



The Guardians of the Cedars issued the following communiqué:

The television footage of the celebrations that accompanied the prisoner exchange deal between Israel and the so-called Hezbollah looked for a minute as though we were in Tehran or in Khoramshahr Province in Iran , and that Lebanon was all of a sudden converted into a yet-to-declared Khomeinist republic. An objective scrutiny of the deal in its proper context leads us, however, to the following conclusions:

1 – The deal appeared to have a much greater dimension than it really is, especially with the local and regional media exaggerating it beyond reason as if this were the first deal of its kind. Recall that in 1983 Israel exchanged 4,550 Lebanese prisoners for 6 of its soldiers, and in 1998 it released 60 prisoners in exchange for the remains of one Israeli soldier, and all without the sensational coverage of the media. The official red-carpet welcome held by the Syrian-imposed regime at Beirut airport in the presence of all its figures, amidst grandiose ceremonies and army band music added to the glorification of the deal worldwide.

2 – The unevenness in the numbers exchanged in the deal - 495 Lebanese and Arabs in exchange for one Israeli businessman and three bodies should not be the source of pride for Hezbollah or for the "nation" it speaks for. To the contrary, the complete absence of the Lebanese authorities from the negotiations and their subsequent participation in the celebrations ought to be reason enough to discredit the whole affair, as much as it reflects on the political incest resulting from the illicit coexistence between the Lebanese State and the Hezbollah militia-party.

3 – The deal would not have gone through without favorable regional conditions and Syria's and Iran's pre-approval: Syria because it is desperate to re-start negotiations with Israel, and Iran because it is seeking to find its missing diplomats and is eager to push further the dialogue it recently opened with Washington. As to Israel , it agreed in accordance with its utmost respect for the value of every Israeli citizen and in its desire to close this file that has festered for years especially in the case of airman Ron Arad. As to Hezbollah it entered the deal for two reasons: One, to lift the terrorism label that is now closely associated with it, and second, its eagerness for a political move that makes up for its military role along the Blue Line now waning under international pressure. It is worth mentioning, finally, that the deal went through because Hezbollah knew how to exploit Israel 's democracy and its concern for the welfare of its missing citizens.

All of which raises the question of Hezbollah's "stardom" even as it is defined as an international terrorist organization and represents foreign interests implanted on Lebanese soil:

1 – The high degree of discipline within Hezbollah cannot be overstated. The wisdom, vision, and ascetic lifestyle – when it comes to money and power – of its leadership should be recognized for the contrast they pose with most other Lebanese leaderships.

2 – The absolute and unconditional support provided to Hezbollah by Syria and Iran , and behind them the Lebanese regime, in the military, financial, political, moral and propaganda areas, in addition to the high degree of respect and appreciation. Contrast all of that with how Israel treated its own allies in Lebanon , the South Lebanon Army, when it abandoned its members, their families, and their cause overnight.

3 – The serious and repeated mistakes that Israel committed in Lebanon, in particular its shameful withdrawal in May of 2000 that gave Hezbollah a free victory and gave birth to the Palestinian Intifada from the womb of this withdrawal-defeat.

In the final analysis, all the appearances notwithstanding and given Lebanon's historic and unique character, Hezbollah and all who are behind it will fail in their objective of transforming Lebanon into an Iranian province. They will also fail in erasing the stamp of terrorism that is imprinted on Hezbollah no matter how many prisoners it exchanges. Hezbollah is doomed to disappear because the land of Lebanon has always rejected foreign and hostile implants.

To the free Lebanese who watched in disbelief the shameful charade on television, they realized that living in exile outside the country is better than living in exile inside the country.

Lebanon , at your service,
Abu Arz,
February 07, 2004