

Excerpts of a speech given by the Lebanese Minister of Information, Mr. Ghazi Aridi, as reported in the Lebanese daily Al-Anwar on January 26, 2003.

(Translated from Arabic by Joseph Hitti. All direct quotes are in Italics.)

Aridi: America and Israel are after Lebanon and Syria much as they are after Iraq and the region.

Mr. Aridi said, *“We have every interest in strengthening the Lebanese-Syrian relationship. As to the timing, location, and method of launch of these operations, this is up to the leadership of the Resistance to assess the circumstances and evaluate all that pertains to the operation on the ground.” “ We will categorically never give up our right and our resistance.”*

On the occasion of its one-year anniversary, the magazine “Southern Issues” held a reception at the Sidon City Hall under the sponsorship of Minister Aridi and the presence of the following MPs: Osama Saad, Bahyya Hariri, and George Najm, the Director-General of the Ministry of Information Hassan Falha, the mayor of the city Hilal Qobrosly, the Greek-Orthodox Bishop of Sidon and Marjeyun Elias Kfoury, and others.

Aridi said, *“It is the Resistance in Lebanon that liberated the south and paid a heavy price. It sacrificed its most loyal and beloved sons, who are most trustworthy in their loyalty to their land and their honor. They did that not only in defense of a land that was taken in a particular region or as a way of expressing a sectarian, religious, or local identity. For the Resistance in Lebanon is the dignity of the Arabs and Moslems, the Resistance is the honor of the Arabs and Moslems, the Resistance is on behalf of the Arabs and Moslems, and the hope of Arabs and Moslems and of every human being at this time.”*

Lebanon as a target

Mr. Aridi indicated that *“Lebanon is at this very moment the target of the US government’s agents, administration, agencies, and institutions. The target of its spoliation of everything everywhere. The US is the primary partner of Israel in all the terrorism it did and still does. There is so much I can say at this occasion, but a few remarks will do. Lebanon is receiving envoys and messengers and observers and guests from here and there, and every human being is free to express his opinion. However, we say to every one that we too insist on our right and we know our obligations, which is why we are not in a position to receive lessons in patriotism, struggle, and hear definitions by this or that other party on whether the Resistance is indeed patriotic or if it wants to submit itself to the international system, as said by one of the guests who came to Lebanon to discuss matters related to the prisoners.”*

“The Resistance has prisoners who are full-fledged terrorists. But our young people in Israeli jails, they are the prisoners and the ones detained in contravention to all international norms and laws. Whatever classifications have been made do not apply to the children in the jails of the Israeli occupation, but conversely do not apply to those captured while attempting to carry out terrorist operations against our people.”

“The Resistance in Lebanon is part of the national and patriotic struggle in this region, and is not terrorism. The Resistance is not alone, but we too reject to be part of this international system of which the US gives us example after example every day. That system is a system of hegemony, domination, hunting people down, and killing human

rights and violating freedoms in the US and elsewhere. The violation of what is sacred and the attacks on people's rights, the kidnapping and assassination operations, and as such the legitimization of all that is forbidden while considering it permitted for the United States."

"The next issue in this media gathering is the big uproar when the Lebanese Ministry of Information refused to air the American films. They have the right to say what they want, and it is our right to practice our convictions. The latest from the US is that the US media campaign has failed and did not achieve its objectives. The American president has decided to open an international information bureau to make proposals to the president in order to avoid misunderstandings and improve America's image."

"What does that mean? It means we were right in two things: The position we took on these films, and the position we took in interpreting the Americans and their practices, which they displayed by saying that it was a misunderstanding. Let us assume that this is a misunderstanding, does that mean that the US will in fact change its policy? And that, after all these years of studies and theories coming out of the US and spread all over the world under the pretext that the US is the best, the most firmly established, the most capable, and that it has the situation under control, here is the US today saying that it is capable of misunderstanding. Are the US and the American President ready to change that policy and avoid misunderstandings, and does this need an international bureau?"

American promises

"This leads us to discuss what is going on in the region, and as I mentioned, the issues of the south of Lebanon are Lebanese issues and national issues. Whatever threat targets the south on the part of Israel is the same threat that targets Iraq on the part of America and Israel, and the same threat that targets Syria and the entire region. What then if we were confronting a vicious Israeli attack and American promises of \$12 billion strictly to Israel?"

"Israel is the greatest beneficiary of this war, and Israel practices the worst kind of terrorism each day against the Palestinian people. No one should make the mistake of thinking that it is possible to reach a settlement with Israel in order for it to agree to the rights of the Palestinian people. Quite the contrary, a few days and the Israeli elections will be over and the cycle of crimes, massacres, home demolitions, and uprooting of trees will return with much greater intensity than today. In fact the plan has never stopped and it is being used in the elections bid. But these actions will increase and a new cycle of massacres by the Israelis will happen because Sharon has nothing in his agenda but to take away the Palestinian people's rights, and the uprooting of the entire Palestinian presence if he could, and because in that standpoint they have been issuing successive threats against Lebanon and against Syria."

The Resistance is a right and a duty

"We in Lebanon say that the Resistance is a right and an obligation. We insist on this right and obligation. To those who indulge from time to time in doubtful or misleading analyses or positions on the Resistance and some of the operations it carried out, such as the latest operation, we say that as long as the land is occupied and there are prisoners and detained in Israeli jails, Lebanon will remain resistant and steadfast in its choice of the Resistance."

“ As to the timing, location, and method of launch of these operations, this is up to the leadership of the Resistance to assess the circumstances and evaluate all that pertains to the operation on the ground. We will categorically never give up our right and our resistance.”

“As to Syria, let us say it candidly that the single most serious political action in this region is the Syrian action. I am not defending only Syria. Syria could have struck deals and agreements, and the Syrian leadership could have accepted empty promises, many offers were made and the Bazaar is wide open, but Syria is acting in the direction of America, Russia, France, Great Britain, Germany, and Turkey. From the seriously deteriorating relationships with Turkey which reached the point of the threat of war to the position of containing all this tension, then to the improvement of relations with Turkey leading to the meeting, and it was not alone at that meeting, the Syrian action is a global action at all levels and in all areas to avoid the region the threat of a new war through the targeting of Iraq.”

Mr. Aridi went on to say, “As Lebanese, our interests as a regime, government, Parliament, opposition, and loyalists, more than ever lie with strengthening the Syrian-Lebanese relationship, because when Syria undertakes such an action it intends to provide more immunity and more protection for the Syrian area and the Syrian position. There is no separation between the Lebanese and Syrian situations and the Lebanese and Syrian positions, and consequently this Syrian action actually strengthens the Lebanese situation and the Lebanese position with this vision. We should read the Syrian action and work to strengthen the Syrian-Lebanese relationship, and in this context we bear two responsibilities: An internal responsibility and the responsibility of the relation with Syria. This is what we must do at the level of the relation with Syria.