

NORTHERN POLITICAL LEADERS DISCUSS CONFLICTS, SECURITY PLANS

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[Interview with several north Lebanon party leaders by Sharbil Zughayb:
"AL-HAWADITH Meets With Parties to al-Kurah and Tripoli War"]

[Text] As soon as the al-Kurah war in north Lebanon between the Muradah Forces and the SSNP [Syrian Social Nationalist Party] subsided, the Tripoli war between the Islamic Unification Movement and the Arab Democratic Party erupted anew and the north, like the other parts of Lebanon, was doomed to live in a state of constant turmoil.

When Prime Minister Rashid Karami announced that the security plan will be expanded from Beirut to include all areas, he was focusing attention on establishing security in the capital of the north and in al-Kurah where the fighting came to an end on the basis of the so-called Damascus agreement between al-Muradah and the SSNP, with al-Kurah thus regaining its peace.

Why did al-Kurah war break out, and has the agreement become entrenched enough to tackle the differences with political means?

With this question in mind, AL-HAWADITH interviewed Robert Franjiyah in his capacity as the commander of the Muradah Forces and Dr Marwan Faris in his capacity as the chairman of the SSNP Supreme Council.

[Question] Al-Kurah war assumed more than one characteristic and interpretation. Some have considered it an act on your part to dominate the area in preparation to spreading your control over the entire northern area. Others have considered it an act of domination by the Maronite sect over the other sects. What is the true nature of al-Kurah war?

[Robert Franjiyah] I add that some of them have also considered it an act to dominate the Muslim sects in al-Kurah. But after our meeting in Damascus and after the paternal intervention of His Excellency President Hafiz al-Asad to stop the internecine fighting in al-Kurah area--the area of our beloved and our friends--I would like to clarify some points. In 1929, when deputies were elected on the basis of governorates, Qablan Franjiyah was the representative of the north. Since then, we have maintained friendships and relations with our beloved people in the area. When the northern governorate

was divided into districts, al-Kurah deputies cooperating with the line represented by Qablan Franjiyah were the ones who got elected. The friendship or the fraternity is not new, regardless of the allegations of those who have never been able to enter the parliament as representatives and who always brought aliens to the area for the purpose of domination and terrorism. Fortunately, our friends in al-Kurah area brought to our attention violations committed in the area by some partisans whose return to the area we approved in the wake of the Ihdin massacre of 1978. All the violations were committed under the pretext of fighting the Israeli enemy. But, unfortunately, these partisans stayed tens of kilometers away from the contact lines separating the northern area from the area of the Lebanese Forces and they started to levy "protection money" through terrorism. Whenever a quarrel erupted between an element of al-Muradah passing through al-Kurah area and heading for the contact lines and other elements whose military presence, wherever it may be, is unjustifiable, such quarrels were settled with the best [peaceful] means.

We wonder: Why do these armed elements resort to absolutely unjustifiable battles in solving certain problems? This is the issue on which we have our fundamental doubts.

[Question] Is it true that Maj Gen Muhammad al-Khuli, the Syrian emissary, advised you not to embark on this war?

[Franjiyah] Maj Gen Muhammad al-Khuli came to inquire about the true situation on the paternal initiative of President Hafiz al-Asad.

[Question] Some say that the canton for which the Nationalists have been accusing of preparing will be a Christian canton and will include all the Christian areas from Jazzin to al-Arz and that after delineating the canton's borders, the intra-Maronite problems in the canton will be settled. What is your opinion of this?

[Franjiyah] My opinion is that the accusations about setting up a Christian canton by a person with the name of Franjiyah are accusations that are not worth answering. I leave it to all the thinkers in Lebanon and in the Arab country to feel free to be convinced or unconvinced of this accusation.

[Question] Despite the patriotic Christian personality of ex-President Sulayman Franjiyah, it is noticed that there is no coordination or effort to create a Christian current supporting you in the other Christian areas outside the north. To what do you attribute this?

[Franjiyah] As long as terrorism in all its forms is present in the other Christian areas, it is impossible to ask any Christian to do something to put an end to the excesses committed in the name of protecting the Christians. Nowadays, how can you ask a father fearing for the life of his son on his way back from school to rebel against him who threatens to kill the son if he doesn't pay the protection money?

[Question] Is there any coordination between you and the Christian notables outside the northern area?

[Franjiyah] There is constant contact with most of the Christian notables in all parts of Lebanon.

[Question] The Lausanne conference was tantamount to a moral and propaganda victory for ex-President Sulayman Franjiyah whereas this victory has turned into a series of successive losses at the practical level, beginning with the formation of the cabinet, the formation of the Military Council and the appointment of the army commander and ending with the appointment of the other security commanders. How do you explain this?

[Franjiyah] The Lausanne conference was not a victory for ex-President Franjiyah, not in the manner that some people tried to depict. Rather, the conference was tantamount to the crystallization of ex-President Franjiyah's thinking that there is no justification for Lebanon's existence and no logic for Lebanon's continuation if one Lebanese faction dominates the others. Lebanon is 50 percent Christian and 50 percent Muslim. Coexistence with dignity and with mutual respect is the basis of ex-President Sulayman Franjiyah's line. This is what every citizen, excluding those who want to make gains by the force of arms, aspires for. As for the appointments, all know that even when ex-President Franjiyah appointed during his administration three friends who, unfortunately for them, happened to be from Zgharta, an endless clamor was raised and the appointment was called at the time an act of domination. What would you expect if we asked nowadays for the appointment of one of our friends to a certain position? We have not and we will not demand any gain but we do demand security and a free life for the citizen who, after 10 years of war, cannot easily find a source of livelihood for his children.

[Question] The Damascus agreement calls for splitting the Christian ministerial seats equally between the Lebanese Front and ex-President Franjiyah. But this has not happened. Who, in your opinion, breached the agreement?

[Franjiyah] Is the side that breached the Damascus agreement the side which formed the cabinet?

[Question] If there is a plan to expand the current cabinet and if you are asked to take part in it, would you accept?

[Franjiyah] Until the cabinet is expanded and I am asked to take part in it, there will be relaxation and mercy.

[Question] Was the purpose of detaining the military in the north and of preventing them from going to Beirut to make them participate in al-Kurah war or to set up the North Lebanon Army under the command of Antoine Barakat?

[Franjiyah] Only two army elements from Zgharta, who were performing their duty and carrying out the orders issued by their command, were detained at al-Barbarah roadblock. They then started sending every northern officer and soldier to the Beirut front and to the contact lines. Some of those officers and soldiers were martyred and some were wounded in battles against

the Lebanese. As for those who remained in their offices, they got promotions and seniority. Some of them rebelled against their command and were rewarded with positions in the Military Council. Why do you want our sons to be killed and to be exposed to injury and death whereas the others are the ones who should be in this position? This is why we demanded that the 7th Brigade be returned to its positions because nobody can defend the northern area like the northerner. God be thanked, President Amin al-Jumayyil has, for the first time, responded to us and ordered the 7th Brigade to return to the north.

The formation of an army under the command of Antoine Barakat is only one of the slogans raised but the people know how credible are those who raise these slogans.

[Question] In the wake of the friction in Jurud al-Batrun, all expectations indicated the possibility of the eruption of a battle between al-Muradah and the Lebanese Forces. Instead, the battle occurred between you and the Nationalists. Are there signs of agreement between al-Muradah and the [Lebanese] Forces?

[Franjiyah] There are no signs whatsoever of agreement with the Lebanese Forces as long as these forces receive their orders from the Israeli enemy.

[Question] Do the Zgharta people move freely in Tripoli and is there disagreement between them and the Islamic Unification Movement?

[Franjiyah] So far, the Islamic Unification Movement has displayed no negative initiative toward the Zgharta people. On the contrary, whenever a quarrel erupts in Tripoli they ask the Zgharta people not to move around in the city so as to protect them and to foil the trap which some people want to lay in the north to strike the unified position taken by the northerners in the face of partition.

Marwan Faris: We Are Eager for Our Relations With Ex-President Franjiyah

[Question] The issue of al-Kurah has assumed more than one characteristic and has been coupled with more than one interpretation and statement. What is the SSNP's opinion of the events witnessed by al-Kurah area?

[Faris] We had developed the conviction that the security plan may spread throughout all of Lebanon. This is why we were preparing the areas in which we have a strong presence to receive the security plan. Naturally, we were surprised by al-Muradah's attack on al-Kurah area, especially since a delegation of the party had met at the beginning of July with ex-President Sulayman Franjiyah and since the meeting was positive and friendly.

In the first day of the battle, we felt that there was an attempt to gain control of the area and so our comrades who were present there fought in defense of their lives and of their homes and kinsmen. We were able to stand fast in the battles launched by al-Muradah against us. This

steadfastness on our part led to the direct intervention of President al-Asad and to a proposed solution presented by 'Abd-al-Halim Khaddam. We approved the agreement reached, and so did Robert Franjiah in the name of al-Muradah. The agreement is being now implemented properly and carefully.

[Question] In your opinion, will this agreement continue, or are there signs of other setbacks that may occur?

[Faris] On our part, we adopted a resolution in our latest annual congress to support the national decisions made by the Lebanese Government. Because we consider the security plan one of the most significant of these decisions, we find ourselves concerned with its full implementation, especially since we agree with the Syrian position that calls for closing the dossier of the Lebanese war and for turning the efforts toward liberating the south, Rashayya and western al-Biqa'.

The internal conflicts in their present violent form in the Lebanese arena must be stopped, peace must prevail in Lebanon and we must continue on the path of political struggle. On the basis of all of this, we are implementing precisely all the provisions of the Damascus agreement we have signed.

[Question] Al-Muradah accuses you of having engaged in certain actions against the inhabitants of al-Kurah and that this forced them to launch the attack against you. What kind of acts did you engage in?

[Faris] The answer to these accusations is provided by the party's history, especially during the Lebanon war. Our party is well known in holding itself above all the excesses and all the violations against the citizen's rights which have marred this war. We are committed to the Damascus agreement which recommends ending the propaganda attacks between us and al-Muradah because we are eager for our relationship with ex-President Franjiah and for the general situation with which and through which we have cooperated within the framework of the National Salvation Front.

As for the accusation that the party attacked al-Kurah, nobody who hears such statements can believe them.

[Question] Al-Muradah says that instead of your directing your weapons toward the contact lines and against the Lebanese Forces which al-Muradah and you accuse of lackeyhood to Israel, you have turned these weapons against yesterday's allies in the National Salvation Front. What is your reply?

[Faris] We did not attack Zgharta. Al-Muradah attacked al-Kurah. Naturally, all the Lebanese stood with us in our position of defense. The battle that took place in this area is a unique battle because it is the first time that a progressive ideological party has gained comprehensive support from all the Lebanese factions. Al-Muradah, instead of turning its weapons against those whom it considers its enemies in the Lebanese Forces, turned those weapons against those whom it considered allies, i.e., the

Social Nationalists. We lost four martyrs in this battle and each of those martyrs belongs to a different area and sect. This shows that the Social Nationalists are fused in the same area and the same mentality.

[Question] Ex-President Franjiah responds to your accusation that he is working to set up a Christian canton by saying that if he were actually working toward this end, he would not have permitted your return to al-Kurah in the wake of the 13 June massacre in Ihdin. What is your answer?

[Faris] We ask for nobody's permission to settle in any place. We have never left al-Kurah but have defended it. Ex-President Franjiah abandoned his position in the Lebanese Front and came to our national position. Therefore, these accusations are unbelievable.

[Question] It is said that the SSNP has passed through a period of stagnation and of coming apart. Now that a new chairman has been elected for the party, how do you envision the coming phase within your party?

[Faris] Our party has not gone through phases of breaking apart. There was a split in the party and we have been able to overcome it and to reorganize the party. This phenomenon is, of course, unique in the world because there has been no party in the world that has splintered and then reunited. As to what happened recently, it falls within the party's constitutional framework, considering that we hold our general congress once every 4 years. This year, the party elected a new Supreme Council and this council then met and elected colleague 'Isma al-Mahayiri party chairman and also elected his office staff. We expect further work and struggle in the coming phase to restore peace to Lebanon and to achieve our national objectives generally.

[Question] How do you evaluate the party's general relationship with the State of Lebanon?

[Faris] After Amin al-Jumayyil was elected president of the republic, a delegation of the party in which I was a member met with the president and we expressed the hope to him that he will rule justly and democratically. We told him that as an opposition party, we were prepared to deliver to him all our weapons. Regrettably, the official actions which took place led to the big explosion which resulted in dropping the 17 May accord and in the departure of the NATO forces from Beirut, and also resulted in forcing the regime to change its political course. Consequently, the party has adopted its official position in its latest congress and this position calls for supporting the national decisions of Prime Minister Rashid Karami's cabinet. While giving our confidence to this cabinet, we have expressed our readiness and our demands to Prime Minister Karami regarding the need for the party to participate in Lebanon's political life, especially in the Constituent Council. We have told Prime Minister Karami that the SSNP is fully prepared to take part in reformulating Lebanon's political life and that the party is ready to push all its forces for the implementation of the plan concerning domestic weapons.

Shaykh Sa'id Sha'ban: We Have Our Security Plan

Tripoli was tranquil on that day and Prime Minister Rashid Karami had just returned from his quick tour in Syria and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, carrying with him the good news that Lebanon would soon finally overcome the state of war and that the security plan would spread to Tripoli, the north and all parts of Lebanon after Beirut.

But the traces of the latest battle in Tripoli between the Fursan al-'Arab [Arab Knights] and the Islamic Unification Movement were evident everywhere and Tripoli's people feared that the battles would be renewed for any reason and that the Coordination Committee would move without achieving any firm results.

Why doesn't Tripoli settle down?

Shaykh Sa'id Sha'ban said: "The events experienced by Tripoli are political events intended for the domination of all of Lebanon. All the events that have occurred in Lebanon, not just the Tripoli events, are intended for domination--domination by the imperialist and by Israel. The imperialist is the United States primarily. Lebanon is the weak point in the Middle East area because of numerous contradictions that constitute this Lebanese structure and which make it easy for the imperialist to penetrate Lebanon.

"Throughout history, Lebanon has been the gate for the Crusader, Tatar, Mogul and Western imperialism and, nowadays, U.S. imperialism, which is trying to control the world through its military might and to impose the policy of oppression and domination on all the peoples, beginning with Latin America, Africa and Asia and ending with the Middle East, whose problem is summed up in the presence of Israel, which was created by the Western countries and which the United States supports nowadays with all its strength. Therefore, we are part of the area's conflict and the sects are used to starting and fanning the fires of disagreement and fighting. There is no doubt that an inadequate awareness of the true nature of imperialism and the collusion of the Arab regimes with the imperialist plot are what have led Lebanon to its present situation."

[Question] Meaning that the battles that take place in Tripoli are between imperialism on the one hand and liberation on the other?

[Sha'ban] Yes, because Tripoli enjoys the quality of true coexistence among all the sects. The Muslims and the Christians in Tripoli, rather in the entire north, live a life of true concord. All feel patriotic and enjoy security and stability. The purpose is to strike this formula and to create in Tripoli contact lines so that the northern area may not be a model emulated by the other areas. They have created for us a contact zone between Tripoli and Jabal Muhsin so that no place will remain without contact lines, so that the single city in Lebanon may be split into two sections and so that the single area may be turned into free zones, with triumph and domination thus achieved by exhausting all and by preoccupying them with this ceaseless battle for which we know no reason, unless you can explain the

reason to us. We do not find between ourselves and Jabal Muhsin any previous history of hostility, until they filled it with weapons and munitions and deployed in it fighters who shell Tripoli with their missiles and their guns daily for some reason and for no reason. They have told Jabal Muhsin that Tripoli is an enemy that they want to destroy with its inhabitants. The fact is that Jabal Muhsin has existed for hundreds of years. Rather, there was no Jabal Muhsin. What existed in this area was Muslims of all denominations and Christians and they lived in the area without any feeling of the social divisions under which we have lived since the start of the events that were intended to shatter Lebanon.

[Question] Your statements about coexistence among the various sects lead us to the question concerning guarantees. What are the guarantees?

[Sha'ban] Unification is the guarantee of security for the Christians in Lebanon generally and in the north in particular because the Unification Movement is not a party but the Muslims themselves. Unification brings no ideas other than the Koran which recommends that all people be treated well. We still live with the Christians without finding a single Koran provision prohibiting us from coexisting with them. On the contrary, the Koran, which we consider the source of our legislation, urges us to treat those who live with us well. Therefore, there is no cause for this fear that emanates from the rumors spread by imperialism and its agents in order to cause social upheavals based on a fabricated fear.

[Question] When you were asked to release the kidnapped northerners, you set for the delegation that met you the condition that efforts be made with the Phalange to release your kidnapped people. What is intended by this demand?

[Sha'ban] We wanted to hand over the kidnapped persons but the kinsmen of our people who are kidnapped in the city threatened that if we took the kidnapped northerners away from them by force, they would resort to kidnapping others and would not tell us where they were kept. This is what made us approach the issue cautiously so that we might preserve the safety of the kidnapped and break the chain of kidnapping until we reached a just solution to the issue. This is why we made it clear to the delegation that met with us that their sons are safe. The delegation visited the kidnapped and heard from them that which pleased it. We assured the delegation that if it were not for the fear of mutual acts of violence, I would have released the kidnapped immediately.

[Question] You say that Tripoli has begun to experience the innovation of contact lines. If what was applied in Beirut previously, i.e., the positioning of observers on these lines to report who initiates the cease-fire violations, is applied in Tripoli, would you agree to such an arrangement?

[Sha'ban] We hope not to need such an arrangement and hope that the contact lines will be eliminated with the conviction of both sides. We do not want to complicate the matter and don't want to get accustomed to always bringing in a third party to arbitrate between us because this is what imperialism

wants, i.e., it wants to introduce its troops and the circles allied with it so as to impose its control and its domination over our country. We are prepared to eliminate the contact lines on our own, provided that the Lebanese and Arab sides pledge not to move their faction against another faction to dominate it.

[Question] In the wake of the formation of the national union cabinet, of the correction of the army situation and of the formulation of a complete security plan for Beirut, do you think that Beirut will experience what it has experienced in the past and would you be satisfied with transferring this plan to Tripoli?

[Sha'ban] We would like to see the outcome of what is happening on the ground. We believe that those formulating the security plan are not up to the level of the security [responsibility] because they are the inter-fighting parties. He who lacks something cannot give it. When those fighting each other draw up a security plan, then this means that they draw it up through their own ideas and that each of them wants the plan to serve him, not serve all. The Phalange have agreed to the plan because they are in power nowadays.

[Question] But Rashid Karami, Salim al-Huss, Walid Junblatt and Nabih Birri, who are among the symbols of Lebanon's political Islam, are in the government?

[Sha'ban] The 1943 charter divided the positions among the sects. But political Maronism has gained endless Islamic concessions. Lebanon's wars have always been an expression of wrath and an indication of the entrenched Maronite domination in Lebanon. The participation in the government of the people you have mentioned has not had a major impact on the course of affairs, and I say this with utter respect for all. What is the issue for which our ministers are working? The Maronites know that they want a Maronite Lebanon on the pretext that they fear for their future. This claim is, in our opinion, false because the Muslims have never threatened to evict the Christians. The Muslims are the ones threatened and they have been evicted from numerous areas. The percentage of evicted Muslims is more than 75 percent. Therefore, the presence of their excellencies the Muslim ministers with their various sects will not change the situation much.

Muhsin 'Id, the military official in charge of the Arab Knights of the Arab Democratic Party, has said: "Jabal Muhsin is not in conflict with the city of Tripoli or with others. On the contrary, we are Tripoli's original inhabitants. What happened in 1976 when alien fingers created sectarian problems was done so that the aliens alone may benefit from it. Throughout the past 10 years, these aliens have continued to sow sedition and division among the people to achieve a certain objective. They have constantly planted sectarian terror."

[Question] Some people in Tripoli accuse you of trying to dominate. Is this true?

['Id] All know that we are aware of the dimensions of our presence in Lebanon generally and in the north especially, particularly in Tripoli. The only thing we want from the State of Lebanon is a right, nothing more and nothing less. As Lebanese, we have a right in our homeland. We offer our blood, pay our taxes and perform all our duties toward the state. But the state has not fulfilled or recognized our rights, i.e., the rights of the Lebanese 'Alawite citizen.

[Question] What is the nature of the rights you demand from the State of Lebanon?

['Id] Our main demand is that we be represented in the parliamentary council because we are denied this right whereas all the other sects, regardless of how small, are represented in the council. If citizenship imposes on us duties toward the state, then this same citizenship gives us national rights. The simplest of these rights is the right to parliamentary representation. Moreover, the game of six for six repeated has denied us the right to employment in the public sector, keeping in mind that we have the required qualifications. There are jobs for which we believe we are more qualified than those to whom the sectarian game gives this right.

[Question] What about the Tripoli events and your role in them?

['Id] We have never at any time resorted to negativism to achieve our rights. We have no choice in Tripoli because all kinds of missiles are fired at us for no reason whatsoever and only for the purpose of terrorization, murder and destruction. In the face of this situation, we have to defend ourselves, and the right to self-defense is a legitimate right.

[Question] Shaykh Sa'id Sha'ban accuses you of constantly violating the cease fire and of shelling Tripoli and says that he is compelled to retaliate.

['Id] We always express the wish and ask the political and economic organizations and leaderships and the Lebanese agencies, led by Prime Minister Karami, to deploy their observers to find out for certain who initiates the cease-fire violations and who abides by self-defense. Throughout 21 days, they launched against us an attack which extended from al-Shari' al-Jadid [new street] to al-Tabbanah. The statements made are the biggest proof of their actions. We did not instruct any of our fighters to move even a single step in the direction of Tripoli but rather instructed them just to defend themselves and repel the attacks.

[Question] Meaning that you approve the deployment of observers on the contact lines?

['Id] We have no objection whatsoever. This was our demand to begin with. Those who fear that they will be exposed are the ones who reject the idea of observers. We have no premeditated plans against anybody and we harbor nobody ill-will. Our objective is to live peacefully and securely while performing our duties and constantly demanding our rights.

[Question] Shaykh Sha'ban says that he pledges to eliminate the contact lines on his own and unilaterally if you pledge not to shell Tripoli and not to attack the Tripolitans. What is your reply?

['Id] To start with, we do not accept that Shaykh Sha'ban speaks in the name of Tripoli. We are the ones entitled to speak in the name of Tripoli because we are its original inhabitants whereas Shaykh Sha'ban is not from Tripoli and has no connection with it.

[Question] But he says that he speaks in the name of the Muslims?

['Id] We are also Muslims and we speak in their name. We demanded in the past what he is demanding now and we pledged to eliminate all the contact lines and all the earthen fortifications in return for not subjecting our dignity or our sons to harassment. With this demand of his, Shaykh Sha'ban is now repeating what we demanded in the past.

[Question] This means that you approve the security plan that will be drawn up for the north and Tripoli?

['Id] We support any security plan and support the legitimate government because we have no alternative to them.

[Question] The security plan to be drawn up means that the Lebanese army will take over control of affairs in the north and Tripoli. Do you agree to this?

['Id] Of course we agree to this plan and to the Lebanese army in particular because we are working for the legitimate Lebanese Government and not for any other circle opposed to this government.

[Question] Do you expect the plan for Greater Beirut to succeed completely, or will it, in your opinion, falter? And can what has been implemented in Beirut be implemented in Tripoli?

['Id] We are fully confident that President Hafiz al-Asad has closed the Lebanese dossier and has mobilized all the capabilities of the Arab Syria to help Lebanon in every sphere.

8494

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