

EDITORIAL

Lebanon's politicians are ruining their country without even saying why

Hizbullah's secretary general, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, spoke in measured tones on Wednesday night, but what he had to say was overshadowed by what he did not. Alongside media reports that his party and its allies are planning a new round of crippling protests, Nasrallah offered few specifics on what "civic action" would entail - or on what, exactly, he and his comrades would do with the "blocking minority" they are demanding in Cabinet. Preternaturally serene about a situation that has many Lebanese deeply worried, the sayyed's comments on his own plans revealed only that he is determined to foil the ruling March 14 Forces' in theirs. Perhaps that is indeed the extent of the resistance leader's peace-time vision, but his opponents and supporters alike deserve a more detailed description of his intentions. Yet he remained quiet, refusing to speak the words that might ease fears, inspire confidence, and open the way for constructive dialogue.

But Nasrallah is not alone. In fact, his counterparts in March 14 have been intransigent and even threatening about how they will use the Special Tribunal created to try suspects in the assassinations that have rocked Lebanon since 2005, and the rush to proceed with privatization of the mobile-telephone sector leads many to believe that yet another form of licensed thievery is in the offing. Regarding negotiations to end the power struggle with the opposition, at least one government minister has even publicly acknowledged that the majority has moved the "goalposts," needlessly prolonging a contest in which there can be no winners.

The two sides need desperately to talk, but about what? Having tested one another's strength for more than a year, neither has shown any curiosity about the other's state of mind. Dialogue might help them fill in blanks, but each camp has so thoroughly demoralized the other that it is hard to see what they can still discuss without resorting to the habitual slurs. Already, the protest measures expected to be taken by the opposition in the coming days are fueling a new spectacle of dueling fatalities. Yelps about a "coup d'etat" can be heard from government supporters, some of whose leaders have openly averred that they do not know what civil disobedience means. Kitschy claims to the moral high ground are uttered in response, as though polluting entire cities with the noxious fumes of burning tires were somehow noble.

Rational people can have sharp disagreements about everything from politics to pie, and the worst that happens is indigestion. Irrational ones turn the same debates into potentially catastrophic confrontations. Sadly for the Lebanese people, their politicians, forever suspecting the worst in everything their interlocutors do and say, have become increasingly estranged from the individual realities faced by their constituents - and so of the collective reality confronting us all.

The Lebanese are caught between two uncompromising forces, both evidently willing to destroy this country for reasons that neither is willing to discuss. In this darkened limbo, men and women struggle to decide what is best for themselves and their children. Not surprisingly, more and more of them are arriving at the conclusion that since no one has deigned to tell them what to expect from a successful resolution of the crisis, there is little point in hanging around to witness the worst-case scenario.

DOMINIQUE MOISI

Vote Barack Obama, a global candidate for a global age

For seven years, President George W. Bush has managed to caricature, simplify and reinforce all the prejudices and negative stereotypes the world has of the United States. He has antagonized the world with any other American head of state before him, seriously damaging America's "soft" power by inefficient and excessive use of its "hard" power.

Reconciling the US with itself and the world should thus be the twin priorities for America's next president. If there is one candidate who can accomplish this, who can contribute, in a split second, to restoring America's international reputation, it is the Democratic candidate Barack Obama.

Exceptional periods sometimes create exceptional leaders. Without the French Revolution, Napoleon Bonaparte would have remained a gifted and frustrated junior military officer. Likewise, the current period in America and its relations with the world have been truly exceptional, requiring a leader who can fundamentally challenge a global majority's view that America has become arrogant, impotent, and selfish.

Of course, diehard anti-Americans will never be persuaded, but they remain a minority, with the possible exception of the Muslim world. The silent majority is ready to be convinced that there is life after Bush. Why is Obama so different from the other presidential candidates, and why might he make such a large difference internationally? After all, in foreign policy matters the next president's room for maneuver will be very small. He (or she) will have to stay in Iraq, engage in the Israel-Palestine conflict on the side of Israel, confront a tougher Russia, deal with an ever more ambitious China, and face the challenge of global warming.

If Obama can make a difference, it is not because of his policy choices, but because of who he is. The very moment he appears on the world's television screens, victorious and smiling, America's image and soft power would experience something like a Copernican revolution.

Think of the impression his election would make not only in Africa, but in Asia, the Middle East, and even Europe. With its rise to global supremacy, America had become the incarnate of the West, and the West was seen as "white." Power in America shifted first from the East Coast to the West Coast, and then to the South. But if a shift across America's racial divide is not truly revolutionary, then what is?

Of course, to reduce Obama to the color of his hair would be a gross oversimplification, even if he has been seen to emphasize his "black roots." In fact, African-Americans do not fully support Obama. With his unique personal history, his African father, he does not fit any African-American precedent.

But that is another reason why Obama is exceptional: The complexity of his identity makes him truly universal, a global candidate for a global age. By virtue of his unique personal history, he can bridge Africa, America, and even Asia - where he studied as a young boy in a Muslim school - thereby giving the universal image and message of America.

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But, above all, what makes Obama unique, given what the US has been through during the Bush years, is the nature of his message he embodies, which is best summed up in the title of his book "The Audacity of Hope." If America can move from a culture of fear to one of hope, it will require a leader who embodies the American dream: modern and armed with a humanistic religious message, in contrast to the anxious irrationalism of the Christian conservative movement that fueled Bush's political base.

Regardless of whether Obama can deliver on his promises, America will not regain the stature it had between 1941 and 2000. With or without Obama, the "American century" will not be repeated. But Obama can learn from the early mistakes made by Jimmy Carter in the mid-1970s. Neo-isolationism is not an option, but restraint - based on confidence and wisdom - is.

The world needs a more modest and confident America. For Americans who have been deeply troubled and saddened by America's evolution in the last decade, Obama, of all the declared presidential candidates, seems to come closest to incarnating the America that they would like to see.

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HIRAM CHODOSH AND CHIBLI MALLAT

Pakistan and Lebanon, the same struggle

The assassination last week of former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto was the latest tragic expression of a sour reality that characterizes the Middle East and its broader geopolitical orbit. In the absence of democracy (meaning regular change at the top by means of free and fair elections), political violence is a certainty.

There are similarities between the situation in Pakistan and Lebanon. The February 14, 2005, assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri followed the forced extension of President Emile Lahoud's mandate in September 2004. In Pakistan, President Pervez Musharraf sought to extend his rule last summer. His main nemesis, Bhutto, was killed four months later. Politically speaking, neither murder was a coincidence.

The perpetuation of absolute rule is the main reason why the Middle East, the world's most dangerous and least stable region despite its wealth in resources, has remained steeped in violence since the 1950s. Violence and lack of democracy are the twin traits of a blocked political process, which in turn is likely to engender violence.

In the absolute monarchies of the Gulf, Jordan and Morocco, a brother or son inherits the ruler. In "monarchical republics" (or *jantaka* in Arabic, following novelist Elias Khoury's contraction of *mamlaka*, monarchy, and *jantoriyya*, republic), rulers also actively seek to be replaced by their sons or death, as in the example of Syria in June 2000. The same milestone has been unfolding in the republics of

Yemen, Libya, and Egypt. Monarchies are, similarly, absolute and refuse dissent. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Morocco, all reject any political challenges to their rulers.

Pakistan and Lebanon are crucial tests for the broader Middle East. In Beirut and Islamabad, where people have courageously stood up to the perpetuation of dictatorship, the devastating pattern of regime retaliation needs to be defeated. Musharraf has long overstayed his welcome, if he ever had one, as head of state. His maneuvers during the past two years have had a single

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objective: to remain in power. After imposing a state of emergency, he forced a kangaroo Supreme Court to confirm his election as president after arresting and dismissing judges and lawyers - notably the Supreme Court's chief justice who opposed Musharraf's bid to perpetuate his rule. Yet the president has retained the support of the West, which sees him as a bulwark against extreme Islamists.

In Lebanon, the pattern has been similar. In 1998, the army commander, Emile Lahoud, was elected president, after passage of a constitutional amendment allowing him to stand for office - one supported by Syria and even the United States. Syria and Lahoud again pushed through a constitutional amendment in 2004 to extend the president's term, in contravention to

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559. Citizens and parliamentarians opposed the move, violence followed, and since then the struggle has continued to elect a new president freely.

The Lebanese political process remains blocked. However, instead of backing an open election between candidates, Western states, particularly France and the US, have been calling for a constitutional amendment to permit the election of the army commander, General Michel Sleiman. This is effectively a nomination process, not a competitive election that is the basic hallmark of democracy. Such calls come at a time when those uncomfortable with true democracy in Lebanon, all allies of Damascus, have been preventing a normal election carried out by Parliament.

It is not enough for Musharraf to abandon his military fatigues and run for the presidency. It is not enough to call for free and fair presidential elections in Lebanon, as the UN has been doing since 2004. Specific measures need to be enacted to ensure that non-violent alternatives of power happen democratically. This can only be done by reinforcing the levers to implement both individual and collective accountability.

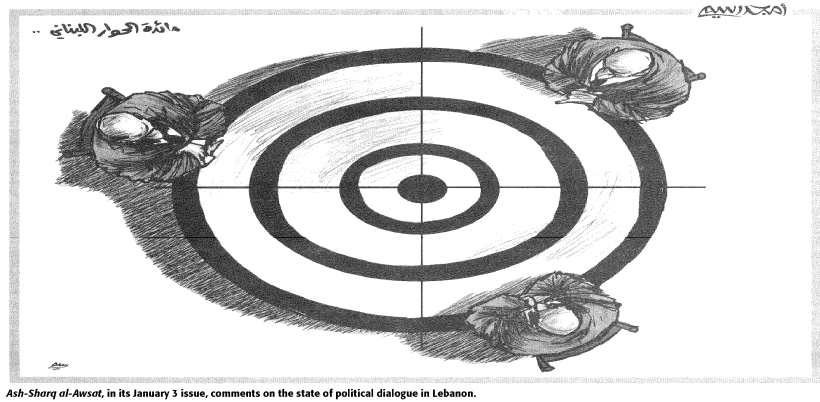
A large group of human rights and democracy activists from Pakistan to Morocco presented a document to the Group of Eight meeting in New York in 2004. It stated that "dictatorship should no longer be considered a mere crime against society. It must now be considered as a crime against humanity." Democratic govern-

ments across the world are failing to respond to this request, by imposing sanctions against individuals who are hijacking democracy in Lebanon, Pakistan, and elsewhere. Now is the time for a coalition of democracies - a majority of countries in the world - to join together and advance a more activist democratic agenda.

What might these sanctions cover? Dictators and their entourage can be prevented from traveling abroad, and that includes for such things as shopping, medical treatment, and other amenities they usually deny their opponents. If agents of death don't relent, they should at least be made to feel the law closing in on them internationally. If the UN is incapable of respecting its own Charter, the largest possible coalition of democratic countries should allow dictators' victims to bring dictators to trial under international human rights law. The US and Europe could easily take the lead. Both places are where dictators and their families usually head to avoid trial.

If we are serious about preventing political violence in Pakistan, Lebanon and other countries, we need to fulfill our commitment to peace, justice and democracy. Although each case is different, the patterns of abuse are similar, and the commitment to justice is simple: it is denied domestically by despots, it needs to be enforced internationally.

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Ash-Sharq al-Awsat, in its January 3 issue, comments on the state of political dialogue in Lebanon.

AFSHIN MOLAVI

Meritocracy is the key to Dubai's limitless ambitions

The ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, has set a precedent for a new type of ruler. In that, he is upholding a modern Arab autocratic tradition.

Dubai's ruler, however, is not looking for a new type of ruler. He is looking for a ruler who can observe and grade the efficiency, competence and attentiveness of local officials. Those who receive poor marks are actively rebuked, while those who impress move into an informal Dubai fast-track, receiving increasingly more challenging tasks, greater responsibility and more scrutiny. If they survive those tests they gradually enter the rarefied air of the Dubai high-flyer executives, the dozen or so movers and shakers who are transforming the Gulf city-state into a major regional and global trade, tourism, transport, technology and financial services hub.

This survival of the fittest produces a not-tooth government elite, not one stocked with cronies and family members of the ruler - and might just be the key to Dubai's remarkable rise. While Western capitals search for an Arab "democratic model," Dubai is providing an Arab "meritocracy model" that underpins its successful growth and development.

The Dubai elite will be severely tested in coming years as the emirate's ambitions seem to have no limits. By the year 2015 it aims to treble its GDP, create nearly a million new jobs and continue its torrid pace of development and growth. It is currently building what aims to be the busiest and largest airport in the world; it already attracts more tourists than India; it reclaims the third largest global re-export hub; its real estate developments - from islands in the sea to towering skyscrapers - are now legendary and its partially state-owned companies are investing in places from Jakarta to Japan, from New York to New Delhi, matched and even outpaced at times by private Dubai-based

developers and investors. A key player in charting the rise of Dubai is Mohammed al-Gergawi, the dynamic and influential minister of state for cabinet affairs, chairman of the state-owned conglomerate Dubai Holding, and limited resources. Today, Dubai Internet City heads leading technology giants and Gergawi heads a conglomerate of some 30 companies with 30,000 staff.

In another Arab state, Gergawi might have become a frustrated bureaucrat or would have turned away from government to the private sector as do many of the elites in the Gulf Cooperation Council states. Had he grown up away from the GCC, he might have become an Arab immigrant in Europe or the United States, joining the millions of Arabs who have left their homeland in search of greater economic pastures.

In another Arab state, Gergawi might have left their homeland in search of greater economic pastures. In the Dubai government's main strategy office headed by Gergawi, was one such immigrant in 2002, before he was scooped up by the Dubai recruiting machine and enticed away from his post as a newly minted professor in Cranfield, England. "Five years later, I'm still here," Jarrar says, recalling how his first visit to Dubai shattered the stereotypical view he had of Gulf Arabs as "unproductive and inefficient."

But it's not only business, management and investment high flyers who seek a piece of the Dubai dream. Indian middle class managers, Iranian techies, European architects, Chinese traders, Central Asian students, American engineers and, increasingly, global members of the media and creative class - film-makers, journalists, artists, production hands - have made their way to Dubai, contributing to what

seems to be emerging as a critical mass of talent driving the city-state forward. The "buy it and they will come" model has served Dubai well in the past. From the dredging of the Creek in the late 1950s to allow larger ships to the creation of massive clustered "city" free trade zones, Dubai officials seem to have only one policy: reality. Dubai is truly peculiar; thus talk of a Dubai "model" enters shaly ground. Egypt cannot suddenly import half a million South Asian workers to construct buildings. Saudi Arabia cannot import thousands of bankers when so many Saudis need jobs, and countries like Syria and Jordan do not have the luxury of being away from the front lines of Middle East conflict as does Dubai.

While much of the Middle East is burdened by a steady brain drain, Dubai has managed to cut against the prevailing grain by both nurturing local talent and drawing in leading regional money managers, traders, bankers and consultants in what is amounting to a brain regain. An ambitious young man in Karachi, Cairo, Tehran, Jeddah or New Delhi no longer instinctively sets his sights on Dubai or the US. The Dubai School of Government (DSG), for example, has managed to attract three leading Saudi women PhD professors away from Europe and the US along with an array of top thinkers from the Arab world and a smattering of World Bank executives. Whether or not Dubai might offer a model matters less in this instance than what it is actually doing: keeping Arab talent in the Arab world.

The city-state has managed to both nurture local talent and attract foreign talent

As a critical mass of the world's professional elite increasingly sees Dubai as an attractive destination to live and work, it will benefit from this transient, mobile and knowledgeable pool of workers. "The hardest part about taking a job in Dubai," a former World Bank executive joked, "is the dozens of CVs I get from colleagues asking me to help them find one too."

The DSG executive president, Nahil al-Yusfi, is an Emirati national who rose to prominence not through political intrigue, but through his ability to chart government performance indicators. On the back of that success, he recently led the study that underpins the 2015 Dubai Strategic Plan, pulling together a disparate array of advisers and consulting with some 3,000 individuals to fulfill our substantive document that resembles something that a major multinational company would generate.

Filled with graphs, charts and projections, the strategic plan lays out areas of projected growth and notes how the government intends to maximize those sectors. In the way it was presented - Sheikh Mohammed standing before an audience of some 2,000 people using power point and taking questions - and the detailed projections it offers, the strategic plan offers a level of transparency and expectation rarely seen in autocratic states.

And why not? The last time Sheikh Mohammed unveiled a 10-year strategic plan was in 2000, and Dubai had surpassed most of the targets by 2005. While other GCC states may have more wealth than Dubai, whose oil revenues account for less than 5 percent of GDP, its secret weapon is not so mysterious: talent. To achieve its 2015 targets it will need to continue grooming local talent and attracting international and regional talent. As a critical mass of the world's professional elite increasingly sees Dubai as an attractive destination to live and work, it will benefit from this transient, mobile and knowledgeable pool of workers. "The hardest part about taking a job in Dubai," a former World Bank executive joked, "is the dozens of CVs I get from colleagues asking me to help them find one too."

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