

ROADMAP TO NORMALIZATION

THE CENTER FOR DEMOCRACY IN LEBANON

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The kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers by Hezbollah on July 12 triggered a wave of violence in Israel and Lebanon. However, the recent spate of terror is but an irrevocable testimony to the inaptitude of the United Nations and world leaders to broker a lasting peace settlement in the Middle East between belligerent member nations of the United Nations.

The Israeli assault on Lebanon, (July 12 onwards) by air, land and sea, amounts to a crime against humanity. To set conditions in the face of immediate ceasefire is to endorse the slaughter of innocent and defenseless civilians in flagrant violation of basic human rights and international laws, including the Geneva Convention.

The so-called "resistance movement" led by Hezbollah, an armed group acting unilaterally, has failed to protect the Lebanese territories from enemy attacks and their balance of terror strategy became shifted in favor of Israel.

Whereas Lebanon, the people and the government, stand today defenseless against these attacks as the international community refuses to implement an immediate and unconditional ceasefire, we propose the following comprehensive roadmap to normalization:

To United Nations Security Council:

- 1) Imposing **immediate and unconditional cease-fire** in Lebanon under the penalty of sanctions, and launching massive humanitarian and economic relief efforts for Lebanon

To Israel:

- 2) Withdrawal to the international borders between Israel and Lebanon (the blue-line) including the Shebaa Farms and the Hills of Kafarshouba and allowing immediate and unconditional return of all those forced to flee battle zones to their homes

To Israel and Hezbollah:

- 3) Exchange of all Lebanese citizens held prisoners by Israel and Israeli soldiers captured by Hezbollah

To Hezbollah:

- 4) Until the Arab-Israeli conflict is resolved, the majority of Lebanese citizens consider the previous steps (1-3) as acceptable conditions for returning to the 1949 Armistice agreement between Lebanon and Israel. If Hezbollah's aim is in accordance with these conditions, then Hezbollah's militants must agree to tender their weaponry to the Lebanese army. In the absence of prospects to empower the Lebanese army, militants might form a deterrent force against foreign invaders only through integrating within the army, in coordination with the Lebanese government. **Unifying all Lebanese arms under a single command and under the flag of the Lebanese army is in our national interest.** The Lebanese Government and the Hezbollah leadership must begin a serious integration process whereby willing resistance fighters can join the Lebanese army and all decisions pertaining to military engagement are consolidated under one command. If, however, Hezbollah insists on the fight against Israel regardless of these goals and maintains an extra-national agenda or slogans such as 'until freeing Palestine', Hezbollah risks to be considered as a pariah to the Lebanese community

To the International Community:

- 5) The deployment of any peacekeeping mission, even if endorsed by the United Nations and the Lebanese Government, is unlikely to guarantee stability and peace. The probability of such mission succeeding will only increase with diplomatic blessing from enemy combatants, which is so far lacking. The only provisional role for such a mission would be to empower the Lebanese army (training, consultancy, supplies and logistics) in safeguarding territorial sovereignty and integrity

To the Lebanese Government:

- 6) The government of Mr. Siniora is the sole constitutional body in the Republic of Lebanon with executive powers to safeguard all Lebanese citizens and territory and speak on their behalf. As such, we hold the current Lebanese government fully responsible for taking measures to restore the peace and fully accountable for maintaining that peace thereafter. Mr. Siniora should not hesitate to seek assistance under a United Nations mandate to spread Lebanon's sovereignty over all its territory **strictly through peaceful means. Keeping in mind that Lebanon's sovereignty will not be complete and our democracy will not flourish as long as there are armed groups in Lebanon beyond the control of the collective will of the Lebanese people, and outside the framework of the Lebanese army**
- 7) Develop an emergency plan to provide immediate aid for the citizens in the devastated areas as they return to their demolished houses and businesses. The **emergency aid plan ought to be financed and distributed through the official institutions of the Lebanese Government**. Philanthropic donations must be encouraged and unconditional assistance from other countries welcomed but they must be restricted to official governmental channels to pre-empt any unilateral program that may single out a community or undertake a sectarian tone
- 8) Develop a comprehensive strategy to immediately rebuild the Southern Suburb of Beirut and the devastated towns of South Lebanon. The rebuilding strategy ought to be based on modern urban planning and must take into consideration the residential and commercial character of the devastated regions. Whereas this plan may be similar in many aspects to the reconstruction of downtown Beirut by Solidaire, it ought to preserve the right of individual ownership of property in these regions and allow public participation in the rebuilding process via government-issued bonds or similar instruments

Implementation of sequential steps (1-8) will gradually yield a paradigm shift in public opinion by demystifying the "resistance rhetoric" of Hezbollah and lead to its peaceful demilitarization from within through continuous and open dialogue under the banner of national unity. Furthermore, it is imperative that the Lebanese Government fills the gap in social welfare that has been so far attended to by Hezbollah, in a serious bid to eliminate the root causes of alienation, despotism and favoritism fueling the enormous support for this non-governmental organization, social movement and armed militia.

The world has recently witnessed the involvement of Syria (U.N. mission on Hariri, border closings, meddling by proxy), Iran (through Hezbollah as the main broker) and Israel (direct military assault, violation of air space, active spy rings) one way or another in undermining Lebanon's democratically elected government striving for peace with its neighbors. The proposal herein offers **disentanglement of the Lebanese crisis from the root causes of the bigger Middle East conflict** and resurrection of the Democratic Ideal in an Arab country of the Middle East.