

To Michel Aoun

Contributed by Hassan Haidar Al-Hayat
Thursday, 02 October 2008

After the "revolt" of the 6th of February, 1984, against the rule of President Amine Gemayel, and up until February 1987, when the Syrian Army returned to Beirut, the Western part of Lebanon's capital, which was still forcibly separated from its Eastern part, and vice versa, witnessed a series of skirmishes and battles between militias of various inclinations and sectarian affiliations. The overwhelming majority of the victims of these events were innocent civilians, who fell, either in the streets, or while trying to reach their homes through checkpoints, demarcation lines and military bases. Sometimes, they were people who were kidnapped based "on ID" and killed, or detained until they could be exchanged for others held by the opposing faction.

It appeared later that these little wars were being ignited intentionally, and that their purpose was to spread chaos and desperation among the city's inhabitants, and to convince the Lebanese that they do not enjoy living together and that their desire to kill each other by far surpasses their drive to enjoy a safe life. They were also intended to prepare the Lebanese and the world to accept the idea of the return of Syrian forces, "the only ones capable of ensuring security".

At the time, I was employed at a local institution in Beirut, whose offices were located in the center of the Hamra area.

Different militias regarded this vicinity as "strategic" due to its many "resources" and the ease, with which "donations" could be gathered from its businesses. One night, a high-ranking banking official, who held an important position at the Central Bank, with a long history with Politics, came to see us. About half an hour later, we started receiving information about tensions between two militias, and began hearing distant gunfire. Our guest decided to return home before the fighting became more intense, as his house was only about one kilometer away, and said that he would be taking a street that does not usually witness any fighting and where there are no militiamen. However, a mere fifty meters away, he was surprised with a checkpoint by one of the two warring factions. The militiamen asked for his ID and he identified himself, but they also wanted his driver's ID. Once they had identified the driver as an "enemy", they brought him out of the car, blindfolded him and tied him up, despite the banker's intervention and his pleading with them to take him instead.

The man's insistence and stubbornness in holding on to his driver led one of the militiamen to fire a gunshot near him. He hurried back to our institution's building and pleaded with some of the guards at the entrance to help him. They tried to convince him that it was impossible to negotiate with the militiamen. Once he had calmed down, he began a series of long and grueling phone calls involving the managers of our institution and the leaders of the militia that had kidnapped the driver. The banker repeatedly stated that he would not go home until he would have gotten his driver back, and that he would not be able to look into the eyes of the man's wife and children after having "caused" him to be kidnapped when he took him away from amongst them to accompany him on his visit.

Five stressful hours passed until the place, where the driver was detained, could be "found". According to the militia commanders, it had been shortly before the decision to "liquidate" him was going to be carried out. When the driver arrived at the building accompanied by militiamen, the man ran to meet him, crying and embracing him, and said: "now we can go home".

That banker with a conscience was Fouad Siniora. Therefore, can we worry about

the treasury with a man like him?

Even the Syrians, your new-found allies, who cannot bear to even hear Siniora's name, have never reached the extent of accusing him of theft. So please, General, have a little bit of common sense.

<http://english.daralhayat.com/opinion/OPED/10-2008/Article-20081002-bdf9d170-c0a8-10ed-00aa-b9bd6fcee888/story.html>