



The Truth About Syria

Posted GMT 4-12-2007 14:28:47

Anyone familiar with the past two years of Lebanese politics would never claim, as House Speaker Nancy Pelosi did in Damascus last week, that "the road to Damascus is a road to peace." Her assertion must have seemed especially naive to the people of Lebanon, where the list of the slain reads like a "Who's Who" of Syria's most vocal and effective opponents.

This round of murders began at 12:56 p.m. on Feb. 14, 2005, when 2,000 pounds of TNT exploded outside the St. George Hotel in Beirut, killing former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq al-Hariri and 22 others. Hariri's crime? He was increasingly outspoken in opposition to Syria's involvement in Lebanon. Basil Fleihan, a member of the Lebanese parliament, was riding with Hariri that day. Burned over 95 percent of his body, he was recognized only when someone heard him whisper "Yasma," his wife's name. Fleihan died two weeks later.

Following Hariri's assassination, Lebanon's freedom forces, known as the "March 14 movement," demanded an end to Syria's military occupation. They won a majority in the country's parliamentary elections.

Their victory did not go unanswered. Three days after the first round of elections, on June 2, 2005, Lebanese journalist Samir Kassir, an outspoken opponent of Syria, was murdered by a car bomb. In response, hundreds of Lebanese journalists gathered in Martyr's Square and held aloft black pens inscribed with Kassir's name as they chanted, "We will not kneel." One of those in attendance said, "When you read Kassir's work, you will know who killed him." His last column criticized the Syrian regime for imprisoning a group of civil activists.

Three weeks later, the day after the March 14 forces announced their electoral victory, the Lebanese intellectual and anti-Syrian leader George Hawi was assassinated by a car bomb. Lebanese journalist Michael Young wrote that Hawi's killing was a clear message to the March 14 forces: The risks to you of ending Syria's occupation will be high.

On Dec. 12, 2005, the United Nations issued a report concluding that it was unlikely that Hariri's assassination could have been carried out without Syria's knowledge. That same day, Gibran Tueni, editor in chief of An Nahar newspaper, another influential opponent of Syria, was killed by a car bomb. Tueni, who had been among the first at the scene after Samir Kassir's murder, knew he was risking death by vocally opposing Syrian oppression. He did it anyway.

Last November, the 34-year-old minister of industry, Pierre Gemayel, became the latest victim. An outspoken anti-Syrian member of the cabinet, Gemayel was killed when his motorcade was rammed by gunmen who then shot him in the head at point-blank range. Gemayel's murder was seen as a clear message to the March 14 forces inside the Lebanese government: We will kill you to prevent you from acting against Syria's wishes.

These murders are intended to terrorize Syria's opponents into silence. They also eradicate the intellectual and political leadership of Lebanon's democracy movement. Imagine if, in 1776, James Madison, John Adams or Thomas Jefferson had been struck down by assassins. Could America have been born without them? It seems a calculation has been made that if enough Lebanese democrats are killed, Lebanese independence will die in its cradle.

At the same time Syria is terrorizing Lebanon, it is facilitating the flow of insurgents into Iraq, supporting the terrorist groups Hamas and Hezbollah, and allowing its territory to be a foothold in the Arab world for Iran's belligerent ambitions. It continues all this despite scores of trips by senior diplomats to Damascus to "talk to the Syrians."

It is time to face facts. Talking to the Syrians emboldens and rewards them at the expense of America and our allies in the Middle East. It hasn't and won't change their behavior. They are an outlaw regime and should be isolated. Members of Congress and State Department officials should stop visiting Damascus. Arab leaders should stop receiving Bashar al-Assad. The U.N. Security Council should adopt a Chapter VII resolution mandating the establishment of an international tribunal for the Hariri murder.

The Security Council should also hold Syria accountable for its ongoing violations of existing resolutions. The U.S. government should implement all remaining elements of the Syria Accountability Act and launch an aggressive effort to empower the Syrian opposition. European governments should demonstrate that they value justice over profit and impose financial and travel sanctions on Syria's leaders.

Assyrian International News Agency

After Pierre Gemayel's assassination, I received an e-mail from a Lebanese member of parliament. "It is so awful," he wrote. "Pierre was such a promising young man, and he was afraid of nothing. They will try to kill all of us in the end, but we will keep fighting. We will never surrender."

Conducting diplomacy with the regime in Damascus while they kill Lebanese democrats is not only irresponsible, it is shameful.

By Liz Cheney

www.washingtonpost.com

Liz Cheney was deputy assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs from 2002 through 2003 and principal deputy assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs from 2005 to 2006.

© 2011, Assyrian International News Agency. All Rights Reserved. [Terms of Use.](#)