

For Immediate Release



## **Samir Khalaf releases new book on Lebanon as a society that has lost its moorings**

Beirut, Lebanon- 20/12/2011 - Nestled in the morass of the American University of Beirut's Nicely Hall, Samir Khalaf, director of the Center for Behavioral Research has spent some time working on his latest contribution to understanding the complex and often misinterpreted Lebanese psyche. As he welcomes you into his office with his broad smile and circular glasses hanging from his neck, one could be forgiven for thinking that his latest work covering the nuances of Lebanese behavior would be as sanguine as the veteran professor.

"Lebanon Adrift: From Battleground to Playground" is a scathing work that breaks down the social and economic conditions that have led Lebanon to become "adrift" or "a society that has not only lost its moorings and direction but is also out of control."

"When we draw a comparison with other post-war interludes we see that societies normally take stock of what has happened and become more moderate," says Khalaf. "Lebanon is the opposite. We have become more flagrant in every sense, from consumerism to architecture."

In characterizing the disoriented, unanchored existence of the Lebanese, Khalaf begins setting the stage for his observations by analyzing the current state of psychological affairs. Khalaf identifies three principal dimensions of Lebanese existence that have caused the current impasse: a postwar society that has not come to grips with what has occurred, harboring feelings of mistrust and hostility; the regional context and its effects on the country; and the commoditization of life as well as its utilization to serve as a distraction and substitution for the previous two phenomena.

"Some of these excesses are so egregious that they assume at times all the barbarous symptoms of the not-so-moral substitutes of war," writes Khalaf. The phenomena he cites as examples of this such as reckless driving, littering, heedless smoking, embezzlement, fraud and corruption strike a chord with any Lebanese citizen who suffers from the societal and behavioral degradation Khalaf addresses in his work.

To better understand the *raison d'être* behind this particular state of mind, Khalaf delves into the distinct features of civil unrest, that are many a time communal concerns hijacked by confessional undertones and paranoia that are transformed into civil strife. The loss of these collective communal identities and circumstances become instrumental in sectarian incitement to violence, as they are coupled with foreign intervention and a loss of collective memory and consensus giving birth to the "geography of fear," or the localization of global

forces that are deemed as a threat to undermine newly formed local identities. These elements are what make up the “Battleground” aspect of the book.

Khalaf then brings in the mass consumerism and hedonism that has come to substitute for a collective consciousness driven by mass marketing, spectacle and kitsch. Here Khalaf notes the irony of Lebanon’s openness and cosmopolitan character which caused the country to become susceptible to such commodification; hence the “Playground.”

“The exuberance and expectations of the Lebanese are so excessive that they are beyond all control and restraint,” he writes. “Hence, they are doomed to a life of constant seeking without fulfillment.”

But according to Khalaf, this providence is not necessarily Lebanon’s destiny. Being adrift also means that you can steer back into a realm of relative reason and sustainability. “Neither the forces of commodification are that irresistible, nor are the Lebanese consumers as pliant and undiscerning,” writes Khalaf. “When its impulsive and excessive features are contained, this liminal state of surrender and wandering may well prove to be rejuvenating. At least it carries the prospects, remote as it may seem, of averting some of the bleak destinations ahead.”

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Note to Editors

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