Syria on the Spot

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Syria nowadays is the prime target for American accusations in Arabia primarily because of its hesitance in completely fulfilling American demands in observing the Iraqi-Syrian borders. The US believes that Arab fighters infiltrate into Iraq through the Syrian borders, and Syria hasn't been doing enough to stop the infiltrators. These fighters, according to the US, are causing so much harm to the American troops in Iraq.

For over a couple of decades, Syria had been classified by the US as one of the disobedient states that don't fully cooperate. First, it was friendly to the Soviet Union with strong military and economic cooperation. Second, it doesn't recognize Israel, and still reluctant in making serious negotiations toward the establishment of peace in the Middle East. Third, it is accused of protecting and harboring Palestinian organizations that are labeled by the US as terrorists. Fourth, its presence in Lebanon has been described by the US as an occupation, and its support for Hizb Allah, the organization that defeated Israel, as antagonistic.

There has been tension between the US and Syria; and, at certain times, military clashes occurred particularly after the defeat of the PLO in Lebanon in 1982. The US wanted the Syrian forces out of Lebanon and used marine power for this purpose. Some Syrian military posts were destroyed, and two American warplanes were downed. Although the American pressure was high, Syria could absorb it and remain in Lebanon, but under unwritten conditions such as remaining out of a certain distance from the Israeli borders.

Relations improved during the American endeavor to push the Iraqi army out of Kuwait. The Americans were in bad need for Arab allies so as to give the war an Arab flavor which might reduce the Arab anti-American feelings. In return, Syria demanded a green light to hit hard on the unfriendly Lebanese president and oust him. America conceded, and Syria sent troops to Saudi Arabia to participate in the attack against Saddam forces.

This honey moon didn't last for a long time. Soon the US discovered that Syria wasn't serious about reaching an agreement with Israel, and was opposing the Israeli-Palestinian Oslo accords. The American anger against Syria intensified during the latest war on Iraq. Syria considered the war as illegitimate and refused to furnish any kind of logistic support for the American forces.

America has been evaluating several possibilities for punishing Syria politically, economically and possibly militarily, but the warrants haven't been at hand. Measures against Syria couldn't receive the support of Arab states friendly to the US because they are in close coordination with Syria on matters of concern; and it couldn't encourage Israel to take military actions because of the dangers of an all-out war between the two countries; and Israel itself has been reluctant in carrying this action due to fears from Hizb Allah.

The murder of the Lebanese Prime Minister Rafeeq Al-Hariri provided the US a bright chance to bring Syria to its knees. Of course, the killing of al-hariri isn't a big issue for the US because it didn't show interest in other prime ministers who were murdered before; but it is a vehicle. From the very beginning, the US expressed its doubts about Syrian involvement in the killing, and hurried to the Security Council to adopt international investigation. For all nations, this is fair and reasonable.

If Syria is proved to be involved, then measures will be adopted by the international community, and most probably with the consent of Arab states like Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Even Saudi Arabia will be pushing for measures because the murdered PM was its man and carried the Saudi nationality.

The international investigation is still going on, and the latest report handed by the international investigations commissions to the Secretary General of the UN says that there are indications of Lebanese and Syrian involvement in the murder. The report doesn't condemn Syria but poses justifications for continued investigations. It is expected that the Security Council will adopt a resolution authorizing the Secretary General to pursue.

Things might cool down if Syria meets three conditions: work harder on observing its borders with Iraq, moves toward the negotiating table with Israel, take measures against Palestinian and Lebanese organizations, and adopts some democratic reforms the American way. In other words, for America to ease the grip, Syria has to be Americanized.

For Syria to ease the grip and render pressure worthless, the leadership should reconcile with its own people and all Arab peoples particularly in Greater Syria. Only free participating people can help.