

SESSION II
WHAT TYPE OF NATIONAL LEADERSHIP IS NEEDED TO TRANSCEND
CONFESSIONALISM IN LEBANON?

Background

The results of the Lebanese parliamentary elections following the Cedar Revolution of March 2005 are widely believed to have failed the expectations of most Lebanese aspiring for the establishment of a non-confessional State. In fact, many argue that the elections have further showcased the reign of a few confessional leaders over their respective religious communities.

Confessional leadership has prevailed throughout the history of Lebanon. The leaders of one community were rarely trusted by the other communities and often received with great caution. Even Fakhreddine II, for example, while perceived by some communities as a national hero and founder of modern Lebanon, is considered by other communities as a traitor who collaborated with Europe against the Arabs.

Lebanon is yet to witness the emergence of national leaders capable of mobilizing intermixed cross-confessional factions around national fundamentals while earning the unflinching respect, trust, and support of all Lebanese.

Questions of Interest

1. What interplay exists between nationalism and non-confessionalism in Lebanon? Is one a prerequisite to the other?
2. What makes a certain Lebanese leader (or citizen) perceived as more national or less confessional than another?
3. Has a national identity problem – manifested differently among different Lebanese – made difficult the emergence of national leaders?
4. Can national, non-confessional leadership help Lebanon transcend confessionalism? How?
5. What general qualities and criteria define national, non-confessional leadership?

Objective

Through studying the politics of various leadership archetypes who have taken center stage in recent Lebanese history, this second session of the Lebanon Think Tank aims to assimilate the set of distinguishing qualities, requirements, and criteria that would delineate the profile of a future national Lebanese leadership.

Session Format

The session will commence with a number of 10min presentations, each featuring one of the Lebanese leaders shortlisted below. The presentation is meant to succinctly and objectively give the audience any necessary historical context and background information on the presented leader. The presenter would then build his/her own case on why and how this specific leader is perceived as non-confessional and national (or not) by the various Lebanese constituencies, while offering the audience his/her own analysis, provocations, and conclusions to take from the presented case. The audience will then be engaged by the moderator to discuss and challenge each case through critically identifying any gaps and/or milestones in national leadership displayed by the presented leader.

Finally, the session will end with a comparative discussion consolidating the conclusions drawn from the various leader cases and audience affirmations, potentially culminating in a consensus on the set of qualities, requirements, and criteria that could help define the profile of a future national Lebanese leadership.

The Lebanese leadership archetypes featured in this session may include:

- Emir Fakhreddine II
- Camille Chamoun
- Saeb Salam
- Antoun Saade
- Kamal Joumblat
- Fouad Shehab
- Moussa Sadr
- Bashir Gemayel
- Michel Aoun
- Rafik Hariri
- Hassan Nasrallah

(Feel free to suggest other leaders, while outlining why you think the session would merit their addition and how they differ from all the archetypes listed above.)

Timeline

- **Nov 6:** Invitees receive event announcement and session description
- **Nov 9:** Deadline to receive invitee volunteer requests to present a specific leader
- **Nov 12:** Confirmation sent to presenting volunteers with presentation requirements
- **Nov 17:** 1st deadline to receive presentation slides from presenters (for review)
- **Nov 18:** 2nd deadline to receive final presentation slides from presenters
- **Nov 20:** Lebanon Think Tank session on National Leadership to be held at MIT
- **Nov 26:** Debriefing meeting by Steering Committee to evaluate event and conclusions

Guidelines

- The governing purpose of this event is not to criticize or justify the decisions, actions, intentions, and/or personalities of the presented leaders, but to scrupulously assess their politics inasmuch as that relates to their national leadership (or lack thereof) and how that can contribute to the overall consensus on prerequisites for future national, non-confessional leaderships
- Although it may be argued that national leadership qualities and requirements can be easily agreed upon before/without having such an event devoted to the topic, the objective of this session is to go through the exercise together as a think tank and to support whatever conclusions are made with historical facts and incidents drawn from modern Lebanese history
- Deciding to have and start with an event on National Leadership does not originate from an age-old Lebanese obsession with their leaders and leaderships, but from acknowledging this as a problem hindering Lebanon from progressing towards institutionalized national leadership and hoping to address this issue openly and constructively