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LEBANON IN THE “DAY AFTER” THE LAST CHANCE?

PREPARED BY
SIMON A. KACHAR, PhD
ZIAD EL- SAYEGH

INTRODUCTION

More than a year after Lebanon was dragged into the Gaza War (**October 2023**), which Hezbollah labeled as a “**Distraction and Support for Palestine and its People**” aligning with the “**Unity of the Fronts**” axis led by Iran, Lebanon has faced growing repercussions from the ongoing Israeli aggression. This development led to a rise in political and media narratives about Lebanon’s situation, ranging from supporters to critics, some raising slogans of solidarity with **Palestine** while others reject being drawn into regional conflicts.

However, despite these differing narratives, discussions have often been limited to immediate concerns such as debris removal, reconstruction, the return of displaced persons, and ensuring medical care for the injured, with little focus on forecasting the future or on Hezbollah’s future role within its partnership with the Amal Movement in the political system, and the subsequent impact on Lebanon’s political duality.

In this context, the neglect of Lebanon’s deeper political and social transformations since the decision to involve the country in the Gaza War becomes apparent. Thus, this paper raises the issues of the “**The Day After**” driven by the need to reframe the narrative around the foundations of state-building, based on the concepts of national and scientific security from one side, and Lebanese citizens’ protection and human security from another, alongside a perspective on the need to restore Lebanon’s unique identity and its cultural distinctiveness.

The first section of the paper focuses on developing narratives around responsibility, accountability, and shared national memory, along with examining constitutional, defense, and diplomatic choices necessary towards a citizenship-based state.

The second section explores the necessary foundations for building a citizenship state after Lebanon’s turbulent experiences over the past four decades.

1. RESPONSIBILITY WITH ACCOUNTABILITY AND OVERSIGHT

The Lebanese people have long adhered to the notion of “**let bygones be bygones**” with phrases like “It’s fine”, “**Just let it slide**” or “**Not the right time**” ingrained in their socio-political fabric. This mindset has dulled the societal and political processes necessary for accountability and responsibility. Attempts to confront harsh truths are often dismissed, while warnings against accountability, framed as potential triggers for sectarian or political conflict, have discouraged genuine reckoning.

In this context, fabricated notions of “**National Coexistence**”, “**Solidarity**” and “**Civil Peace**” have created a superficial and emotionally charged narrative that does not build a collective memory grounded in rights and responsibilities.

To chart a path forward, a redefinition of accountability and responsibility is necessary. This foundational reform is essential if the Lebanese aim to navigate the second century of their shared existence under a sovereign state governed by the rule of law.

2. COMMONALITIES OF THE NATIONAL COLLECTIVE MEMORY

The Lebanese national collective memory, despite its fragmented origins and purposes, is rich with concepts such as “**Living Together**”, “**Civil Peace**”, “**National Unity**”, “**Civil Solidarity**”, “**Consensus**”, and “**Reconciliation**”.

Each of these concepts has its constitutional, political, economic, social, financial, diplomatic, defensive, and, importantly, religious interpretations. And unfortunately, each of them has been translated differently, depending on the balance of power.

The multiple dimensions of these translations have often remained theoretical, disconnected from political behavior, and sometimes even from academic, civil, and religious practices. This detachment has at times undermined the noble moral significance of these concepts, which are meant to reside in the collective national memory. On one hand, they are intended to form the foundation for the protection of Lebanese identity, built upon freedom, pluralism, democracy, justice, and citizenship. On the other hand, they should guide the acceptance and celebration of diversity.

The reformation of the national collective memory narrative among the Lebanese people, both residents and expatriates, under the framework of the constitution and the agreement of all Lebanese, regardless of their affiliations, is a foundational process. This process involves their shared commitment to living together, with a renewed emphasis on dignity, social cohesion, and good governance under the banner of a civil state. This reformation is essential if Lebanon is to enter its second centennial with a unified vision for a future based on human dignity, community solidarity, and proper governance, all within the context of a state of citizenship.

3. CONSTITUTIONAL, DEFENSIVE, AND DIPLOMATIC OPTIONS

The Lebanese state has been stripped of all factual foundations regarding constitutional, defensive, and diplomatic options. The constitution has become a mere viewpoint. The Taif Agreement was assassinated and demonized. Politicians, academics, and activists have made efforts to sell the idea that we are in a political system crisis, whereas the truth is that we are facing an illegitimate ruling system, as well a corrupt political class.

The Taif Agreement was neither fully nor truly implemented. It was subjected to moral demonization, adopted by the minority alliance axis, and its structural reforms were politically distorted. The demonization and distortion of the agreement intersected with the interests of the ruling system’s dinosaurs, supported by a malicious regional and international cover. The crux of the agreement’s failure lies in its profound truth—establishing the Lebanese model of living together by embracing diversity within a civil state of citizenship. This democratic parliamentary model has been rejected from its inception by those aligned with both religious and secular dictatorships. Power-hungry individuals exploited the agreement, while some free thinkers tried to save some aspects of its truth, only to face moral and physical assassinations during a voluntary uprising after enforced normalization.

The Taif Agreement, and anyone who reads its national depth, will discover how misleading it is to reduce it to a “**Ceasefire**” or a tool for enhancing and hiding powers. The agreement carries within its genes the founding principles of Lebanon as a unique entity, inspired by Lebanon’s civil state ambitions. A simple review of its key points, such as the dissolution of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, the establishment of a national committee to eliminate sectarianism (Article 95), the creation of a non-sectarian electoral law, the establishment of a Senate that addresses the concerns of religions communities, the interpretation of the constitution by the Constitutional Council, strengthening judicial independence, adopting a unified civil personal status law, and embracing neutrality in the National Pact, reveals how these aspirations were left on paper while the rule of law and the constitution were overturned by militia-like, mafia-style behaviors that ravaged the country and its people. These behaviors were compounded by transient cross-border affiliations that killed the idea of citizenship in its infancy and burned the concept of living together with crimes of veto-driven politics.

At the same time, some politicians, academics, and activists have tried to theorize the slogan “**People, Army, Resistance**” to the point of considering it a constitutional custom that must be followed, while exploiting the phrase “defense/political strategy,” which subjected Lebanon and its people to all forms of sovereignty violations, systematically attacking its constitutional military and security institutions.

These individuals forgot that protecting Lebanon requires placing sovereignty in the hands of the legitimate armed forces exclusively. This necessitates the removal of all non-legitimate weapons, Lebanese or non-Lebanese, as sovereignty cannot be divided or shared. This applies to Palestinian weapons, and Hezbollah must responsibly engage in the process of surrendering its weapons to the Lebanese state according to the provisions of the Taif Agreement. The Lebanese state must also enhance its defensive capabilities within a comprehensive strategy, becoming the sole reference in this regard, thus ensuring Lebanon's protection and strength against any aggression, reinforcing the national covenant, sovereignty, partnership, and stability under the constitution.

This National Sovereign path requires a national confrontation and agreement on what ensures Lebanon's protection, keeping it away from any regional or international conflicts, leading to its positive neutrality within a clear constitutional legal framework. This must be based on the covenantal partnership between its components, and includes equipping, training, and arming all Lebanese armed forces, providing political support for them to carry out their missions fully in accordance with the provisions of the constitution.

Regarding foreign policy, Lebanon's diplomacy has been subjected to dependency, duality, and contradictions, adopting positions that do not align with the historical principles Lebanon was founded upon, particularly its membership in the Arab League and the United Nations, and its commitment to a positive neutrality supporting justice. Applying UN Security Council resolutions related to Lebanon (**1701, 1680, 1559**) and adhering to the Arab Peace Initiative (**Beirut 2002**) form a structural framework for saving Lebanon's diplomacy.

Therefore, it is crucial to reframe Lebanon's public policies to restore Lebanon's historic role in the Arab world, contributing to shaping values of freedom, justice, dialogue, human rights, equality, managing diversity, and building peace.

Lebanon is at a historic and final opportunity to return to the model of its civilizational role. After decades of internal conflicts and destructive external factors, from civil war to ongoing economic and political crises, Lebanon today requires a new phase marked by stability and unity, aiming to build a modern state based on the principles of citizenship. This goal can only be achieved through fundamental changes across all fields: legislative, executive, social, and cultural. Lebanon needs a political and legal system that strengthens the concept of citizenship, ensures justice and equality for all citizens, and transcends sectarian and ethnic divisions.

A. Implementing the Constitution

The Need for Effective Strong Rule of Law

The Lebanese Constitution, adopted in 1926, and the National Pact known as the “**Taif Agreement**” form the legal foundation that governs the relationship between the citizen and the state and defines rights and duties. However, this constitution has not always been effective in delivering justice and equality. It has faced several gaps and issues, exacerbated by political and sectarian conflicts, which turned laws into tools for manipulation and control rather than instruments of justice. For long periods, it was difficult to see a genuine implementation of laws in a fair and just manner due to the sectarian political dominance over institutions.

Therefore, the next phase in Lebanon must be a truly reformative period for the more effective application of the constitution. This reform should include ensuring judicial neutrality, institutional independence, and removing any sectarian or political influence on judicial decisions. The reform must also focus on social justice and achieving equality before the law. It is crucial to emphasize the application of laws that hold those responsible for abuse of power accountable and ensure transparency in all dealings.

One of the key reforms Lebanon also needs is the introduction of modern mechanisms to monitor the performance of the state and its institutions, ensuring accountability for any dysfunction or corruption in government agencies and preventing sectarian politics from affecting the course of justice.

B. Good Governance

The Key to Building a State of Citizenship

The shift from a sectarian state to a state of citizenship requires the Lebanese government to adopt a model of good governance that promotes transparency, accountability, and ensures equality in the distribution of opportunities and resources. Good governance is the cornerstone of building a state of institutions in Lebanon, where public administration must be efficient and effective, and government institutions must deliver services to citizens without discrimination or favoritism. This model requires deepening the concept of transparency in government work and ensuring accountability through the oversight of government performance by regulatory bodies.

Fighting corruption is a fundamental part of this model, and there must be a comprehensive approach to combat corruption, starting with raising citizens’ awareness of the importance of fighting this phenomenon, and extending to the application of deterrent laws against the corrupt. The independence of the judiciary should be strengthened to ensure that anyone who commits a corruption crime is pursued, regardless of their position or political affiliation.

Furthermore, good governance cannot be effective unless it is applied across all of Lebanon, with an equitable distribution of resources and opportunities to all citizens, regardless of region or sectarian affiliation. This equality in development enhances the sense of national belonging and ensures social stability and living together among Lebanese citizens.

C. Rebuilding Institutions

Ensuring Independence and Efficiency

To achieve a post-sectarian phase in Lebanon, its priority must be the construction of effective and independent state institutions. This requires that government institutions be managed by competent and professionals, free from any political or sectarian interference. The structure of a state of citizenship cannot be complete without establishing a strong foundation for constitutional institutions.

Among the key institutions in need of reform in Lebanon are security, judicial, and financial institutions. These institutions are essential for ensuring security and stability and regulating the relationship between citizens and the state. It is crucial to completely separate politics from administration in these institutions, so that officials are chosen based on competence and professionalism, not partisan or sectarian loyalty.

D. Education and Citizenship

Building a Generation Aware of Its Rights and Responsibilities

One of the essential pillars for building a State of Citizenship is the development of the educational system. This system should focus on nurturing a generation of citizens who are aware of their rights and responsibilities and believe in the principles of equality and social justice. The educational system must serve as a fertile ground for fostering genuine citizenship values, emphasizing democracy, human rights, and respect for others.

In Lebanon, it is crucial to prioritize citizenship and equality topics within school curricula. This will contribute to cultivating a general culture based on cooperation, tolerance, and national belonging, which can help overcome the sectarian divides that have torn apart Lebanese society.

Additionally, there must be a focus on teaching universal human values, which will help in developing active citizens who contribute to building their nation and protecting it from any attempts at sedition or division.

E. Civil Society and National Partnership

Ensuring Active Participation

Civil society plays a pivotal role in building a state of citizenship. It acts as the spokesperson for wide segments of the Lebanese population and enhances individuals' capacities to defend their rights and advocate for their causes. Civil society organizations must enjoy full freedom and actively press for political and social reforms.

Moreover, it is essential to strengthen the partnership between the state and civil society. This partnership ensures the respect of human rights and the promotion of social justice. It should be based on transparency and inclusive national dialogue, involving all social and sectarian groups to form a unified vision for Lebanon's future.

Lebanon is facing an existential crisis, and the only way to save it is through new leadership that adopts a reformative and sovereign vision, which restores national resilience to the Lebanese identity, where freedom, diversity, and democracy are structural foundations. All of this can only be achieved by building a state of citizenship and restoring the Lebanese people's trust in it.

CONCLUSION

Building a state of citizenship in Lebanon requires a long and complex path, but it is possible if political will and cooperation among all segments of Lebanese society are present. This journey begins with the full and effective implementation of the constitution, with all its reform provisions, ensuring good governance and transparency in state management. Additionally, it requires the rebuilding of institutions so they can serve citizens effectively and justly. Education and civil society must play a significant role in promoting national values and achieving mutual understanding among all Lebanese. Ultimately, the hope remains in building a new Lebanon that surpasses its violent struggles and builds a prosperous future for all Lebanese, both residents and expatriates.

Will we take advantage of this “last chance”?



SIMON A. KACHAR, PhD

Dr. Simon Kachar is a Lecturer in Political Science at the Department of Political Studies and Public Administration at the American University of Beirut, and the Founding Director of the Good Governance and Citizenship Observatory at AUB.

Additionally, he is researcher and advisor in public policy. He was a columnist in the leading Lebanese newspaper, Annahar, writing and commenting on public policy development and public reform.

He is the author of the book “Fouad Chehab and the Political Change in a Pluralistic Society” (Dar Saer Al Mashreq 2023), and has published articles in peer-reviewed journals, analytical articles, and policy briefs on social issues, public policies, governmental policy development, public governance efficiency, and public administration reform.

Dr. Kachar holds a BA and MA in political science and public administration as well as a PhD in political science, with his doctoral dissertation awarded the Michel Eddé academic prize for the best PhD dissertation on good public governance from Saint Joseph University (USJ).



ZIAD EL- SAYEGH

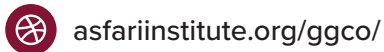
Expert on Public Policies, Migration and Refugees. Executive Director of the Civic Influence Hub (CIH). PhD candidate in Public Diplomacy and International Relations.

He holds a Master in Philosophy and Theology; and Certificate in Labor Policies and Social Protection (ILO/WB). Senior International Fellow at the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship at the American University of Beirut – November 2024. Expert on Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon and Middle East Peace Negotiations Process, on Syria Refugees, on Labor Policies and Social Protection. El Sayegh has specialized studies in the Palestinian and Syrian Refugees issue in Lebanon, Middle East Peace negotiations, Labor and social Protection issues, and Syria Displaced. El Sayegh published several studies in Public Policies, as refugees and migration, Christian – Muslim Dialogue, Religious Freedom, Arab thinking and Citizenship.

Co-author of “We Choose Abundant Life: Christians in the Middle East: Towards Renewed Theological, Social, and Political Choices” (2021), “October 17 Uprising: Squares and Testimonies” (Arab Center for Research and Policy Study 2022), “Méditations et Migrations”, (L’Harmattan 2019), “The Religion Freedom with Civic Religious Dialogue in Lebanon”, (Adyan Foundation - Dar Al Farabi 2017).

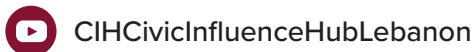
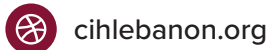
The Good Governance & Citizenship Observatory (GGCO)

The Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship
Ayman and Sawsan Asfari Building, Residence 37
American University of Beirut
PO Box: 11-0236, Riad El Solh, 1107 2020, Beirut, Lebanon
Tel: +961-1-350000, Ext. 4469



Civic Influence Hub (CIH)

Beirut Central District - Allenby St., Port 136 Bldg.
4th floor, Beirut - Lebanon
Email: info@cihlebanon.org
Tel: +961-1-986760
Mobile: +961-81-624012 | +961-3-002797



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