

Hezbollah's Putsch and Associated Difficulties

By Dr. Nizar Amin, Middle East Analyst based in Abu Dhabi, UAE

Anyone looking at the aftermath of the collapse of the Lebanese national unity government in the past few weeks could legitimately ask if the much-vaunted 'Switzerland on the Mediterranean' has actually become the battleground between the 'forces of resistance' and the 'evil manipulators' of the West. Some may even wonder during this time of Arab change, whether Lebanon has simply shaken off 'the shackles of reaction' in a people's revolution against injustice. But for all intents and purposes, and despite the appearance of a victorious march toward a 'Hezbollah state', what Lebanon has experienced is a mere putsch whose energy will dissipate in the face of insurmountable domestic and international obstacles.



The fashion in which Hezbollah 'democratically' forced the resignation of the government of Prime Minister Sa'ad al-Hariri is reminiscent of Hitler's march to power when his 'brown shirts' intimidated political opponents into ceding the political ground to the Nazi Party in the 1930s.

Hezbollah and its key allies (the AMAL Movement and the Free Patriotic Movement) rallied opposition party members who held cabinet posts in the previous government of national unity, to collectively resign. Hezbollah later mobilized hundreds of its members, in 'black shirts' this time, in a show of force in Beirut's streets. That resulted in the intimidation of enough members of Parliament to switch their support to a Hezbollah chosen, 'minor' Sunni politician and former Prime Minister, Najib Miqati, to become Prime Minister-designate.

The other candidate for the post and current PM, Sa'ad al-Hariri, lost his bid in what was a clear violation of the rules of representation in 'carefully-sectarian'



Lebanon where the Premier is usually a Sunni Muslim and the Speaker of Parliament is a Shi'a Muslim. Hariri has the overwhelming support of the Sunni community and controls 20 of 27 Sunni Deputies in Parliament. His ouster was thus seen as an outright interference in Sunni affairs done by a Shi'a Party that represents Iran and its religious leadership. Hariri and the Sunnis also have a sense of outright betrayal because in 2009 he and his allies in the old parliamentary majority chose to elect Nabih Berri, Hezbollah's ally and leader of the Shi'a AMAL Movement, as Speaker of Parliament because he was the Shi'a's choice for the post.

In addition to his inability to muster the support of the Sunni community and the parties and personalities of the 2005 Cedar Revolution (Hariri and his allies so far refuse to participate in the new government), Miqati will simply be unable to accomplish what Hezbollah wanted to achieve by choosing him. Purported corruption scandals are likely to expose Hezbollah's allies before anyone else; attempts at reforming public administration will not spare their base; and changing the political equation will upset the sectarian balance. Importantly, Miqati will be confronted by the status of Hezbollah itself as a state-within-the-state and will be advised not to touch the 'resistance' (a euphemism for independent Shi'a political and military power inside the state).

But it is in the external sphere that Miqati will find his task to be the most difficult and nearly impossible, and where Hezbollah will meet its failure. As the head of the executive branch of a state that is a member of the United Nations and a member (non-voting) of the Security Council until the end of 2011, Miqati is expected, by the Party of God, to lead the charge to end Lebanon's obligation to the International Tribunal for Lebanon (ITL) charged with investigating the assassination of one of his predecessors, Rafiq al-Hariri. As an international entity created by UN Security Council Resolution 1757 under Chapter 7, the tribunal is independent and Lebanon's withdrawal from it does not end it; nor can the Lebanese government withdraw its judges from the ITL (they are appointed by the Secretary General) or affect its funding (anyone can

compensate for it). If he goes through with what is expected of him, Miqati will willy-nilly be driving Lebanon to become a pariah state, akin to Syria and Iran and subject to international sanctions and ostracism. Hezbollah will subsequently be the party that forced a withdrawal from a justice-seeking court and caused the imposition of economic and other sanctions on a country with a steep history of supporting international legality and norms.

Furthermore, and by virtue of being chosen by Hezbollah, Miqati will very likely be confronted by the challenges of alignment with the Hezbollah-Syria-Iran axis that he very well knows will not hesitate to make Lebanon a battleground against Israel and the United States. At a minimum, Miqati will witness every day the transformation of his country into a chip in the game Iran is playing with the international community in relation to its nuclear program, not that it has not yet been used for that purpose. He will also see how Syria will manipulate him and its allies in its approach to relations with the Arab world and with France and the United States.

Ultimately, Miqati will be judged on his performance vis-à-vis Lebanon's stature in the world and on whether he keeps his country out of danger. He has described himself as independent and conciliatory, but Hezbollah has chosen him to execute a partisan agenda that not only



unsettles Lebanon's sectarian balance, but also makes the country a pariah state. It is thus inconceivable to think that Miqati will succeed in a country that has no middle ground or that Hezbollah's putsch will last long enough to see its fruits. In the meantime, the country simply hangs in a state of disequilibrium until its political factions find the middle ground that both protects its civic peace and keeps it away from harmful external alignments.

Views expressed in this article are not necessarily those of SAGE International

Nasrallah image:

<http://www.abna.ir/a/uploads/89/7/89787.png>

Hariri image:

<http://images.huffingtonpost.com/2010-05-23-SaadHariri.jpg>

Miqati image:

<http://previous.presstv.ir/photo/20110124/shamsara20110124144309950.jpg>

(Accessed: 02/02/2011)