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Tammam Salam and saving Lebanon from Syria

The morning after Tammam Salam was chosen as premier-designate of Lebanon, a newspaper known to sympathize with Bashar al-Assad's regime welcomed him by asking: "how do you announce you stand by the Syrian uprising whilst you are a premier of a consensual cabinet, and you know that March 8 supports Bashar al-Assad's regime and March 14 is against it. So why did you say that?!" However, despite this negative stance by the daily, Salam is perhaps the only Sunni man there is a consensus on in Lebanon's history, as most MPs –despite their affiliations and positions –voted for him. There was semi-consensus over him as he garnered the votes of 124 MPs and only four MPs abstained from voting.

Parliamentary support was accompanied by international support. The Saudi king and Russia's President Putin sent him letters, while Saad Hariri, a former Lebanese premier, sent him his private jet. Luckily for him, President Bashar al-Assad did not call him, but the Iranian ambassador in Beirut voiced his leadership's wishes of success. Of course, he did so whilst reminding him of what that leadership called the "resistance," which is Hezbollah.

A debate over Hezbollah

The congratulations' session turned into a debate as the premier-designate responded to the envoy that if Hezbollah's arms were targeted against Israel, then they are legitimate. However, he set the condition that "decisions of war and peace must be in the hands of the Lebanese state, and an end must be put to using arms inside Lebanon." So, everyone is competing over the prime minister as they realize that Lebanon may be the next battlefield. I don't expect that anyone wants this, including the Iranians who are usually enthusiastic to support proxy wars. They have no interest in involving Hezbollah in a battle whilst it is involved in Syria's war. We don't know much about the new premier other than he comes from a deep-rooted political family. His father began his premiership career at the beginning of the 50's. Tammam Salam has not competed over the premiership and has not requested it. His acquaintances commend him as an intellectual 'Beirut' who loves music and theater. He is on good terms with everyone around his residence, which is close to a Shiite environment. The required specifications for the premiership in this particular phase in Lebanon's development seem to be evident and present in Salam. Despite this, the country's crises are bigger than all figures' capabilities and it will not be easy to protect Lebanon from drowning if the Syrian dam collapses! Everyone's interest, except that of Assad's regime, is to prevent the next flood and protect civil peace from the winds of domestic struggle that we see between Sunni, Shiite, Alawite and Palestinian blocs.

Convincing Hezbollah

How can Salam convince Hezbollah not to send its missiles and men across the borders to Syria, so thousands of Syrian fighters do not end up coming to Lebanon and, thus, transferring the war to the neighboring country? How can Salam save the areas the Syrian regime targets with shelling and direct occupation? How can he protect his Sunni citizens who complain of the provocation by Hezbollah's militia men? And how does he convince the Sunni extremists to abandon establishing armed militias under the excuse of creating a balance with Hezbollah and protecting their areas? And how will he prevent Israel from crawling because it says Hezbollah stole from the chemical and strategic arms' caches? Above all this, how will Salam provide subsistence to thousands of Syrian refugees and other hundreds of thousands who will certainly flee if the fighting in Syria intensifies within the upcoming months? As we see, Tammam Salam was handed the ship's helm amidst a storm. This why it is not strange that he was assigned the role of premier-designate upon semi-consensus.

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