

Interview with Dr. Ahmad Fatfat

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Fatfat Supports Armed Resistance, Opposes Armed Hizbullah and Predicts Consensus after Aoun Lost his Case
By Dalia Nehme

Youth and Sports Minister Ahmed Fatfat supports an armed resistance that defends Lebanon against Israeli threats, but rejects an armed Hizbullah that he perceives as an Iranian force using Lebanon as an arena in a confrontation with the United States.

Fatfat, in an interview with Naharnet, said Iran supports consensus on a Presidential candidate to avoid a sunni-Shiite confrontation, contrary to Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime that believes Chaos in Lebanon is the way to re-gain control of the Beirut decision-making.

Nevertheless, he expressed belief that the various Lebanese political factions would reach agreement on a consensus presidential candidate, noting that Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun's chances in Being a serious candidate for the nation's top post have "decreased."

Fatfat also called for pulling "Syria's weapons" out of Lebanon, stressing that bases manned by Fatah Intifada and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command are "Syrian and not Palestinian" structures because their decisions are issued by the Assad regime and not by the Palestine Liberation Organization of President Mahmoud Abbas.

"We are for an armed resistance and against an Armed Hizbullah," Fatfat declared.

"Resistance is not restricted to a single party, all the Lebanese factions have resistance heritage and have a duty to resist if the resistance is targeted against Israel to reclaim the land and regain prisoners," he explained.

"But an Armed Hizbullah is not accepted … If these weapons have internal aims they would become hostile weapons and will be faced by tough confrontation from Lebanese (groups) that reject such a trend," Fatfat added.

He expressed "concern that this weapon is not meant to serve national goals, but rather regional (Iranian) aims.

"In other words it is an advance Iranian force in the Iranian-American confrontation, which means a return to using Lebanon as an arena for settling accounts in the region" to avoid confrontation in the Gulf or Iranian territories, Fatfat added.

He called for control by the Lebanese Army command of Hizbullah weapons, which would enable the Lebanese army to call the shots, noting "that a decision to go to war is a political decision that should be taken by the political authority and referred to the army for implementation."

Fatfat said Army Commander Gen. Michel Suleiman has a "promising political future" after he resigns, but objected amending the nation's constitution to allow his election for head of state to succeed President Emile Lahoud whose extended term in office expires on Nov. 24.

Iran, Fatfat noted, tends to facilitate "consensus" on a presidential candidate "and has no interest in (presidential) vacuum because it realizes that vacuum leads to Sunni-Shiite feud and this is not in Iran's interest."

"The only side that has an interest in spreading chaos across Lebanon is the Syrian regime because it believes that it can return to Lebanon through this path .. It is possible that this regime is planning exactly to do that," Fatfat added.

He called for normalizing relations with Syria along the lines of reaching a border demarcation agreement, exchanging diplomatic relations and non-interference in the internal affairs of each state.

"We all support Syria against Israel, but bilateral Lebanese-Syrian issues have to be dealt with first," he noted.

He expressed the belief that some "major" allies of Syria "want entente because they realize the importance of entente, but Syria does not support entente among the Lebanese."

Entente, Fatfat added, "could be achieved once Syria is convinced that its policy is stupid."

He said Aoun was escalating his verbal campaigns because "he is convinced that he is no more a serious (Presidential) candidate. His allies did not clinch to him as he had hoped"

"He (Aoun) did not manage to promote himself, neither as an opposition candidate, nor as a consensus candidate. It appears that he has heard from political, diplomatic, popular and probably religious circles that his chances are not excellent," Fatfat explained.

He said he is "much more hopeful than I was two weeks ago that consensus would be reached" on a presidential candidate.

However, he stressed that "clear indications to this effect are not expected before the seventh or the eighth" of November.

"This is normal because in Lebanon white smoke billows in the latest moments," he stressed.

Nevertheless, he stressed that the March 14 alliance has taken a "decisive decision. We'll not permit vacuum. Vacuum bears serious repercussions … that is why it is our duty to elect a president by simple majority if a head of state was not elected by Nov. 24."

In answering a question about terms for consensus, Fatfat said: "Implementing what has been agreed on during national dialogue sessions that include the international tribunal and organizing relations with Syria."

He predicted that a government of national unity would be formed once a new head of state is elected."

Choosing a presidential candidate, Fatfat noted, is "the Christians' responsibility in the first place, but it should be backed up by national participation."

He praised efforts by the for-member intra-Christian committee that worked out specifications of a presidential candidate and outlined assignment that he should shoulder.

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