



The Guardians of the Cedars issued the following communique:

In a first ever, Syria has used the term “withdrawal” instead of “redeployment” as was the case in the Syrian president's latest speech to the People's Assembly. This was indeed the only bright spot in the speech that was otherwise replete with negative points to which the Lebanese people have been accustomed every time a Syrian official speaks about Lebanon.

Beyond the tone of superiority and arrogance that dominated his speech, the Syrian president typically failed to specify a timetable for the withdrawals and issued veiled threats to the Lebanese people on the issues of the settling of the Palestinian refugees and Hezbollah. He alluded to the possibility of a return to the climate of war that dominated Lebanon in the 1980s, and insisted on continuing to interfere in internal Lebanese affairs when he stressed that the role of Syria in Lebanon does not end with the withdrawal of Syria from Lebanon. He said that Syria will not relinquish its responsibilities towards its allies, urging those allies to prepare themselves for defeating “another May 17 looming on the horizon”. In addition to hurtful criticisms he addressed to the Lebanese people, accusing them of accepting any foreign interference but the Syrian one, and describing some of the Lebanese of infidelity and ungratefulness, etc.

We will not bother rebutting all these new-and-improved stale deceptions that reflect the state of panic, hatred, anger and reaction in which the Syrian president finds himself, not to mention the state of hysteria of his regime now that it has been forced to relinquish its most valuable hostage which provided it with all the attributes of permanence and prosperity through the blackmail it exercised over the past thirty years. We will simply clarify a few points as follows:

1 – It is true that the Lebanese people are now looking for foreign intervention. But that is only for one reason, namely to help them rid themselves of this cancer that has transformed their lives into pure hell for a full one-third of a century.

2 – It is true that the Lebanese people look forward to a new May 17, but in due time and with the right circumstances. The fact is that the Lebanese are having a hard time keeping up with the frenetic pace of Syria's own unprecedented rush to unconditional peace with Israel according to Bashar Assad's own statements on many occasions and to every mediator visiting him.

3 – It is true that he admitted to making mistakes in Lebanon, but he kept them confined to their political context and did not admit to the crimes of collective and targeted murders that his regime committed in our country, the last of which was the assassination of Rafik Hariri, or the crimes of organized and systematic destruction of Lebanon's people, infrastructure, institutions and existence as a nation.

4 – As to his accusing some Lebanese of ungratefulness is a tad imprecise because there are three categories of people who have collaborated with the Syrian occupation and for different motives.

- First: One group reconciled themselves with the occupation out of fear from its brutality and to avoid reprisals, but turned against it as soon as was possible. We understand these people's position and we appreciate their current support for the opposition.
- Second: Another group collaborated with the occupation from an ideological standpoint that blends Arab Nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism, and which is represented today by “Hezbollah” and other Syrian satellite groups. We understand this group's position but we do not excuse it because it distanced itself from the country's traditions, customs and basic nature. We also believe this group to be a minority destined for gradual extinction in the post-occupation period. The demonstration it organized in Riyadh Solh Square was a fabrication of the Intelligence Services that bussed thousands from Syria across the border to pack them in downtown Beirut. Needless to say, this group's slogans and platforms are stale and have been superseded by ongoing events.
- Third: The third group collaborated with the occupation from the standpoint of personal gain and interest, after it sold its conscience and soul to the devil. We do not excuse or forgive this group because it is the lowliest and vilest and the farthest away from Lebanese authenticity. No wonder that it renounced Syria after renouncing its own people and nation. But its day of reckoning with the Lebanese people will be commensurate with the magnitude of their treason.

What matters is that the Syrian era is over in Lebanon or at least is on the wane. This is what Bashar Assad and its followers in Lebanon have to grasp. We stand on the threshold of a new age of emancipation and freedom in which there is no room for outside tutelage. It is equally important for our people to know how to choose their new representatives in the coming elections, on the basis of new criteria of integrity, patriotism, and superior ethics. And finally, it is important that the new government emerges from Freedom Square and from the will, dreams and

aspirations of the young people bastioned there. In short, we hope that our young people will master the art of accountability and responsibility as well as they mastered the art of liberation.

Lebanon, at your service,

Abu Arz

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