

Third Session of the
Körber Dialogue Middle East

“Lebanon After the Doha Accord: The Way Ahead”

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The Körber Dialogue Middle East provides a platform for multilateral discussions on foreign policy and security issues relevant to the Middle East. It seeks to bring representatives of the most important stakeholders together on a regular basis in order to foster an open and policy-oriented exchange of ideas. In the third session of the Körber Dialogue Middle East, high-ranking representatives of leading think-tanks and former officials from the Middle East, the European Union and the United States gathered in order to discuss the situation in Lebanon after the Doha Accord.

This summary contains a selection of individual arguments which we consider to be relevant to the current policy discussion. It is distributed to the participants of the Körber Dialogue Middle East and a small number of high-ranking policy-makers.

SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION

I. The Doha Accord: Actors and Results

- The Doha Accord can be viewed in the light of two antecedents, the Cairo Agreement (1969) and the Taif Agreement (1989). Since 1969, the fundamental problem, i. e. Lebanon’s fragile sovereignty, has not been solved yet. Lebanon still is a heavily penetrated state, a “state at risk”.
- The Doha Accord endorses a “status quo ante” of the Lebanese political system which terminates the turmoil in the aftermath of the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005.
- In the absence of robust state structures in Lebanon and the existence of a de facto “two-state constellation” (Lebanese government, Hizbullah as “state within a state”), the behaviour of external actors is still crucial to Lebanon’s future development.
- Yet, the essence of the Doha Accord was actually determined on the streets of Beirut, not in the meeting-rooms of Doha—i. e. there is a limit to the influence external actors can exert.

- Hizbullah's margin of manoeuvre on the domestic Lebanese scene is much smaller than its regional role which largely derives from its resistance against Israel. In the final analysis, Hizbullah is a regional party reaching its limits in Lebanon.
- After its military success in the May 2008 events, Hizbullah could have pushed for more concessions. It might have been prevented from doing so by the " Hamas experience " (once Hamas gained power, it became subject to a Western boycott).
- The Siniora government has been establishing surveillance points to control Hizbullah's activities, especially in the Shouf Mountains. Hizbullah adherents called on Hassan Nasrallah to take action against the government's measures. The government's call for the dismantling of the party's private communication network provided Hizbullah with a pretext for action against the government.
- As of today, the EU does not have a concerted Lebanon policy. The relevant actors are mainly France and Germany which clearly have been taking sides with the Siniora government.
- Since the fall of Baghdad, the US have been using Lebanon as a "tool" to punish Syria. The " Cedar Revolution " is regarded by the US as a successful materialization of the " Freedom Agenda " in the region. In the context of the May 2008 events, the US pressured their Lebanese allies (i. e. the Siniora government) to take measures whose risks were not entirely foreseeable.
- Qatar successfully acted as broker of the Doha Accord. It entertains good relations with all parties to the conflict, is less partial than other actors.
- Iran welcomes the Doha Accord, regards it as a sign of Hizbullah's political maturity, even as a model of regional conflict resolution.
- Saudi-Arabia is not an impartial actor with regard to Lebanon, it supports the Hariri camp. The Saudi-Arabian leadership is very keen on holding Syria accountable for its activities in Lebanon. During the lifetime of King Abdullah of Saudi-Arabia, a Syrian-Saudi reconciliation is unlikely.
- Syria is interested in a friendly government in Lebanon. It does not intend to return to Lebanon. Syria's behaviour, especially with a view to the progress of the indirect talks between Syria and Israel, will be crucial to Lebanon's future.
- Scenarios for the future of Lebanon after the Doha Accord: 1) a comprehensive regional solution, with a US-Iranian détente, further progress in the Syrian-Israeli talks including US involvement and an improvement of Saudi-Syrian relations ("best case"), 2) escalation of tensions in the region which culminate in a regional military conflict ("worst case"), 3) protracted crisis in Lebanon, with the radical Sunni forces in Northern Lebanon seeking to regain ground and with the fragile sovereignty of the Lebanese nation-state further eroding.

II. The Syrian-Israeli Track

- Syria is not interested in a weak Lebanese state. Asymmetric wars and strong non-state actors have a destabilizing effect.
- Israel is also interested in a stable Lebanon which is able to rein in militant non-state actors.
- In the Israeli perspective, the major cleavage line no longer runs between Arabs and Israelis, but between moderate and radical forces in the Middle East.

- Israel would face domestic pressures if the Golan Heights were to be returned to Syria. The Golan settlers are regarded as “good settlers” by the Israeli public.
- Israel is taking the talks with Syria seriously. The question is what Israel will gain (e.g. will Syria deliver Hizbullah?).
- Israel demands the cessation of Syrian aid to Hizbullah. Yet, after Syria’s withdrawal from Lebanon, Syria’s scope of action in Lebanon is limited.
- As of now, severing its ties with Iran, Hamas and Hizbullah is not discussable for Syria.
- Returning the Shebaa Farms to Lebanon would render Hizbullah’s arms meaningless. The question would arise for which purpose Hizbullah’s arms are needed. There would be great domestic pressure on Hizbullah to disarm.
- Iranian-Syrian relations constitute an “alliance of necessities”.
- A US involvement in the Syrian-Israeli talks is crucial. A successful conclusion of the talks is hardly imaginable without US presence at the negotiating table.
- Both Syria and Israel keep all options open.
- Israel seeks to “close the Arab file” in order to focus on Iran.
- If Syria and Israel reach a peace agreement, Lebanon will also have to go to peace with Israel. The establishment of peaceful relations between Israel on the one hand and Syria and Lebanon on the other hand would increase the potential for an Arab-Israeli détente.

III. Towards a Stable and Sovereign Lebanon: Policy Options for External Actors

- External actors should not “pick winners”, but rather pursue an even-handed approach which accommodates all political actors, work with institutions rather than parties and help re-launch the inner-Lebanese National Dialogue.
- The international community should support Lebanon by granting material aid. This aid should be pinpointed to the marginalized regions in Northern Lebanon, but should also include reconstruction efforts in the South (including mine clearing) and training assistance, especially in the field of security sector-reform. NATO could play a constructive role in the latter.
- The Lebanese army needs to be strengthened.
- No, this is still much too ambitious. In Lebanon, to do less is often to do more. What is the use of strengthening the Lebanese army if the function of the army is unclear? Similarly, a policy which tries to work with state institutions will never be even-handed because it would be perceived as supporting certain parties to the conflict.
- There are two basic alternatives to stabilize Lebanon: choose a hegemon to rule Lebanon or secure close cooperation among all interested external parties. Today, the first option seems more realistic as it is highly unlikely that external stakeholders, such as the US, Israel, Syria, Iran and Saudi-Arabia, could closely work together with regard to Lebanon.
- The regional conflict foci should be cooled down: the Israeli-Syrian talks should be supported, the Golan Heights should be returned to Syria, a solution to the Shebaa Farms problem should be advanced. The price of another round of military conflict between Hizbullah and Israel (or between Syria and Israel) would be forbiddingly high for both sides.

- A Libyan-style approach to the Hariri tribunal should be sought.
- External actors should be alert to the danger posed by Salafist groups in Northern Lebanon.
- Yes, but the Salafist threat is overblown. The danger posed by al-Qaeda cells in Lebanon is much graver.

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