



The Guardians of the Cedars issued the following communiqué:

As has been the case in the past whenever Syria found itself in trouble, it went back to dangling the carrot of the peace negotiations with Israel. But this time, the trouble in which Syria finds itself is much deeper and dangerous than the previous times as is clear from its making concessions even before the negotiations begin, and from its stated readiness to make concessions never heard of before.

After sanctions were imposed on Syria by the US Administration under the "Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act", Syria started announcing its desire to resume the negotiations with Israel that have been suspended since 2000. And after the issuance of resolution 1559 and its corollaries and the mounting pressures of the international community on it, Syria's eagerness to resume negotiations also became more pressing. It began sending repeated messages through both open and secret channels to Israel, but to no avail. It then called for UN envoy, Mr. Terje Rod-Larsen, and asked him to officially notify the Israeli government of its complete readiness to dialogue without pre-conditions. And when Israel refused to respond in kind, the Syrian president went to Sharm-El-Sheikh to ask the Egyptian president to intercede with Israel so that it accepts to resume negotiations, not only without pre-conditions, but also by abandoning the "Rabin Trust" in an attempt to entice Israel back to the negotiating table.

For clarity's sake, it is important to remember two things: First, the "Rabin Trust" in the Syrian definition is essentially a verbal promise made by the former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in the presence of then-president Bill Clinton, pledging to return the entire Golan to the Syrians in exchange for full peace between the two countries. Second, from the moment the negotiations stopped in 2000 and until the very recent past, Syria has reiterated over and over again, and at every occasion, that it will resume negotiations only from the point where they stopped at that time.

If we consider that relinquishing the "Rabin Trust" means relinquishing the Golan Heights, then the magnitude of the trouble in which Syria finds itself becomes obvious, and so do the reasons that are pushing it to concede on all these "national" principles that it held on to for a very long time and which were obstacles to a peaceful resolution. Which leads us to the inevitable two equations:

First, whenever pressures mounted on Syria, the more flexible its position became and the better the chances for peace; and whenever the pressures on Syria eased up, the more hard-line its positions became and the slimmer the chances for peace. All of this is as if Damascus continues to live in the time of Omayyads and operate on the principle of Muawya who said, "If what separates me from people is only a hair, I would not let it break. When they pull, I let go; and when they let go, I pull."

Second, the stronger Syria's influence grew in Lebanon, the greater its bargaining position became, and therefore the farther away it moved from peace. And conversely, the weaker its influence in Lebanon was, the closer it moved to peace.

Consequently, one may conclude that Syria's sudden interest in sitting at the negotiating table is driven mainly, if not entirely, by the likelihood of its losing Lebanon and the Lebanese card it long held in the negotiations bazaar to strengthen its ever meandering position and avoid having to seriously engage the peace process... What the Syrian regime is doing today is precisely that; to hurry back to the negotiating table before it withdraws from Lebanon and so long as it has two seats at that table instead of one.

But what the Syrian regime is missing in this new chapter is that it has lost its credibility with the world. The situation today differs substantially from the past. What was permitted then is no longer permitted today, particularly that the West now understands better the language of the Arabs and knows their mentality of deceitfulness, concealment and double-speak.

One last word to those who support a Syrian role in Lebanon: One of the most important condition for achieving a comprehensive peace in this part of the world is to end Syria's influence in Lebanon before anything else. To say otherwise is totally naïve and utterly nonsensical.

Lebanon, at your service

Abu Arz

December 10, 2004