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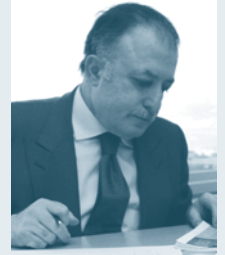
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An Arena and a Lab

Lebanon represents an important laboratory for economists, politicians, social workers, diplomats, intelligence officers and artists. For us, it is a goldmine for research. Although the researcher is required to be both neutral and objective, we, as citizens, are both saddened and angry. 1,500 Lebanese were killed in two years, which is tantamount to around 100,000 in the United States, 23,000 in France, 25,000 in Iran and 6,600 in Syria. We become sad when we see that 72* soldiers from the Lebanese Army were killed in a month, also tantamount to 1,750 US soldiers or almost half of American soldiers who were killed during the four years war in Iraq. We are also angry when we see that the leaders of this country refuse to learn from the past and insist on heading toward the abyss.



We have been conducting opinion polls and studies since 1995 and have formed a database collected from 100,000 interviews. Here are some of the conclusions that we have reached:

- First:** The Lebanese have a vivid memory. They remember the massacres of 1840 and 1860 (especially if you were a Maronite or a Druze) and the last civil war, but they never understood the reasons behind them, nor did they embark on a course of reconciliation and forgiveness.
- Second:** The Lebanese have a selective memory. They evoke the past to rationalize their positions in the present and justify future actions.
- Third:** The majority of Lebanese follow their zu'ama (leaders) for several reasons, most of which are imposed by the confessional system.

This leads us to say: the Lebanese are practical; they adapt to the conditions and try to maximize their benefits and minimize their losses.

Other observations were also noted:

- 1- The Lebanese system is a close circuit. Its dynamics put the players in predictable positions. The "Shia'a" in the 1970s and the early 1980s, represented by Amal Movement, were closer to the right than to the left just like the "Sunni" who are represented by the Future Movement today.
- 2- The Lebanese are always "surprised". They go to war and consider the act of killing as "non-Lebanese". They were born into confessions and are bound to rights and duties stipulated in the confessional system. However, they deny being confessional and are "surprised" by "racist" or "discriminating" speeches delivered by politicians or zu'ama.
- 3- The Lebanese are better than their zu'ama. Their responses in the opinion polls highlight their determination to avoid trouble. They ask their zu'ama to seek solutions and avoid wars.

The current crisis as seen by the Palestinian refugees and Lebanese is an interesting example. Today, the Lebanese will be "surprised" that the camps, which we chose to ignore and the Palestinians, who were deprived of the right to work and other civil rights, do not see the situation in the same way citizens of Trablous do.

According to a study prepared by Fafo*, the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are more disadvantaged than Palestinians in Syria and Jordan. So is it surprising to see the situation in the camps explode?

This opinion poll is a benchmark poll that might make some people happy and others angry. Those who thought that the events of Nahr al-Bared would weaken the Future Movement in Trablous were wrong. In fact, the Future Movement still holds the first place (54%) in Trablous. For those who thought that the Syrian intelligence would be the first party accused in the events of Nahr al-Bared, the answer is positive in Trablous but negative in Saida and the refugee camps.

Measuring the spread of Islamic movements and the intensity of loyalty to them is a complex issue and cannot be resolved in one poll.

We know for example that Islamic movements exist in Trablous but were not clearly quantified in this poll because sometimes they merge with the supporters of Future Movement and at other times with the "don't know" and the "no one" answers, perhaps due to the security situation.

Additional surveys will be required to clarify this issue. In Saida, the situation is different where citizens expressed a definite yes to Islamic movements. Further work should be done to measure the extremism of these movements.

Are Islamic movements welcome in the camps? Yes... Are they very extremists? More studies are needed.

The opinion poll presents many figures and percentages that we should stop at and consider. Fatah al-Islam is one of the outcomes of successive Israeli wars and the recent war on Iraq, according to the Palestinians. It is a "terrorist organization" to 50% while 40% see it as an "Islamic organization". The Palestinians want to control the security of their camps and they are more supportive of Fatah than Hamas. Should they not be able to return to their homeland, half of them wish to remain in Lebanon.

Lebanon appears to the respondents more of an arena than a lab. For a country to be an arena and a lab at the same time is sad and potentially explosive. The Lebanese seem to perhaps reject being lab rats for experiments by their zu'ama or regional and international leaders. For this wish to be translated into determination and action, many efforts are required. That is why all these opinions and wishes are now just a case study.

* The number reached 97 by July 16, 2007

* Fafo Institute for Applied International studies

The above speech was written by Jawad Adra and distributed during a press conference organized by Information International on June 19, 2007.

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