

Bkerki's Revolt and the Establishment's Star Wars Attack of the Clones or Return of the Jedi

by Don Quixote (May 15, 2005)

In an era of careful strategic planning and long-range global vision, most Lebanese were shocked by Bkerki's reaction, which transpired in the archbishops' declaration and its sequels, vis-à-vis the elections in Lebanon.

Bkerki's religious authority and teaching have always commanded a faithful following among many Lebanese and an envious respect from all of them even its foes; thus, many would have preferred for Cardinal Sfeir and the archbishops to have stayed above the fray of petty electoral politics in Lebanon, preserving to Bkerki the image it has, as a haven of safety, wisdom, and calm in times of national crisis. But when Bkerki decided to intervene, for unknown reasons, many would have expected from Bkerki more than just an arbitrary sectarian reaction to protect the narrow interests of a few recycled and failed Christian leaders, but rather a national carefully-planned proposal, to bring forth to the national scene, a new breed of visionary leadership with progressive programs.

Unfortunately this is not what happened. Bkerki's revolt was in line with the regressive plans of the warlords, the feudal lords and some deep pockets, to secure power in the hands of a few families (individuals or groups) who have taken over Lebanese politics, *Godfather style*, through emotionally charged rhetoric, void of any vision or constructive programs for the future. Today, the sole outcome of Bkerki's revolt may be a seat for a "favorite" daughter in Beirut and a few other seats for some of the failed Maronite political families in the rest of Lebanon. May God rest the soul of Rafic Hariri and Basem Fleihan, and bless Ghattas Khoury and the other living "martyrs of merit" in Lebanon.

Most Lebanese mourned with tears Rafic Hariri, largely because he was a successful man of humble origins, who made a positive change in the lives of his family, his people and his nation. He gave hope and set an example for ordinary Lebanese, that working hard with dedication can sometimes pay back in a country dominated by tribalism, feudalism, warlords and regressive mentalities. However, very few Lebanese expected Hariri's shoes to be filled in a ritualistic crowning ceremony that goes against everything Hariri stood for. This is not to belittle or deny the right of Hariri's biological heir Saadeddine to a role in Lebanese politics, but Saad's program so far seems to be a few photo-ops around the world, his father's legacy... and a vague notion of national unity. With a collection of candidates on his list from every walk of the political life in Lebanon, one is left to wonder what his program is vis-à-vis socio-economic reforms or the looming implementation of UNSC 1559.

Most Lebanese also celebrated Jumblatt's apparent political re-birth and many hailed it as the return of the prodigal son, especially after he denounced, for the first time in his public political life, Syrian tutelage, and called for secular reforms in Lebanon and invited young new ideas to continue the rebuilding process. But sadly, that only happened amidst Jumblatt's frequent hops to Europe and the West where he was reminded of Descartes' "I think therefore I am". Now that he has settled in Mount Lebanon, it seems that the Lebanese air poisoned with feudalism and tribalism has got back to him and suppressed the democrat in him, only to revive "Abu Zeid el-Helali".

And yes many Lebanese celebrated “Kornet Shehwan” as a professional group born of the plight of the Lebanese citizens under Syrian occupation, and looked upon it with hope to what its plan was going to be. At the end of the day, the Kornet had no national program, let alone a sectarian one, and many of its members came across driven by narrow personal interests and an arriviste mentality, proving once again to the World that selfishness in Lebanon is a virtue, and lending truth to the old Arabic adage: “Kil Min Ido Elo”.

The “Amal Movement” was celebrated, at one point or another in the history of the Lebanese conflict, as a national alternative to the regressive feudalism that dominates Lebanon. But after more than 15 years as the executor of the “Syrian Will” in Lebanon, the Amal Movement today continues to impose on the nation a failed leadership who has done very little, not to say nothing, to expand the movement of hope to all the dispossessed within its sectarian reach let alone beyond it, or to promote a non-confessional national agenda or to consolidate national unity... or at the least to initiate a rebuilding campaign of Southern Lebanon, free from Israeli occupation since the year 2000 AD.

The Lebanese Forces as a progressive power of change in Lebanon died in 1982 with the assassination of its founder, the late Bachir Gemayyel. What is left today is a fundamentalist group of zealots driven by adulation of an imprisoned warlord and an alleged assassin, claiming to represent Christian values and defend the interests of the Christian community. Whether this movement will be able to regroup after the release of its leader from prison and evolve into a democratic organization with a truly national program that transcends narrow sectarian goals, remains to be determined.

Despite reservations on its origins, identity, agenda and modus operandi, Hezbollah seems today to be one of the few brokers in Lebanese politics, and perhaps the only organization in Lebanon, with a clear agenda. Working to advance the cause of the Islamic Resistance in Lebanon, it has achieved many of its goals largely by capitalizing on the political and leadership vacuum on the national scene and exploiting the fears of many Lebanese and their resentment towards the state of Israel. Hezbollah fits perfectly within the sectarian establishment of Lebanon and seems to benefit from it. It remains to be seen whether this symbiotic relationship will endure or whether Hezbollah can transcend its sectarian agenda to offer a positive national vision; unless its leadership is content within its niche and plans to wiggle its way into Lebanon’s feudal establishment.

Last but not least, many Lebanese welcomed General Michel Aoun back in Lebanon with open arms and big hopes. The “General”, as usual, spoke from the heart with mighty words and great ideas; but alas, without a concrete plan to implement those ideas. The time may have been short (*or shortened, by design or lack thereof*) between the return of the “General” from exile and the spring elections, for him to organize a slate of candidates and offer the Lebanese people a comprehensive program that embodies his vision. The Lebanese people, who can freely read and think, know that; but their patience has its limits. They are waiting to find out if the Free Patriotic Movement of the General has the necessary components and can acquire the requisite momentum to become a national reform movement. Will it pull itself together and fill the political vacuum in Lebanon with a forward-looking and democratic agenda? Or will it wither and die into the jungle of sectarian divisions and the opium of individual idolatry?

The politics of “business as usual” and back-door deals between the few power holders on the Lebanese scene seem to have prevailed and dealt democracy in Lebanon a big blow one more time, this time without the excuse of foreign intervention. These politics have historically and by all means (*including warfare*), marginalized the aspirations of the new generations, silenced the honest voices of revolt against corruption, empowered the sectarian regime and secured the entitlements of a privileged few and their blood-lines in the political establishment.

“Democracy by agreement”, they like to call it! It is a fancy, user-friendly misnomer to describe the “coalition of tribal lords”.

What is the point of holding an election today if the system is wired to leave out new and young ideas and keep the same corrupt tribal geezers and warlords of the past, give them a facelift and makeup, and bring-in with them a few new faces loyal to their interests?

It is time to pause and ask what do we want from our politicians and what do we need elections for?

The bickering over the election law today is not really over the rights of the different religious communities (*that was the façade*) but over the entitlements of the feudal lords and the warlords who take for granted their rights to decide for these communities. It is time to change the status-quo, rewrite the laws and bring about a clean slate of secular politicians, faithful to their country and driven by the ideal to serve their nation and the zeal to excel in their service.

The alternative would be to amend the Lebanese Constitution to formally adopt a federate or confederate system of government that preserves the specificities and independent rights of the different religious communities and allows each community the privacy to make internal reforms, the seclusion to forge its way in the modern age of democracy and the right to chose its representatives and leaders independently of other communities, democratically or as it sees fit.

...so that the sacrifices of 30 years of war and occupation do not go in vain; unless the land of Lebanon is doomed, by “Creative Design” or pure geographic location, to be in eternal conflict, to continuously export great minds into the World and endlessly retain gigantic mediocrities at home, recycle them into a few politicians who imprison its inhabitants in the dark ages.

The voice of one ... or maybe thousands!