



The Guardians of the Cedars issued the following communiqué:

Mistaken are those who find the recent UN Security Council president's statement of little importance or who see in it a weakened resolve towards Syria compared to resolution 1559. In fact, it is a qualitative leap in the international community's management of the Lebanese dossier that is unprecedented in its insistence on rescuing Lebanon from Syrian hegemony.

Its importance lies first in that it was a unanimous decision by the 15 members of the Security Council, including the 6 members who opposed or abstained from voting on resolution 1559. Second, it approved Mr. Kofi Annan's report issued on October 3 in which he named Syria by name and confirmed Syria's interference in Lebanese affairs and its failure to implement the terms of resolution 1559. Third, the statement established a mechanism for implementing resolution 1559 by requesting the Secretary General to report to the Security Council on progress in the implementation every 6 months.

Mistaken too are those who believe that the US administration will soon be softening its tough position on Syria or is ready to make a deal with it over Lebanon, as is rumored by those close to the Syrian regime. To the contrary, all indications point to the fact that the US, irrespective of who is in the White House after the November elections, is determined to move forward in escalating the pressures on Syria until it submits to the American demands. Suffice it to observe the US administration's behavior at the Security Council in adopting UNSCR 1559, supporting the report of the Secretary General, sponsoring the president's statement and ensuring both the unanimity of the member states on it and its inclusion of a specific mechanism for monitoring its implementation. Senior officials have also been making sharp statements in Syria's direction, beginning with Condoleezza Rice's position last March on the issue of the term extension, David Satterfield's statement this past October 14, which was by far the most virulent, and the statement by Ms. Melissa Russell, the Syria desk officer at State Department. All of this seems to confirm the fact that US policy towards the Syrian regime is on a path of escalation.

Ms. Melissa Russell in fact visited Damascus and Beirut last week, where she met a number of Lebanese leaders and discussed several issues at hand. Here is a brief summary:

- 1 – Washington insists on separating the UN process for resolution 1559 from Syrian-American relations, while ensuring that a unified and unambiguously stern language is maintained in Syria's direction, stemming from the US administration's anger at the Syrian regime's behavior.
- 2 – Washington has no intention of changing its position on Syria for the moment, and there is no "renewed friendship" between the two countries because that will be out of synch with the ongoing political war. The US has no intention of softening its tone towards Damascus because of all the outstanding problems between the two countries.
- 3 – Washington does not intend to soften its position vis-à-vis the Syrians on the issue of respecting Lebanese sovereignty, evacuating their forces from Lebanon, and ceasing their interference in Lebanon's internal affairs.
- 4 – Washington considers the Syrian offer to cooperate on the Iraqi border as insufficient because, again, the dossier between the two countries is full of thorny issues.
- 5 – Contrary to what many believe, the Security Council president's statement was not milder in its language towards Syria, nor was it a retreat. And there certainly is no deal over Lebanon between Washington's position on resolution 1559 and Syria's promised cooperation on the Iraq question.

The events of September 11, the launching of the War on Terrorism, and the invasion of Iraq exposed the threat posed by the Baath regime of Syria. It revealed its pivotal role in manufacturing and exporting terrorism, and it opened the eyes of the US administration to the fact that the Syrian regime's strength lies in its continued control of Lebanon. As a result, the US has decided to strike Syria, starting in Lebanon. The liberation of Lebanon thus has become an integral part of the American War on Terrorism and a central tenet of the new US foreign policy, irrespective of who ends up in the White House.

The Syrian regime's margin of maneuver has narrowed extensively, which prevents the regime from implementing even one of the critical American demands. Anything else that the Syrian regime says it will concede to the Americans is negligible, such as the announcement by Syria of its readiness to cooperate with the US on Iraq or its masquerade of withdrawing a few soldiers from Lebanon in front of the cameras. Similarly, the three cards that enabled Syria to play a regional role far greater than its importance, namely Lebanon, Hezbollah, and the rejectionist Palestinian

organizations, have now caused a backlash after three and one-half decades and are weighing heavily on a Syrian regime already reeling under mounting pressures.

On this basis, the question is no longer: Will the Syrian regime fall? The question is when?

Lebanon, at your service

Abu Arz

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