision in government is the one that is keeping Lebanon subject to external pressures and demanding help for a particular religious community.

Thus, abolition of confessionalism suggests, from a theoretical point of view, creating conditions for justice and equal opportunities for each citizen; it limits also clientelism and increases the effectiveness of public administrations. It also permits the prevalence of a feeling of national belonging, which in turn limits the capacity of outside forces to exert their influences on the interior, especially in internal affairs.

Thus, we should work in a scientific and constitutional manner for the eradication of confessionalism in order to achieve national cohesion and to consolidate unity and the feeling of belonging to one nation. To achieve such goals a national committee headed by the President of the Republic and including the Prime Minister, Speaker as well as people from various sectors, should be created. It should put forth a plan to abolish confessionalism in a progressive manner as stipulated in the Taef Accord. Such an accord stipulates the creation of such an organization the “National Council for the Abolition of Confessionalism.” The committee would start immediately putting forth a media policy that would help national cohesion and the development of a sincere and constructive dialogue. It also undertakes progressively practical measures to abolish confessionalism and supervises the implementation of such measures. It will also carry out the elimination of texts of confessional nature. Knowing that civil society should seek the creation of mixed and non confessional gatherings, schools, clubs, and parties, as it substitutes progressively the prevailing religious institutions and forces with non confessional ones.

It is clear that the Lebanese are not united in their political thoughts as confessionalism and sectarianism enable leaders to speak on their behalf for personal objectives, and are still prevalent in the political thought of most Lebanese. Despite of our belief in the richness of political and social life in Lebanon because of the plurality of religion, culture and social life, and the necessity of such communities and sects to carry out a positive role in public life and the true dialogue, we are aware that confessionalism is harmful to the real role of religious communities. In the same manner, sectarianism harms the real role each sect should play and hampers the development of dialogue. Thus, the Lebanese should adopt the concept of national belonging, as a rallying concept that prevents some leaderships from investing badly in the religious communities and sects. However, the prevailing problem up till now is that most of the political forces have no interest in developing the concept of patriotism and practice it, as this concept is absent in the minds of many politicians, so that issues such as confessionalism and sectarianism, are still prevalent in our Lebanese society.

In order to realize the basis of a true national belonging, the only guarantee to prevent outside influences, we should review our history books and recognize all differences imposed on citizens in our modern history. The concept of national belonging should be a main issue to be dealt with in civic education books, as it could contribute in making the citizen conscious of his rights and obligations; it also puts an end to the role of confessionalism and sectarianism and supports the process of national dialogue.

Problem Number Three: the Practice of Power

Among the problems of the post Taef era is the political practice. Government in the shadow of Taef has generated new phenomena stemming from the nature of power and its practice in the shadow of the new constitution. The most important of those are the Troika in case of agreement of the three presidents, the Doika system, and the power of Parliament in case of disagreement.

1- Troika

The Speaker seeks to participate in the affairs of the executive power. Despite the preamble of the constitution which stipulates the separation of powers, the balance and cooperation among powers, separation means, in fact, religious and sectarian tensions, and the eventuality of conflict, whereas a balance protected by cooperation is the model illustrated by the Taef Accord. Such a balance should be achieved alongside cooperation, but such a fact should not mean the constitution of a troika system of rule that would eliminate the role of constitutional institutions, as this happened in the first years of rule following the Taef Accord, when it was impossible for the parliament to control the government's activities or propose a confidence vote, or even supervise the acts of ministers and suggest a confidence vote on an individual basis. Cooperation should be controlled by the President of the Republic. As for the concept of the Troika, it was made on the basis of giving more advantage to cooperation than to the separation of powers, which resulted in crippling the state and its institutions, preventing the nomination of civil servants. The three presidents have gathered in their persons the prerogatives of public institutions; thus their differences would harm the institutions and this in turn led to the consolidation of confessionalism and sectarianism.

The Authority of the Parliament

The authority of parliament stems from making the term of the speaker and his deputy four years making it difficult for a no confidence vote against the speaker and his deputy after two years. Because such a vote requires a majority of two thirds, the attempt for a no confidence vote against the speaker would lead, because of the confessional system, to a major confessional problem

Doika

When two presidents agree without the consent of the third, the latter is weakened. One should point out that such a rapprochement could be transformed into a confessional tension in some cases that would paralyze the activities of constitutional institutions, as is the case with the Troika, or create confrontation among institutions.

What is then the solution to avoid falling into such a false political ruling?

It is important to note the importance of the separation of the executive, legislative, and judicial powers and ensure equilibrium among them from the practical point of view. The 1926 constitution has established the principle of the separation of powers; and the situation remained as such notwithstanding the various constitutional amendments since the 1930s, passing through 1943 and ending with the huge and rational amendments that were introduced in the constitution in 1990.

It is also important to note that the executive power should not control the parliament through its exceptional legislative prerogatives, or that the parliament controls the decision of the executive power under the threat of a no confidence vote or hampering the projects it suggests. One should point out that the only power that has no prerogative of controlling the others is the judicial one, as it enjoys a lesser degree of independence than the others, especially in matters pertaining to nomination or job rotation of civil servants.

One should admit the principle of the separation of powers, in a way that the Lebanese judiciary is transformed into a constitutional power independent by itself, and this would lead to the consolidation of its role to equal the other two powers and in protecting liberties and guaranteeing public rights. Besides the judicial nominations, rotations and promotions should be exercised by the Higher Judicial Council. The constitution should also stipulate the prerogatives enjoyed by such a council

One should also not exercise simultaneously a ministerial and parliamentary role. That is if a member of parliament becomes a minister, he should resign from his parliamentary post. In the same token, if a minister was elected as MP, he should resign from the Council of Ministers, because it is inadmissible to join together the executive and legislative powers. It is not permissible that an individual is at the same time executing a certain policy and supervising the execution of that same policy. This constitutes a violation of the principle of separation of powers.

It is noteworthy to indicate that such a fact would change by activating the role of the political parties changing the electoral law into the proportional system and carry out elections in Lebanon on the basis of a single district.

Problem Number Four: Frustration of Christians

Undoubtedly, the Lebanese society with all its components has been witnessing a state of deep frustration. This is not limited to some Christians only, but such a frustration has started with the Christians for political reasons. After the ratification of the Taef Accord, ideas spread that indicated that the Christians were in a state of frustration, and this was illustrated in the 1992 general elections when an important part of Christian voters and candidates boycotted the election process.

True, there was a sort of unannounced boycott and announced estrangement distance among many Christians with the third Republic. For this reason, the Lebanese should deal with various factors that led to such a state of despair among

many Christians. This has compelled in the past the visit of Pope John Paul II to Lebanon following the special Synod for Lebanon.

The Christians were subject to a series of political and psychological shocks that contributed to the creation of such a frustrated state. Such shocks include the downfall of General Aoun following his proclamation of the war of Liberation against Syria with an Arab-Iraqi support and a French encouragement, the armed deployment of some militias following the downfall and the subjection of the Kataeb party headquarters to theft and dilapidation, the assassination of Dany Chamoun, the 1992 general elections, and the imprisonment of Samir Geagea.

What contributed to the increase of such a state of frustration is that some of the Christian leaderships have expressed during the presidential terms of Hrawi and Lahoud a feeling of despair, especially in the field of political reform. As many parts of the Taef Accord have been implemented, the part regarding sovereignty was not been implemented, especially that part that stipulated the redeployment of the Syrian armed forces in Lebanon in conformity with the Taef Accord. Thus, many Christians linked the idea of the Syrian army presence in Lebanon with being controlled by Moslems.

It is noteworthy to mention that the Maronite Patriarch played a major role in leading the Christians, especially in the post-Taef period, which witnessed the absence and the marginalization of many leaders. The Maronite Patriarch also provided legitimacy to the solution based on the Taef Accord. He undertook, with the benediction of the Vatican state, many supportive stands to the constitutional legality issued from the Taef Accord.

What is the required solution then to deal with the feeling of injustice?

Thus, we should put an end to the war issues once and for all, including that of the displaced, the forced displacement of people inside Lebanon and emigration. Thus, the case of the displaced should not be a political card. Furthermore, emigration should be dealt with rationally. The situation is grave as the following information reveals: between 1975 and 1990, about 900,000 citizens left the country. Fifteen years after the civil war has ended, a huge number of Lebanese citizens are applying for emigration because there are no job opportunities in their own country. As a result, thousands of Lebanese youngsters, men and women, leave their country each year. And since the unemployment rate is still high and the economic problem is increasing, the emigration process will not stop. Thus, one should deal seriously with culture, agriculture, industry, and elaborate a modern, just, and transparent law to grant citizenship and find a solution to its relevant problems.

It is also important to consolidate the Lebanese Diaspora in order to support the just and right Lebanese causes, and to strengthen the social ties, develop the economic relations on all levels. Thus, it is the duty of the Lebanese government to establish healthy and practical relations with the Diaspora, and attract them to Lebanon by granting those who deserve it the citizenship and the right to vote, and by

founding an Emigrant Council that would deal with political, social, and economic issues related to the Diaspora.

Problem Number Five: The Political Representation

Most of the debate concerning the electoral law is confined to the subdivision of the electoral districts and the relationship such a subdivision has with the right, just and equal representation, knowing that a sound representation suggests that the member of parliament represents the whole of Lebanon and not only his electoral district.

What is the solution then to a sound representation?

The solution resides in reforming the electoral process, through a proportional electoral system that takes into consideration the confessional local dimension and the national non confessional one.

Such a reform ensures justice, as the proportional system allows the representation of all trends, categories, organizations, and political parties. This would increase the level of political life as the proportional system leads to an increase in competition and programs. It allows also a representation that reflects the growth of the social force and political currents, which would lead to the creation of non confessional alliances among the main currents.

At this level, the National Dialogue Party sees that it is necessary to reach a just and comprehensive electoral law. Thus, it is necessary in the first phase to elaborate a realistic electoral law with regards to the differences among the religious communities' leaderships. It should guarantee a right representation to all parties and takes into consideration the national equilibrium by resorting to small districts. Let us take for example, the case of Beirut. The subdivision of the capital should be reviewed: it should be divided into three districts, but different from the current division with the recent electoral law, but in a way that would ensure the election of a member of parliament through an effective choice of electors. The elections should not be a mere participation to cover the control of one party with a great number of candidates and electors. Thus, we see that it is necessary to readopt the small district system.

Taking as a basis the principle of evenness between Christians and Moslems, the two wings of the country, we see it is necessary to take into consideration that no big difference in the proportion of votes occur between one district and another, as is the case with the current electoral law. It is sufficient, for example, that a candidate obtain 3000 votes in a region to become a member of parliament representing the whole of Lebanon, whereas 40000 votes do not allow another candidate in another region to win a parliamentary seat.

The party sees that it is necessary in a second phase to adopt a more representative system than the current one, that is a majority electoral system with collective votes (that is allowing the elector to vote for a number of candidates equivalent to the number of seats in the district), because the majority system is ill-

avored and is applied only in six out of 211 countries which carry out the electoral process.

The electoral majority system with districts comprising a number of electoral seats affects a just representation and reduces its legitimacy. For a correct representation, one should resort to a proportional electoral system, based on small districts so that elections take place on the level of the Qaza. This will contribute to the development of political life as it allows the different components and religious communities of Lebanon to participate in the electoral life in a way that is equivalent to their respective social and political dimensions. Furthermore, it is important to elaborate an electoral law that would guarantee the right and just representation, but most important is to free the electors, Moslems and Christians alike, from being subject to the local political forces that have the supremacy in forming the electoral lists. It is important that the true will of electors stems from the outlook of the Lebanese people and expresses their desires.

However, the proportional electoral system which should be adopted on the basis of Lebanon forming one electoral district, is the most ideal solution that respects the spirit of the Taef Accord. It also contributes to the establishment of a true political life based on parties, far from confessionalism, sectarianism, and localism.

However, it seems that most of the political forces in Lebanon are not prepared yet for such an electoral system.

The main problem in the political life resides in the absence of political parties that would reflect the outlooks of the Lebanese people, not to mention the propagation of confessionalism. Thus, it has become imperative to work for the development of the laws concerning political parties as well as the general principles that organizes such parties. It is possible to establish a bi-party or a multi-party system based on alliances among parties. Yet, it is imperative that the new party law abolish confessionalism and sectarianism, respects the principle of commitment to the national principles in conformity with the constitution and the national reconciliation document.

It is also important to resort to referendums as an effective means in the framework of direct democracy, and respect the will of the people in certain matters suggested by the authorities, and undertake the necessary constitutional amendments.

The Lebanese society should also fight corruption. The first step, in this direction, would be the struggle against the corrupt political culture and pay attention to the general interest.

It is also important that the money used for political purposes be controlled in conformity with the principle of equality, and this is done by elaborating laws that would supervise the financing of political parties and electoral campaigns. Thus, the state should not be lenient on such means; it should prevent them and forbid bribery. This is because such matters will ultimately lead to a lack of confidence in the authorities, the dissolution of the state, distrustfulness with regards to the elaboration of laws, to resorting to personal interests, to the squandering of public money, to the

increase of charges on taxpayers, and to the slowness in the activities of the public administration and formalities.

For all the above mentioned reasons, it is necessary that laws be elaborated for the sake of general interests, to control illicit enrichment and to increase the prerogatives of the financial control organizations, especially the Government Accounting Office.

ON FOREIGN POLICY

The Lebanese agree that Israel is their main enemy that occupies Lebanese and Arab territories. That is the cause of the refugee problem; a problem which causes fear due to a sectarian imbalance that an eventual settlement of the Palestinians would provoke. But, the Lebanese foreign policy is also based on good relations with the Arab states. This is because the Arab world constitutes the strategic, political, and economic dimension of Lebanon. Lebanon should establish the best of relations with the world on the basis of equality, sovereignty, non interference in Arab States' internal affairs, and the necessity to reactivate the joint defense policy. It couldn't be otherwise, for Lebanon is one of the founding members of the Arab League in 1945. It is also one of its most active members.

However, one should review the structure of the Arab League, which failed to tackle and find solutions to important issues such as the Lebanese and Palestinian crises for instance.

Problem Number Six: Relations with Syria

Lebanon's relations with Syria assume a special aspect based on the proximity of the two states, social interconnection, and historical development, not to mention that Syria is the gateway to the Arab world. Such special relations were embodied by the conclusion of a series of joint treaties and the creation of a Higher Lebanese Syrian Council. After Syrian Withdrawal, Syria has an effective and indirect influence on Lebanon's internal affairs and this consecrated its political and security role in the country. However, there should be a kind of Lebanese-Syrian understanding that serves the interest of both countries.

How should one reach a Syrian-Lebanese understanding?

The main problem with Syria stemmed from the fear that some Lebanese had reservations about Syria's policy in Lebanon, as they consider that the Syrian authority sided with a group of Lebanese at the expense of others, and it favored its interests over Lebanon's interest.

Thus, the Lebanese should coordinate with Syria on issues pertaining to foreign policy, which was concluded in the "Fraternity, Cooperation and Coordination" Treaty. This treaty affirms "the distinguished fraternal links based on proximity, history, belonging, common fate, and common interests."

This treaty also comprises a series of principles, the most important of which is the reaching of the higher degree of cooperation and coordination in the fields of politics, economy, security, culture, science, agriculture, industry, and trade; it also stipulates the formation of organizations to achieve the goals of the treaty.

The treaty comprised a series of points organizing the foreign policy of the two states, including the one that stipulates that Lebanon and Syria are two Arab

countries committed to joint Arab pacts, have a joint fate, and are supportive of one another on issues linked with security and national interests.

Under the label of “Lebanese Syrian Relations,” the accord stipulates: “Lebanon, with its Arab identity, is tied to all the Arab countries by true fraternal relations. Between Lebanon and Syria, there is a special relationship that derives its strength from the roots of relationships, history, and joint fraternal interests. This is the concept on which the two countries' coordination and cooperation are founded, and which will be embodied by the agreements between the two countries in all areas, in a way that accomplishes the two fraternal countries' interests within the framework of the sovereignty and independence of each of them. Therefore, as strengthening the bases of security creates the climate needed to develop these bonds, Lebanon should not be allowed to constitute a source of threat to Syria's security, and vice versa.”

As for the privileged relations, they were in fact illustrated in the “Treaty of Fraternity, Cooperation and Coordination” that was concluded in Damascus in May 22 1991, between the Republic of Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic.

The solution resides in the amendment as well as the implementation of the above mentioned treaty and the Taef Accord.

Problem Number Seven: Palestinian Presence

Figures concerning the number of Palestinians present in Lebanon are contradictory: 600, 000 according to the Palestinian Red Crescent; 400 000 according to the Lebanese state; 300,000 according to Israel; 319,000 according to UNRWA.

Paragraph 11 of UN General Assembly dated December 11th, 1948 stipulates that the UN Assembly “resolves that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practical date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the governments or the responsible authorities.”

What is then the solution to the Palestinian problem in Lebanon?

It appears that the Palestinians’ “Right of Return” is linked to their right as individuals regardless of their national rights. Only they have the right of compensation for their lost or damaged property, whether they chose to return or not. Finding solution to the Palestinian refugee problem has become a part of the Madrid Middle East Peace conference. Thus, Israel cannot but abide by the international legitimacy and UN Resolution 194, knowing that Lebanese and the Palestinians reject the naturalization.

Anyways, the Lebanese government should remove the obstacles to the relations with Palestinians, and deal positively with the issue of their legal status in Lebanon, and examine their civic and social rights, which should include a permanent residency for those that are on Lebanese territories, and a treaty between Lebanon and

Palestinian authority stipulating reciprocity in the fields of labor, social security, taxes, and removing conditions with respect to foreign appropriation allowing foreign investments in fields that are not linked to security and the nation's higher interest. The government should grant Palestinians legal security and offer them social and medical care, and permit them to work in jobs that are forbidden to them such as engineering and law and other higher level professions.

Lebanon has taken part in the Middle East Peace Process since the 1991 Madrid Conference on the basis of land for peace and a just and comprehensive peace to the crisis in the region and the commitment to UN Security Council resolution 425 as the sole solution to put an end to the Israeli occupation in South Lebanon, without changing its firm stand regarding its commitment to other Arab rights, such as the Palestinian right and the Syrian right in conformity with UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338.

Problem Number Eight: Lebanon's Foreign Relations

Lebanon will never have a real foreign presence if it does not show true interest and does not promote Lebanon's image to the world. Lebanon's image is still affected by the civil war and many Westerners believe that Lebanon is still going through a war. This is because Lebanese officials have not promoted their country recently showing its touristic, educational and health advantages.

How can we improve Lebanon's relations with the world?

It is necessary that Lebanon enjoys excellent relations with the European states especially after their unification and transformation into an international power at all levels. Lebanon has benefited and is still benefiting from its special relations with each of France and the Vatican; it is also taking part very seriously and effectively in the European-Mediterranean partnership and is benefiting mostly from such an alliance.

As for Lebanon's relations with the United States, the sole superpower in the world, it should be based on positive attitude, because Lebanon, with its modest means compared to those of the United States, has no interest in creating an enmity with the US; and the only choice Lebanon has is to develop a positive strategy to deal with the world and activate the Diaspora institutions.

It is important that Lebanon plays a distinguished role in the United Nations, as it is one of its founders. Its role stems from its religious, civilizational and cultural position, as it is the crossroad of civilizations and cultures, knowing that the world today is witnessing a wave of radicalism and a so called "clash of civilizations". The world is looking for a model of coexistence among civilizations, cultures, religions, and thoughts, as a substitute to the clash of civilizations prevalent in the East and the West. Lebanon could serve as a model if its people develop their relations and benefit from their plurality and harmonious society.

