

Highlights of the speech of Hezbollah Secretary General, Sayed Hassan Nasrallah (Abo Hadi), on the mass protests against corruption and for social justice in Lebanon. 25 October 2019



1. Abo Hadi: Our country is passing through a very sensitive time, and we must therefore speak responsibly and calmly. I will begin with short summary of H3zb0llah;'s position on the protests that I stated last Saturday (19 Oct); I will go into analysis of positives that occurred so far, and the solutions, and classification of what's going on, then dangers, then my final position.

Last Saturday, I spoke very highly of the protests, saying they were genuine, and we support most of its aims. I also said H3zb0llah can't join these protests, because we'd be visible, and it would politicize protests.

I also called for non-politicizing the protests.

I also said because protesters are anonymous, they can stay in the squares for a while, and leave after only fulfilling a few of their demands. If H3zbp1llah goes down, we can't leave until getting all we're demanding.

Some have tried to present this as H3zb0llah attacking the protesters. This isn't accurate. If we were to go into the squares, it would be on the side of the protesters against the governmental authorities.

First, the positives and the accomplishments. All that is happening today must be for the benefit of all Lebanon and all Lebanese people. The protests, especially in 1st days, have accomplished positives.

Unfortunately, these positives have not been explained to the protesters, even by some claiming to be leading the protesters. I want to focus on these positives - the accomplishments of the protesters.

A) Forced Lebanese gov't to adopt budget free of additional taxes, fees and a 0.6% deficit. Unprecedented. Protests forced this upon the gov't - this is a major accomplishment.

B) Under public pressure, Saad Hariri issued his reform paper - an unprecedented and important paper. It is a very advanced first step. Unfortunately, so-called protest leaders, some media, and "objective analysts" - some of whom I respect - downplayed this.

I don't ever recall a Lebanese gov't accomplishment something this important in so little time, with specific timetables. Why downplay this? It's an accomplishment of the protesters.

2. Abo Hadi: Downplaying accomplishments is improper. Saad Hariri's reform paper isn't empty promises. There are timetables, and bills are being formulated to be sent to parliament with in timetables - most importantly Law to Return Stolen Money.

As H3zb0llah, this reform paper is for implementation and not mere ink on paper, and we won't allow these promised reforms not to be implemented - whether or not protesters remain in the street.

C) Protesters pushed officials to begin implementing their promises, including Stolen Funds Law, Tax Collection Law, etc.

D) Putting current and future officials on notice, that they will be held accountable. After electoral law - relatively best so far - returned same old parties, they thought they could do whatever they want. Protesters made them realize otherwise.

E) It reinvigorated Lebanese people's self-confidence. Decades-long corruption convinced them they had no hope to accomplish change. This protest showed they can make change, and return to the streets again.

F) It showed the people they can come out and say what they want. Put the curses aside - some of this is spontaneous, but others are being directed by parties.

The positive is that it gave the people to come out and express their pain and complaints in their own words and language.

We need to see the poor, unemployed, college students, etc. and see what they said, and define that as the goals of the protests - which are social and economic issues. These are the issues that must be addressed and fixed.

G) Protests boosted any political party genuinely interested in combatting corruption to push forward and accomplish its goals. This includes H3zb0llah.

Those who have been promising to combat corruption now have their opportunity, so please go ahead and do it.

As I mentioned, Hariri's promised economic reforms were a first step. There will be future bills as well, including some we're proposing.

3. Abo Hadi: Yesterday, President Aoun opened the door to the protesters, and told them please come to me. He never said he rejected any of their demands. He said, "come speak to me, and we'll discuss our mutual fears." But they cut up his speech and ruined it.

If they don't want to have dialogue with President Aoun , where are we heading then?

2) We must all seek solutions. Any solution must be based on not falling into governmental vacuum, because it is very dangerous.

Vacuum, in light of current economic situation - protesters are complaining about and which concern the poor - and domestic and regional political tensions --- vacuum will lead to chaos and collapse.

If they keep up like this, how are they going to pay salaries? Even the heroic Army will come to a time where they can't pay their salaries or buy food if we go to vacuum.

It could lead to a bad security situation, and some might even be planning a civil war as they have in other countries. So, any solution must be based on dialogue with President Aoun. we don't back a vacuum, because it would lead a chaos.

last Saturday, when I addressed the demand for the downfall of the gov't, I said this means going to vacuum - so we reject this...

Why don't protesters send us an electoral law, and we'll conduct early elections accordingly. The problem is that the protesters can't even agree on that - some want single district law, some want downfall of sectarianism and others don't, some want Orthodox Law.

H3zbollah wants to protect Lebanon internally as we have externally. We're willing to accept the price of being cursed and accused of protecting the ruling class - which we're not doing. Despite this, we're still willing to give our sweat and tears to defend this country - against dangers some see, and some others don't..

Those who said H3zb0llah can't now oppose vacuum when we took country to vacuum for 2 years until President Aoun was elected being unfair. This isn't true - We delayed presidential election, but there was no vacuum, but a functioning gov't in place that kept country in order.

We now ask each area of protests to elect spokespeople, decide on common positions, and go meet with President Aoun. I'm not saying stop protesting either while this dialogue is going on. keep up the public pressure.

4. Abo Hadi: No one should impose their own political agenda on the protesters. The protesters themselves should oppose this.

Regarding blocking roads - I'm not opposing this in principle. it's a legitimate form of civil disobedience. We've done this in the past and could do it again. I'm not disagreeing with principle, but the timing.

You've heard the complaints of the people - saying the day they don't work they can't feed their kids. It's now been 9 days. I'm not talking about the protesters, however large they may be, but the people who still want to work.

There are people also setting up "checkpoints," attacking people with sticks trying to drive through, humiliating others, asking for ID cards - what does this remind you of?

There are also people setting up "blackmail checkpoints" - charging people who need to cross through to go to a hospital, etc.

Look, if the poor want the roads to remain blocked, then let them remain blocked. But you, protesters, who are speaking in the name of these people, please take the initiative and open the roads. By all means, continue and even grow your protests, but just keep the roads open.

It's also a lie that there is anyone trying to lead Army to clash with protesters. Army isn't required to go break up the protesters - they're required to go and protect them.

In 2005, during political protests - not social protests like now - an army commander asked H3zb0llah if Army should go in and break up protesters and even use live fire. I opposed that entirely. We know what it's like to have our demonstrators killed, in 1993, 2004

Lebanese security forces shouldn't fire upon anyone. So accusation that H3zb0llah inciting Army to attack protesters is 'untrue'. Of course, they should intervene, if there's any vandalism, but that's their duty to figure out how to do so.

Protests began spontaneously, non-politically, and focused on social issues. Now, it is largely no longer so. It's daily activities, slogans, etc. is no longer a spontaneous political protest. And the youths going out to protest should know this.

5. Abo Hadi: Now the protests are being led by known political elements, and I don't want to mentioned any names. There is now top-down direction and there is even funding. Don't try to deny there is funding. We protested in the streets, and we needed funding.

To organize media, parties, get food, etc. "you need money". Are you getting the money from the poor..? Unlikely. So who is funding these things.

Just be honest with the people who from "X Country" or "X Embassy" or "X Rich Person" is funding - so we know, if they have best interest of people at heart. This opens a lot of questions.

We in H3zb0llah don't deny where we get our funding. So do the same.

The demands are no longer what they used to be. People are calling for the downfall of the regime. But Lebanon doesn't have a "regime" like some other countries.

If they mean the "sectarian regime," then great, we in H3zb0llah are the first to support the abolishment of Lebanon's sectarian system.

Downfall of the government. People really want vacuum?

There are some asking UN to subject Lebanon to Chapter 7. Is this what the protesters want?

Some have even begun attacking the "Resistance as terrorism", and questioning its disarmament. This isn't what the people want.

Therefore, there are some who are riding the wave to accomplish political goals.

Will staying in the street endlessly accomplish goals? Probably. Probably not. H3zb0llah did it for a very long time, and without dialogue got nothing. So protest needs something extra - and that's dialogue.

Some come out with populist speech and say "we're all the leaders of the protests." * Scoff* this is good during revolutionary days, but it doesn't accomplish goals. Protesters need to elect representatives to dialogue on their behalf.

There are already de facto leaders of the protests, and protesters should know whom it is they're following.

As people decide to reject one proposal or another by officials, someone is directing this. This isn't just analysis - we know this for a fact.

6. Abo Hadi: A segment of these leaders is indeed honest and patriotic. I don't know their percentage. Another segment is party-affiliated, connected to the ruling authority for years, with their own objectives, foreign influence, etc.

Another segment formed recently in the last parliamentary elections that, despite a lot of effort and money, failed to accomplish much.

There are those leading the protests that are definitely connected to foreign embassies and intelligence agencies. Some of the leaders of the protest are also corrupt, and accuse H3zb0llah of corruption.

Some are even seeking political revenge and settling political scores. I have names of all these people. I'm not trying to sow doubt. I'm simply addressing the protesters, that they know who is speaking in the name of their pain.

What are the guarantees that these "leaders" won't exploit these protests for their own political goals or for foreign interests?

People don't want to replace the corrupt with the genuinely corrupt. They want a better alternative, whom they will follow until the end of time.

I'm speaking as a brother to the protesters, and let them say what they wish in response.

So you "protest leaders" reveal yourselves - if you are a political party, say so. You're calling on MPs and Ministers be financially transparent, so you do the same, and tell people where your money comes from.

That's how to bring about a better alternative on which people can hang their hopes.

3) I now want to direct myself to H3zb0llah's supporters and allies, and this is the most sensitive point.

I'm the first who came out and said this was a spontaneous uprising, not connected to foreign gov't or embassies.

H3zb0llah leaders called me concerned, I told them not to worry. of course, there's always a concern that certain elements might try to exploit the protests, but I said not to be concerned, not to be conspiratorial.

I reject the conspiratorial viewpoint. But in the last few days, our "Intelligence informations" - not analysis - indicates this is no longer a popular protest, but that some are trying to enter the country into a regional struggle.

Just go look at Gulf Media, social media, etc. Will you end up believing that this is spontaneous? It is no longer so. This was done in other countries. It's a possibility. In my opinion, it's more than a possibility.

Don't listen to the foreign embassies. Today, the US Embassy in Beirut says they don't want the gov't to fall. But it doesn't matter what they say, but what they and the CIA do.

Look at the Israelis. Today they are bringing Lebanese in Israel to the border to express solidarity with the protesters in Lebanon. What does this mean? We in the Resistance are entitled to be cautious

There's a concern some are trying to lead us to civil war. Look at what's happening in #Iraq.

7. Abo Hadi: H3zb0llah is the strongest party in Lebanon. And I'm not threatening anyone. But we're not worried about H3zb0llah, we're worried about Lebanon and where it is going.

Lebanon is now an existential threat to Israel. Lebanon which it used to invade with a musical band.

There were internal discussions among Lebanese parties that hung their hopes on U.S. war on Iran that would destroy the Resistance Axis. But this isn't happening, and U.S. is packing up from the region. So, some now trying to bet on something else.

So leadership of the protest needs to assure the Resistance that we are not being targeted. Not because of the Resistance itself, but because the Resistance defends and protects Lebanon.

There are those who are now accusing us of not being in the camp of #ImamHussein. If you bring us an honorable alternative leadership, we in H3zb0llah will in line behind you.

In any case, protest or don't protest, that's your business. We never asked anyone to do so or not. Some say H3zb0llah is behind this movement, some say it is against it.

Yes, on Saturday, I asked H3zb0llah's supporters not to enter the protests, because it would have had an effect on the protests.

But some of H3zb0llah's supporters and allies are among the protesters.

Important: There's now some confusion as to what I want of H3zb0llah's supporters. Now, in light of everything, I want to speak directly: I want H3zb0llah's supporters to leave these protest squares.

In some protest squares, where H3zb0llah was attacked as terrorist and some asked for it to be disarmed, and other protest squares remained silent, some of our supporters went out to offer a different perspective and defend H3zb0llah.

But I ask our supporters to leave the protesters entirely, so no one can accuse us of anything. Leave the protests to those who believe in them - and we respect their beliefs.

It's not in H3zb0llah's interest to be in the protest squares, but to sit back and wait and watch. If there's any positive that comes out of it, we'll support it.