



The Guardians of the Cedars issued the following communiqué:

In the preceding statement we said that Arab regimes were quick for the most part to reject the American project for political reform entitled "The Greater Middle East" on the grounds that it represents voluntary suicide for them. The regimes took action in various ways and directions to pounce on the project and abort it even before it sees the light the day.

In contrast, the peoples of the Middle East implicitly welcomed the project with a remarkably positive disposition, as expressed in Arab capitals by a number of voices that openly called for change and by demonstrations and unusual signs of disobedience seen for the first time in many decades. The most prominent of such actions were last week's bloody confrontations in Northern Syria, which are likely to increase in intensity.

It remains, however, that the welcome by the Arab street of the American initiative is muddled by feelings of fear, distrust, and reticence. Fear, because of the hesitation of welcoming this foreign and unknown guest called democracy since humans are known to fear that which they ignore. And fear of this promised freedom that the Arab individual has known only by longing for it.

Distrust comes from the doubt that the United States can actually achieve this daunting and complex task, especially after the catastrophe it is confronting in Iraq.

And reticence is due to the fact that Arab societies remain isolated on themselves, attached to their traditions, reluctant to open up to the West and join in its liberal civilization, especially in what concerns Women's rights, for the prevailing mentality continues to lean towards a male-dominated tribal system.

For all those reasons, we believe that the United States cannot succeed in its project if it decides to undertake it with the agreement or cooperation of the extant Arab regimes. Instead, it must act to eliminate those regimes one after the other much as it did with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, as a prelude to liberate the peoples from their grip and pave the way for them to express themselves and choose their rulers by themselves in a sane democratic way.

We also warn the US administration not to fall for the cosmetic changes to which the Arab regimes will resort as they try to pre-empt the project, including the implementation of superficial reforms and making verbal promises, such as the one recently issued by the Arab Foreign Ministers on the subject of Human Rights, which are no more than camouflage and smokescreen.

We say all this because we fear for the project to meet with failure and for the dreams of millions of Arabs to evaporate, and for the Arab peoples to remain indefinitely hostage in the hands of their regimes. We fear that the status quo of backwardness, fanaticism, and isolation will persist with no end in sight. Only then will the words of actor Omar Sharif, uttered during his latest Oscar Award, will become true: "No Arab country will be a democracy in another fifty years because we are a people of tribes..."

Lebanon , at your service,

Abu Arz,

March 20, 2004