

# The Lebanese Syndrome: Maintaining the System, and Depleting the Resources

## Part 2/6

In its previous issue, *li Monthly* published Mr. Adra's paper on Crisis of Identity and the Role of the Zu'ama'a. In this issue, *li Monthly* publishes the continuation of the last article and Role of International Interference, Pre and Post Taef in Lebanon and Post Syrian Era.

### Lebanon Before Taef

Bechara Al Khoury, the first president of Lebanon after its independence in 1943, depicted in his memoirs how the Ottoman rule restricted appointments in the public sector on sectarian basis. He described how his father lost his job to his cousin, who had bribed Kilian, the Ottoman administrator Wasa Pasha's son in law. Sectarianism, feudalism and nepotism characterized the administration as described by President Al Khoury "appointments have historically been distributed among sects: the vice president of the board of directors is a Maronite, the accountant is a Turkish Sunni ... The appointments in the high ranking posts were exclusive for the Lebanese prominent families ..."<sup>(1)</sup>.

The French mandate maintained this system. Politicians and notables were bribed for support, fraud was practiced during elections, and nepotism governed administrative appointments. "Corruption" was not limited to politicians and administrations it spread to the different sectors and aspects of the Lebanese lives. Iskandar Al Riyashi, a prominent journalist at the time, confesses in his book *Qabl Wa Baad* (Before and After) how "corruption" had extended to the media. He describes the actions of a wealthy, and politically aspiring gentleman "he was generous with us – as with all the prominent journalists – who gathered every night to feast around his table ... some would brag during the day about their integrity and yet sell themselves at night"<sup>(2)</sup>. Al Riyashi played a key role in bribing the populous of Békaa, using money supplied by the French, to "convince" them to vote for the acceptance of the French mandate, during the King-Crane Commission's polling of the Lebanese. This phenomenon is still widely witnessed in present day Lebanon.

Al Khoury, who complained from the practices against his father, applied the same practices himself when he became president. His administration was infamous for its corruption. His own brother, Salim, nicknamed Sultan Salim, was one of the most influential and corrupt figures. This conduct eventually led to his forced resignation in 1952 as a result of what was termed "the White Revolution". (perhaps)

The Chamoun Presidency witnessed the continuation of these practices. The Shehab presidency made promising steps to restructure the administration and curb "corruption" through the establishment of several organizations such as the Civil Service Board, the Lebanese Central Bank, the Court of Audit, Central Inspection, and the National Social Security Fund. However President Shehab's attempts to improve the system while maintaining the same political class and controlling the intelligence services proved to be a difficult formula, thus, crippling any possible improvements. Calls have recently been made to revive the role of some of these regulatory institutions; however most of them remain highly impotent due to political interference.

### Role of International Interference

Any attempt to explain the Lebanese syndrome and trace its historical roots, is invalid, unless the role of international interference is examined. Lebanon's competing confessions have historically sought to forge foreign alliances to increase their power, and strengthen their positions, irrespective of the role and interest of those foreign powers. In his book *Le Liban Contemporain, Histoire et Societe*, Dr. George Corm asserts that the competition between the various sects in Lebanon is not restricted locally but relies heavily on foreign assistance as a major determinant, and traces it back to the prominent Lebanese families who sought the aid of the Ottoman Pashas in Damascus and Akka (Palestine). Thus he states that all attempts for reform since then has failed due to the survival of the ruling

class that was ensured by foreign intervention<sup>(3)</sup>. A good example is De Martel's, the French High Commissioner in Lebanon, correspondence with his mistress, in which he reveals how he advocated and ensured the presidency of Emile Eddeh "and so Emile Eddeh won the presidency by one vote, which weakened his presidency, and rendered him under my mercy, and the mercy of his opponents!"<sup>(4)</sup> Another example of the influence of De Martel over Lebanese politics is evident in his letter:

"I have always assured you that my friendship should bring you a million, and now that I know that you have made several millions, we should find a mean for you to double your fortune, therefore I will make the coming elections a way for you to achieve what you want. No parliament member will win unless he has visited you and did the necessary, now you can see how much I love you! ... By the time I am done with Eddeh and Khoury, they would have lost their money, their minds or both..."<sup>(5)</sup>

Miles Copeland in his book *The Game of Nations*, as well as other theorists and historians, asserts that President Chamoun's loyalty and subservience to the west resulted in the agitation of Muslim leaders and the outbreak of civil violence in 1958. This trend continued to fester and grow throughout the consecutive governments until today.

Dr. Corm also conducted an in depth analysis of factors and conditions causing "corruption" as they relate to external interference in local politics and administrations, in his book *Madkhal Ila Loubnan Wa Al Loubnaniyeen* (An Introduction to Lebanon and the Lebanese). The author concludes that "real reform cannot be achieved as long as the confessional system is maintained in Lebanon. The system reflects the foreign powers' interests and whims. The Lebanese sects cannot be simply viewed as local actors, since they are highly related and dependant on foreign powers giving the example of the 18th century relation of the Maronites with France, the Orthodox with Russia, Roman Catholics with Greece, Druze with Austria, Shiites with Iran, and Sunnis with Saudi and Egypt. Foreign players may change yet the concept remains the same. Therefore the confessional system, no matter how hard we try to add a modern democratic aura to it, cannot establish a proper identity for the Lebanese ...and is a mere instrument that encourages foreign intervention... the allocation of appointments in the administration does not reflect the Lebanese will, but rather the will of foreign powers and balance of power between those countries that the Lebanese sects are dependant upon."<sup>(6)</sup> Dr. George

Yacoub in his unpublished study *Lebanon Security Dilemma: A Strategic Reading into Lebanon's Political History* also asserts that the rivalry between confessions has led to foreign intervention, he produces the following formula "Incessant domestic rivalry among numerous actors, segmentation of political power among rival political leaders on sectarian basis, a political patronage system which is accepted as a means of political survival, struggle to gain control of the state resources to finance or maintain the system of patronage, the continuously increasing demand on such resources and their limited supply, fear of one or a coalition of local actors becoming dominant, counter measures to maintain balance, escalatory process of a series of action and counter action, conflict and calls for foreign intervention".

The system has proved to be resilient as it would mutate during major upheavals and international crisis to become stronger. Since the downfall of the Ottoman Empire, the two world wars, the French mandate, the 1967 war, and the downfall of the Soviet Union, each time a regime change occurred yet the system survived.

## Post Taef Lebanon

In the aftermath of the Taef Accord signed in 1989, the general behavior was to recover from the civil war, consider it as the "war of the others on Lebanon", and ignore any call for an in-depth understanding of causes and consequences of the war and the necessity to plan for a new Lebanon. This aversion pushed the Lebanese directly into the "march for reconstruction and development" without a clear plan for development, and before launching a "march for reconciliation" necessary for understanding the causes of the war and creating a clear common view of Lebanon. Deaf ears were turned to calls for soul searching. The warlords, with their inherited rights, became the legal administrative and political leaders under the Hrawi Presidency.

As common in the end of each political era, slogans promising reform and ending "corruption" are raised. The reigning political class blames previous governments, even if it was part of them.

During the Hrawi presidency, the affairs of the state were settled by what was termed the "Troika" in reference to the relation between the Maronite President, the Sunni Prime Minister and the Shia's Speaker of the Parliament. Disputes arising from competition over power and resources were settled by referring to the Syrian intelligence officers and the president of Syria on many occasions. Despite the promises made by the Lahoud Presidency, achievements towards curbing "corruption" and finding a cure for the

syndrome remained mediocre, selective and sometimes vindictive, at best.

After more than ten years in office Prime Minister Hariri declared that "corruption and attempts to curb it are as old as the Lebanese system caused by the entrapment of the administration in the hands of the political ruling class, and the inability of the regulatory agencies to perform their duties in the light of political intervention".<sup>(7)</sup>

## Post Syrian Era

It is worth noting that the ministerial declaration of Riad Al Solh in 1943 in which he promised to curb "corruption", promote integrity, meritocracy etc. has been repeated in all ministerial declaration last of which is that of Prime Minister Fouad Al Sanioura made in June 2005. Every president and prime minister without exception and to no avail has promised to curb "corruption", improve public administration performance, and rid Lebanon of its confessional political system.

Following the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, calls for reform rose, mostly from confessional leaders who have played a vital role in the previous administrations, and were keen on preserving the system as it had served their best interests. Once again all the players searched for a scapegoat on whom to place all the blame for the previous behavior. A similar conduct took place in 1920 after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, where the most outspoken against the fading era were the same people who allied themselves with it, as echoed by Margaret McGilvary in 1920 in her book *The Dawn of a New Era in Syria* (Syria being the present day Syria, Lebanon and Palestine).

"The present crying need is a complete reorganization of the administration, and the removal from office of those local officials who served under the Turks, and who have been allowed by the O.E.T.A to remain in office. They are, almost without exception, 'grafters' and 'crooks.' In the day of the Turk they abused their power and preyed upon people. Today the same men, or men of the same spirit, conduct the administration along Turkish lines. Syria needs a political house-cleaning, and she has a right to demand that the power of the country should be entrusted to those who are fit to govern, and not to the worst type of political 'boss'."<sup>(8)</sup>

The Syrian authorities' responsibility for the "outbreak of corruption" in Syria and Lebanon ought to be examined, however, blaming the Syrians for the syndrome is a typical Lebanese self denial.

**In the next issue part 3: Devices and Arrangements.**

*Al Khoury, B., 1961. Haqaeq Lubnaniyah. Beirut: Mansboorat Awraq Lubnaniyah*

*Al Riyachi, I., 1953, Qabl Wa Ba'd. Lebanon: Dar Al Hayat*

*Corm, G., 1996. Madkhal Illa Loubnan Wa Al Loubnaniyeen. Lebanon: Dar Al Jadid*

*Corm, G., 2004. Loubnan Al Mo'aser Tarikh Wa Mojtama'. Lebanon: Al Maktaba Al Sharkiyah*

*Mc Gilvary, M., 1920. The Dawn of a New Era in Syria. N.Y.: Fleming H. Revell Company*

<sup>(1)</sup> *Al Khoury, 1961 p.: 30*

<sup>(2)</sup> *Al Riyachi, 1953, p.:77*

<sup>(3)</sup> *Corm, 2004 p.: 77*

<sup>(4)</sup> *Al Riyachi, 1953, p 148*

<sup>(5)</sup> *Ibid, p.: 144*

<sup>(6)</sup> *Corm, 1996 p.: 37*

<sup>(7)</sup> *Hariri, Al Nahar, November 20, 1997. p.:9*

<sup>(8)</sup> *Mc Gilvary, 1920, p.: 297-298*