



The Guardians of the Cedars issued the following communiqué:

Political observers have questioned the reasons and implications of the recent and unusual flurry of diplomatic activity in Damascus. Indeed, it is no coincidence that three regional and Arab conferences are all of sudden held on the same day in the Syrian capital in the absence of any prior context or background. The Union of Arab Parliamentarians, the Foreign Affairs Ministers Conference of the countries contiguous to Iraq, and the Ninth Ministerial Conference of the 6-member Electric Connectivity Network (that includes Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, and Turkey), as well as the current visit by the Egyptian President and the visit by Spain's King and Queen that preceded it.

As American-Syrian relations were deteriorating before, during, and after the US invasion of Iraq, reaching a climax with the passage of the Syria Accountability Act and the support by Washington for the Israeli raid against Damascus, the latter now finds itself alone facing an open challenge by the American Administration. In response, Syria has adopted its traditional preemption approach by seeking the protection of others, increasing the presence of foreign officials on its soil, and embarking on active diplomacy in all directions, without abandoning its strategic objective of ensuring the failure of the American initiative in Iraq and the region.

One can certainly read between the lines to find out that the basic Syrian motive for hosting these conferences is not, as is stated, to look into the Iraqi situation, or discuss parliamentary issues or matters of electrical connectivity, but to achieve a number of objectives, including:

1. Prod the conference attendees to express solidarity with Syria by prominently including in their final statements the point of standing by Syria and denouncing the attacks against it as happened recently at the Islamic Conference in Malaysia.
2. Shield itself against an American-sponsored second military strike by Israel by coalescing neighboring states around it, especially Turkey that has become a key component in the new Syrian policy because of its extremely critical strategic position, which explains the quasi-permanent presence of Turkish delegates at Syrian conference tables and meetings.
3. Intimate that Syria is not isolated to the point that it can be singled out as happened to the former Iraqi regime, and that it is capable of pulling Arab and Islamic states to its defense.
4. Exaggerate the regional importance of Syria in the eyes of international public opinion, especially the US Administration, and convince it that Syria is a major player in the regional arena that cannot be easily isolated or punished.
5. Remind the US Administration that Syria's position remains as strong as in the past, and lead the Americans to resume negotiations with Syria and recognize its "effective" role in the peace process between the Arabs and Israel, all the while maintaining the Syrian traditional posture: flexibility in its apparent desire to negotiate but unyielding on its negotiating positions.

The Syrian regime is dangerous because of its cunning, its duplicity, and its expertise in walking the tightrope. The US Administration must rethink its methods of engagement with this terrorist octopus by carefully reading between the lines and seeing through its façade to its inner sanctum, and through its outward expressions to what it secretly schemes. To do otherwise would doom the US initiative in Iraq and elsewhere to failure, with dire consequences that would be a disaster for everyone.

Lebanon, at your service,

Abu Arz,
November 8, 2003