

LSE IDEAS Middle East International Affairs Programme lecture

A talk by Saad Hariri

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It is an honor to be here with you today at this prestigious institution. An institution that has taken upon itself the mission of bringing academic expertise to bear on the issues and problems of society. The issues and problems of today's *global* society to which we all belong. I know many of you wonder why extremist messages and calls to action strike an increasingly loud chord in the Arab and Muslim world. LSE has adopted "rerum cognoscere causas", which means "to know the causes of things", as its motto. And I would like to tell you what I believe makes a defiant message so appealing to so many.

It is a simple but profoundly important fact that for over half a century, most of our region has suffered from vicious and protracted cycles of violence, fear, anger and deep frustration. At the heart of these cycles lies the unresolved tragedy of Palestine. Some of you may be thinking right now, "Oh no – not another one of those who cannot deal with his own problems and therefore blames everything on Israel." That is certainly not my purpose. Neither do I claim that if and when an Arab-Israeli settlement is reached and a Palestinian state is created - that all our problems will disappear. But this does not change the fact that a lot of the anger and frustration and readiness to respond to angry or defiant calls is indeed fuelled by the powerful sights and sounds of the continuous tragedy in Palestine –a tragedy to which most people in our region are exposed on a daily basis. What I am saying is not new. Many of you have probably heard this before.

But yes. I want to say it again. And the world should hear it yet again and again. It is that important. Ending this tragedy, which is at the center of the Arab Israeli conflict, is of utmost global urgency. It is not only a matter of correcting the injustice done to the Palestinians for over three generations. We have all – and I mean all - been affected by this conflict, either directly or indirectly. Often in violent ways. Lebanon has paid

a severe price. And still does, every day. Unfortunately, London has suffered as well. 2005 is still a fresh memory. The UK, as a major power, and as a permanent member of the Security Council, has a moral – and historical - responsibility to play a more active and effective role in reaching a viable settlement. When we look at the map of historical Palestine today we realize that, in some ways, we are back to the same basic problem that Britain had to deal with as a mandate power sixty three years ago. Namely, to partition the land between Arabs and Israelis. Today, after many wars and many waves of refugees – and Lebanon has been the recipient of many of these - partition is unavoidable. In 2002 a hand for peace was extended to Israel. From the city of Beirut. This was done through the Arab Peace Initiative, which was endorsed by Arab and Muslim countries –about 1.2 billion people in all. The Arab peace plan would create a Palestinian state on the 22 percent of historical Palestine occupied in 1967 -as a basis of a genuine historical reconciliation between the two sides. Unfortunately, since then Israeli governments have continued to reject or ignore the Arab Peace Initiative. The failure to end the Palestinian tragedy has no doubt contributed – in a major way - to the rise of violent extremism in Arab and Muslim societies. Let there be no mistake about it. Today, the insistence on continuing settlement building and the introduction of a new citizenship law by the Netanyahu government which will create apartheid-like conditions - are bound to frustrate the peace efforts and make extremist messages even more appealing to Palestinian, Arab and Muslim ears. It is an understatement to say that mine is a complicated country. The complexity of Lebanon stems from facts of history and of geography. These facts have put Lebanon – a country of only 4000 square miles and 4 million people - at the crossroads and fault lines of practically all the cultural, national, religious and sectarian divides. This is what makes Lebanon so special and so complex and, yes, fragile, at the same time. But complex as Lebanon may be, I believe that what most Lebanese really want is rather simple. It is in fact what people everywhere want. They want peace, security and the opportunity to lead their lives normally. You give them that and they can take care of the rest. And the rest means creating wonders from this little stretch of land on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean. They have shown this over and over again. The intensely rich demographic mix in Lebanon has undoubtedly made, and continues to make, an exceptional cultural contribution to the Arab and Muslim worlds and to human civilization at large. Our businessmen traders renowned the world over, have also shown, over the centuries, exceptional ingenuity and skill. The term globalization has been with us only for a few decades. But a few millennia ago our forefathers turned the old world around the Mediterranean into a globalized sea of international trade and cultural interaction. If we fast forward to today, we see the same drive, energy and Lebanese ingenuity making its mark in many places. We see that in Lebanon, and we see it even more in Lebanese expatriate communities around the region and the world. This has enabled Lebanon – with its meager natural resources – to reach the highest per capita income by far among the non-oil Arab countries. We have also managed to achieve growth rates between seven and nine percent annually over the past four years. Our debt ratios are dropping fast and our banking sector is as sound as ever. This despite being in an almost constant political crisis during that period. While this may sound impressive, it only points to even greater heights that the Lebanese can reach

if they are provided with a normal environment that allows them to realize their full potential. A secure environment where state authority prevails. A state and a national security strategy that protects them from being dragged to wars every few years. A political system and a public administration that work normally. A judicial system that safeguards and enforces the rule of law. An infrastructure that meets the needs of a modern economy. This in fact is my basic agenda . It is also the cause behind which the Lebanese people rallied in the spring of 2005. The cause of democracy, the truth, good governance and economic progress. The cause of independence, peace and security. It is this cause that brought me into public office. And it still guides me in carrying out my responsibilities. A lot of this depends on us, Lebanese people and Lebanese leaders. Whether we can strengthen the national common denominator and shun sectarian instincts and control narrow political interests. But a lot also depends on regional players and whether they will refrain from abusing Lebanon's fragile diversity, something that has characterized Lebanon's modern history.

And most of all it depends on whether we will have the global leadership needed to reach a comprehensive peace settlement - or fail again and go through yet another decade of conflict. The cost of failure will be great. The payoff of success is even greater.

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