



The Guardians of the Cedars issued the following communiqué:

The passing year could not leave us without a new catastrophe that sowed its sorrow across the nation. The plane of death that crashed on the beaches of Cotonou and killed more than a hundred Lebanese victims brought back the painful memories of the war with their funeral processions and mass burials. As if our land has not had its share of blood and bodies, and as if Lebanon needs more hurt and pain. As if the endless procession of miseries that hammer the country like so much hard rain has now to deal its blows even to its far-flung emigrant children.

Everyone accuses the regime in power of treating people's lives with recklessness and scorn, so much so that the industry of death is the only one growing in Lebanon. The ruling regime is accused of negligence because it allowed a plane with faulty technical maintenance and not meeting international aviation regulations to fly to Beirut and land at its airport. The government also stands accused of spreading unemployment and forcing young people to emigrate, live in the loneliness of exile, and then die cheaply on foreign soil. And everyone attributes all of this to the corruption of the ruling regime and its dysfunctional institutions, and the flourishing culture of organized theft and laundering of the country's resources, making Lebanon the country with the greatest per capita debt in the world.

Yet no one mentions the party that brought and protected this corrupt regime, providing it with the cover to complete the destruction of the country's foundations and sap it of all its foundations. As a result, and contrary to the prevailing political discourse among pundits in the Lebanese media, the focus must remain on the root and cause of the problem, namely the Syrian occupation, rather than on its symptoms and manifestations. That of course does not exonerate the ruling class from its responsibilities for colluding with the occupation and covering up for its insidious goals of erasing Lebanon from the political map.

As with any occupation, the interests of the Syrian occupation lie in selecting the worst elements of the Lebanese political establishment to manage the government and using them as a screen through which to achieve its objectives which naturally go against the interests of the occupied country. Had we been occupiers in Damascus, we would have done the same thing.

For years the issue of the mobile phone industry and its ensuing crisis with no end in sight has been on the table. No one dares say that the bulk of the profits from that industry are funneled into the pockets of the Syrians, which is why it is an insoluble and incomprehensible problem. There has been much discussion on the economic crisis precipitated by the depression in sales of Lebanese-made products, and no one dares to publicly state the obvious cause, which is that unregulated Syrian goods have flooded and undercut Lebanese-made products.

Similarly, the scarcity of financial revenues feeding the treasury is primarily due to the Syrian control of the vast majority of the State's revenue sources, especially the country's ports of entry by land, sea, and air. No wonder therefore that the treasury is bankrupt, the State is in permanent deficit, and its debts continue to mount.

As to unemployment and emigration, no one dares state the fact that the number of undocumented Syrian workers who enter and work illegally in Lebanon because of the occupation has reached close to 2 million according to official statistics. This massive human infestation in a country whose total population is 4 million is behind the impoverishment of the people and the despair of its young people who seek to emigrate in search for livelihood. Only the closure by several countries of their gates to immigrant Lebanese youth has stemmed the drain and prevented Lebanon from becoming a country of aged seniors.

We expose these facts not to exculpate the ruling regime whose men will be judged and penalized in proportion to their crimes, but to keep applying pressure on the source of the bleeding crisis and remind everyone that the Syrian occupation has been, and continues to be, the culprit behind Lebanon's many crises, past and present, including the catastrophe of the plane that crashed last week in Cotonou.

Lebanon, at your service,

Abu Arz,

03 January 2004