



The Guardians of the Cedars issued the following communiqué:

Ever since the US government slammed its sanctions on Syria, the latter has been under siege, desperately trying to break through the stifling economic, political and psychological isolation through a strategy that may be summarized in the following three components:

First, an increase in visits by Syrian officials to a number of countries that are squarely in the anti-US camp with the objective of finding new allies that could provide a protective political cover and alternative commercial markets. The latest such visit was to Iran, Syria's traditional and natural ally – if not its only one since the Islamic Revolution. However, those visits have not yielded the desired outcome because of the economic and political weakness of those countries relative to the United States, and they were mere visits of protocol that netted a few modest commercial deals and financial loans.

Second, Syria has been issuing repeated calls to the US administration requesting it to resume the broken dialogue between the two countries and resolve outstanding issues. Those calls have often been made through the media in order to convey the message that Syria is the victim and the US is the bully.

Third, the Syrian regime has been sending messages, naturally through the media, to the Israeli government calling on it to resume peace negotiations. This is obviously intended to portray Syria as the one eager for peace and Israel as the one rejecting it. Syria has often used this trick to deflect mounting US pressures.

Yet the Syrian regime knows deep down that its contorted methods no longer work and its usual political maneuvering is now well known. The shortest route to break through the isolation is to accept the American conditions conveyed to Syria by the Secretary of State and begin implementing them one by one:

Close its borders with Iraq and deny access to infiltrators, stop all incitement to civil war in Iraq, and stop derailing the rise of a new democratic state there. For Syria to compare its long border with Iraq to the US-Mexican border and say that it is unable to control it, is an argument that no longer stands because the Syrian-Iraqi border was very tightly closed and controlled for three decades under the former Iraqi regime.

- Cease its support of terrorism and shut down the offices of all terrorist organizations operating from Syrian soil.
- Dismantle and disarm the so-called "Hezbollah" organization, then allow the Lebanese Army to take control of the south of Lebanon and the Lebanese-Israeli border.
- Decommission its weapons of mass destruction, following the Libyan model.
- End its occupation of Lebanon and remove its military and security troops and personnel from that country in implementation of the Taef Agreement and UN resolution 520.
- Undertake political and constitutional reforms within Syria and give the Syrian people their basic freedoms.

Unfortunately, any political observer of Syria knows that the regime is not only unwilling to implement the American conditions, as some really believe the case to be, but it is also unable to do so because any such implementation, of even one of the US conditions, will certainly lead to the demise of the regime.

Indeed, for the Syrian regime to stop supporting the anti-Israeli terrorist organizations would deny it its *raison d'être* and take away from it a major card it has adroitly exploited for many years in the game of political blackmail. Similarly with the Hezbollah organization that Syria built up as a security, military and political surrogate to control Lebanon, but which has now become a cancer it can no longer control, especially because Syria gave it a dimension far greater than its actual size and a regional and international reach that goes beyond Lebanon's borders. The rise of a democratic system in Iraq threatens the very foundation on which the Syrian regime rests. The abandonment of weapons of mass destruction means a strategic imbalance – or the terror imbalance, as some would have it – with Israel. And a withdrawal from Lebanon will speed up the toppling of the Syrian regime in Damascus, as would reforms inside the Syrian political system.

And so after dancing on a tight rope for thirty years, the Syrian regime has finally fallen into a tight trap from which there is no escape. The Baath regime in Damascus finds itself today in a dead-end from which it cannot easily exit, as some would have us believe. It is suddenly between the rock of rejecting the American conditions and the hard place of agreeing to them. And both are untenable.

For the Syrian regime to think it can bide its time until the outcome of the US presidential elections in November is foolish because the US sanctions were imposed under a law and not under executive order. The conditions mentioned above have become a staple in US policy, irrespective of who ends up living in the White House.

The Syrian regime is under the microscope....and it is only a matter of time.

Lebanon , at your service

Abu Arz

16 July 2004