



MEI MEDIA WATCH

(A Survey of Editorials)

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Ahmadinejad in Lebanon, October 2010

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[On 13 October President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad undertook a state visit to Lebanon. His first since he assumed office in 2004, the visit and his meetings with Lebanese leaders including Secretary-General of Hezbollah Hassan Nasrallah attracted considerable attention. Commentaries of various international media on this development are reproduced here. **Editor, MEI Media Watch.**]

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THE DAILY STAR

LEBANON

Beirut, Editorial Friday, 1 October 2010

1. Ahmadinejad should hear the other views

Much attention in Lebanon is beginning to focus on the visit of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad some two weeks hence, and while such tours are typically suffocated in protocol, this particular journey could offer the leader of the Islamic Republic – so pivotal to the local situation – a rare chance to build a better foundation for Iranian involvement here.

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Indeed, the ado surrounding the visit, still a fortnight away, springs precisely from the outside role that Iran plays here. Ahmadinejad's presence here, in short, carries a special resonance because Iran has long been a generous benefactor to Hezbollah and thus bears direct responsibility for Hezbollah's pre-eminent standing.

To add to the weight of the visit, this country is yet again, alas, teetering in the face of an existential threat; Iranian foreign policy is partly fuelling this existential crisis. Iran, however, has on more than one occasion demonstrated that it has only a superficial knowledge of the intricate dynamic playing out in this nation. Lebanon is a crucial theatre for the political power game playing out in the region, and Iran only knows this country based on the version given by its friends here.

Ahmadinejad and his cohorts in the top Iranian leadership surely have a regular flow of information from their allies here. Instead of meeting with those partners face to face and hearing yet again the same spin on Lebanon's reality, Ahmadinejad would be better served if he took advantage of his time in Lebanon to meet with the leaders of the groups which oppose his allies here.

The Iranian head of state does not need to make still another inflammatory speech, expounding at length on the positions of the Islamic Republic and the so-called axis of resistance which it leads; we certainly do not need to hear that speech again, even if he has never performed it here before.

Rather, Ahmadinejad has a golden opportunity to participate in an exchange of views with people who can articulate stances clashing with his own. To be honest, it would be good for the president of this country, too, to use his palace to convene Lebanese leaders representing all the major factions for an unfettered discussion. As much as we support transparency, we would prefer to be spared the rhetorical grandstanding should such a séance occur publicly; it would be better for all concerned if the debate were private.

To be sure, Ahmadinejad is not the only world leader who would benefit from sitting down and listening to his rivals. Iran, however, is not renowned for having a free and robust flow of information. It would be useful and important for its president – and for Lebanon – if he could listen to and discuss with political leaders who hold different opinions.

Source: http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&article_id=119861&categ_id=17#axzz12jqgQFKO

THE JERUSALEM POST
IPOST.com **BETA**
Israel's Best-Selling English Daily and Most-Read English Website

Editorial, 14 October 2010, Wednesday

2. Ahmadinejad's victory tour

The conquest of Lebanon, cemented by Ahmadinejad's victory tour, is a stepping stone toward Iran's declared goal of hegemony throughout the Islamic sphere and beyond.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's visit to Lebanon is no courtesy call. The Iranian president's provocation sends manifold, highly noteworthy messages to multiple regional and international recipients. This isn't a repeat of the shameful rhetoric exhibition that Teheran's autocrat stages annually at the UN General Assembly. This trip is packed with immediate practical significance.

Foremost is the contempt toward Israel. The very fact that Ahmadinejad presents himself at Israel's doorstep speaks volumes. He is emphatically thumbing his nose at Israel, while simultaneously sending a warning against any Israeli pre-emptive strike on Iranian nuclear facilities.

Ahmadinejad is in Lebanon reminding Israel that he has a formidable proxy – Hezbollah – primed for attack from bases directly adjacent to 'the Zionist entity,' and that he can deploy this proxy at will. Iran, via Syria, has armed Hezbollah to the teeth following the Second Lebanon War (in unabashed contravention of Security Council Resolution 1701) and the terrorist organization now brandishes at least 40,000 rockets aimed at Israel.

Ahmadinejad is also exclaiming, for all democracies to hear, that his is the regime that effectively calls the shots in Lebanon, in collusion with his Syrian allies.

The message unequivocally underscored for the Lebanese is that their sovereignty is now reduced to a mere façade, that Beirut is Teheran's and Damascus's abject vassal, that Ahmadinejad has legions – again Hezbollah – inside Lebanon, and that they could take it over if given segments of the fragmented Lebanese jigsaw fail to meekly acquiesce. In short, there will be hell to pay throughout Lebanon if it doesn't toe Ahmadinejad's line.

Ahmadinejad's visit, it is grimly safe to conclude, has illustrated that Lebanon's anyhow fast-waning independence has been decisively quashed. It is, quite simply, no longer a player in its own right in this part of the world.

THE LEBANESE humiliation is complete. As the special international tribunal probing former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri's 2005 assassination is poised to indict Hezbollah members for partaking in the plot, current premier Sa'ad Hariri (the assassination victim's son) is being threatened unless he can somehow forestall the tribunal. The younger Hariri must collaborate with his father's murderers – and his country's subjugators. Otherwise he can expect the same bitter fate.

Hezbollah parliamentarian Nawwaf al-Moussawi, for one, has minced no words on the issue. Any Lebanese who accepts the tribunal's indictments will be eliminated as a 'traitor' in cahoots with Israel and the US. A gun is pointed at Hariri's head: He either does as ordered, or he meets his father's bloody end. Ahmadinejad's visit cements Hariri's pitiful status.

Damascus added insult to injury last week when it issued 33 arrest warrants against some of Hariri's closest allies in his erstwhile anti-Syrian front. Hariri's impotence was exposed for the world to see.

His own faint-heartedness, irresolution and lack of direction have factored into Hariri's misfortune almost as much as the ruthlessness of the powerful extortionists to whom he has surrendered. His dishonourable submission to Hezbollah chieftain Hassan Nasrallah made it inevitable that he would suck up to Syria's Bashar Assad and now welcome Ahmadinejad as well.

If anyone deserves our sympathy as Ahmadinejad's survey of his expanding kingdom plays out, it is the many ordinary Lebanese – not necessarily only Christians – who are sick at heart as they witness the Iranian-Syrian stranglehold tightening on their country. At another sensitive juncture in Lebanon's perennially troubled history, it is saddled with a craven leader and left vulnerable to the manipulative dominance of ruthless regimes in Damascus and Teheran.

This is a particularly tragic aspect of Lebanon's demise. Hariri held extraordinary promise when he took over the reins of government in Beirut. His Western orientation, seemingly determined anti-Syrian stance and apparently principled pro-democracy rhetoric kindled the hope of real change. But rather than Lebanon extricating itself from the Axis of Evil – as much of its own citizenry fervently wishes it would – it has become a humble component of the Iranian machine.

Rather than merely observing this sovereign entity's collapse across the border, the shameful display to the north marks an opportunity for Israel to remind the international community that Ahmadinejad's Iran doesn't 'only' menace us Zionists.

The conquest of Lebanon, cemented by Ahmadinejad's victory tour, is a stepping stone toward Iran's declared goal of hegemony throughout the Islamic sphere and beyond. The consequences for the free world would be dire. For Lebanon, they already are.

Source: <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Editorials/Article.aspx?id=191301>

THE DAILY STAR

LEBANON

Beirut, Editorial, 16 October 2010, Saturday

3. On the cusp between conflict and stability

I ran's president has left, the crowds have gone home and Western journalists have moved on. So where are we?

The first thing we should realize is that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's visit was not about Lebanon – the visit was primarily about Iran and its foreign-policy objectives. Iran is

engaged in a cold war with Israel; Israeli President Shimon Peres journeyed to Iran's doorstep when he visited Azerbaijan in late June, so Ahmadinejad's sojourn to Bint Jbeil was merely quid pro quo.

In south Lebanon, Ahmadinejad wanted to bare his teeth to the Jewish state, to remind them he can play rough if the Israelis, as is their wont, do not choose to pursue peaceful resolutions. At the same time, Iran this week has already conveyed a clear message to the US and its Western allies that the Islamic Republic is ready to negotiate on its controversial nuclear program. Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki on Friday stated Iran's willingness to talk next month in Vienna about the disputed nuclear program.

In other words, our causes are not Iran's concern. To be sure, Ahmadinejad went out of his way to praise Sa'ad Hariri and Michel Suleiman, but his visit was about Iranian interests. It was not even about Hezbollah; no, the trip was a serious and effective tool to practice the Islamic Republic's international diplomacy.

Alas, we should also note, we have also this week witnessed yet again the Israeli approach to the problems of the region. By approving on Thursday night the construction of 238 more illegal settler homes in occupied East Jerusalem, Benjamin Netanyahu has added another stone to the boulder which the Israelis are attempting to fashion as a counterweight to any effort expended in the interests of a peace deal with the Palestinians.

Yes, the Israelis are continuing their tradition of taking myriad small steps to jeopardize the suspended and uninspiring direct peace talks, but the equation still contains another variable, one with the ability to overcome the pettiness of the Netanyahu Cabinet: on November 2 the US midterm elections will take place, and though a chastened Barack Obama may emerge from that contest, he will be able to dedicate more energy to the outside world. He will still have the power to move toward a deal with Iran and to force the Israelis and the Palestinians to take steps toward peace.

It appears the Iranians will meet with the P5+1 major powers sometime in early November for talks about Iran's nuclear work; with that date and the US midterm elections looming a scant few weeks ahead of us, we find ourselves about to receive very soon some crucial indications of whether the near future will offer encouraging negotiations or a descent into confrontation.

Source:

http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=17&article_id=120436

THE DAILY STAR

LEBANON

Beirut, Editorial, Thursday, 14 October 2010

4. Is Iran changing its approach?

After weeks of mounting hype, unrelenting public debates, and extensive speculation in the run-up of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's trip to Lebanon, the Iranian president's motorcade finally rolled through Beirut on Wednesday, bringing an end to the sense of anticipation for the visit that has recently almost taken over the Lebanese people's lives.

Pundits and commentators have overwhelmingly attempted to portray Ahmadinejad's visit as an affirmation of Iran's unexpected increasing influence over Lebanon. In truth, however, the visit of an Iranian president to this country – or indeed Iran's influence here – should not come as a surprise. The nexus between communities in Lebanon and Iran goes back centuries, and Iran's role today in funding the country's resistance, Hezbollah, and in assisting in its reconstruction has only deepened long-existing ties.

There is one sentiment, however, that Ahmadinejad has not often expressed when speaking of his country's relationship with Lebanon: his support for the Lebanese national project.

Yet, at a joint press conference with President Michel Suleiman Wednesday, Ahmadinejad conveyed a very different message than usual, highlighting the country's unity and, by the same token, igniting a sense of expectation that our diplomatic relationship with Tehran may be reaching a new, constructive, plateau.

Lebanese should rejoice at Ahmadinejad's words: His newly expressed posture – if it is translated into an actual foreign policy – could go a long way toward stabilizing our country. To begin with, Ahmadinejad's call for the resurrection of the Lebanese state could signal the beginning of a new age for Hezbollah's role in this country. The party has been an essential contributor to Lebanon's wellbeing, but Lebanese are eager to see Hezbollah become a full signatory of the national project of building a strong state.

As a politician the calibre of Ahmadinejad knows well, a strong state cannot come to life unless it is well-rooted in the rule of law. The Iranian president's support of the Lebanese state, we hope, will pave the way toward an official endorsement of this principle.

Most importantly, Ahmadinejad's words hint of a shift in political thinking that – if developed further – could herald an era of lasting peace in Lebanon. Too often, our weak sense of unity has made Lebanon into a battleground for competing regional powers. A strong Lebanese state would imply that it is the Lebanese authorities alone who choose the struggles we wage.

We have long anticipated Ahmadinejad's visit. But nothing compares to our eagerness to see the Iranian president confirm and reiterate his support for the bedrock of our national unity – the Lebanese state – during the rest of his stay, and after.

Source: http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=17&article_id=120352#axzz12js3bCrG



Doha, Editorial, 14 October 2010, Thursday

5. Ahmadinejad in Lebanon

Iran's president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad got a hero's welcome in Lebanon yesterday. He was showered with rice and rose petals by tens of thousands of Hezbollah supporters who lined the streets and waved Iranian flags as his motorcade made its way from the airport to the presidential palace. But rarely has this region witnessed such a huge controversy over a state visit than this one. Israel and its allies outside the region were vehemently opposed to this visit, and made all kinds of veiled threats to dissuade Lebanon from playing host to the Iranian leader, though it's perfectly within Ahmadinejad's rights to choose which country he has to visit and that of Lebanon to choose the leader it wants to receive. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said the visit would destabilize the region and inflame tensions within Lebanon.

Having said that, what does the Iranian leader hope to achieve with the current visit? It has come at a time when the region is politically charged, and also at a time when Ahmadinejad himself is not enjoying his rule in his own country with a dominant opposition trying to clip his wings. For a few hours, he might have been overjoyed at the warmth of the reception he received, something which the Iranian leader might not have received in Tehran itself. The visit will definitely boost his stocks in Lebanon and increase his credibility there. It will also strengthen Hezbollah's hands in Lebanon, which finds in the Iranian leader an ally it hasn't found before.

Lebanon is not in an ideal position to receive Ahmadinejad now. The country has a government but a weak one as differences among the disparate groups are still raw. Tensions have been mounting in recent weeks over the explosive issue of the UN tribunal investigating the 2005 assassination of Rafiq Al Hariri, the former Sunni prime minister and father of the current incumbent, Sa'ad. Expectations that the court will shortly issue indictments against members of Hezbollah have already raised the political temperature several degrees. In such a charged atmosphere, Ahmadinejad's visit should not be seen as strengthening one party at the cost of the other. Also, the region cannot afford another crisis. Iraq is still without a government and nervousness among Sunnis in Lebanon was palpable: one group publicly urged Ahmadinejad not to use Lebanon to spearhead attacks on Israel. Memories of the devastating war of 2006 are still fresh— even if Hezbollah has restocked its rocket arsenal since the last round.

Source: <http://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/the-editorial/editorial/129138-ahmadinejad-in-lebanon.html>

gulfnews.com

Dubai (UAE), Editorial, 16 October 2010, Saturday

6. Effectiveness of Ahmadinejad's visit to be tested

Lebanon can ill afford conflict in the context of UN tribunal verdict on Hariri murder

Lebanon sure breathed a sigh of relief on Thursday night as the contentious visit of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was over without incidents. For better or worse, Ahmadinejad takes controversy wherever he goes.

In tense Lebanon, there were fears that the division over his visit would even lead to security incidents. But the Lebanese were able to 'absorb' the theatrics and rhetoric of the Iranian leader. And life moves on.

But there is the political implication of the much-publicized visit. Ahmadinejad landed in Lebanon amid an escalating crisis over the United Nations-backed tribunal, set up to prosecute the suspects in the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri.

Iran's allies, led by Hezbollah, seek to scrap the court, widely expected to indict members of Hezbollah in the murder. The ruling majority, led by the prime minister and Hariri's son Sa'ad, insists that the court must be allowed to proceed and the perpetrators brought to justice.

During the visit, Lebanon and Iran signed 15 agreements involving education, trade and energy. But the Lebanese people will judge the effect of Ahmadinejad's visit, seen as a testament of support to Hezbollah, on the way the current political crisis will be handled by the political elite in the next few weeks.

Reports leaked few weeks ago suggested that Hezbollah and its allies might quit the current government to force the formation of a new, and more friendly, government that would opt to suspend cooperation with the UN court.

Analysts predict another deadly conflict if Hezbollah tries to overthrow the Hariri-led government. Ahmadinejad told his Lebanese hosts Iran was keen to see Lebanon united and strong and would not support any move that threatens its stability and the peaceful co-existence of its multi-religious communities. It is hoped that Ahmadinejad stressed that position in meeting with his allies in Lebanon.

The behaviour of Iran's allies in the next few weeks will prove if his visit was a success.

Source: <http://gulfnews.com/opinions/editorials/effectiveness-of-ahmadinejad-s-visit-to-be-tested-1.696986>



Jeddah, Editorial, 15 October 2010, Friday

7. No major event

President Ahmadinejad's Lebanon trip should be seen in an Iranian context

The two-day visit of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Lebanon has been hailed by the Iranian media as 'a major event in the Middle East' and one which 'reveals a new regional power structure'. The media outside the region have taken much the same view, at least before he arrived, although in their case there was no enthusiasm about the prospect. To the Americans and Israelis (and some Lebanese), this was an intentionally provocative visit designed to signal Iran's superpower status. Indeed, if Washington and Tel Aviv were to be believed, it was akin to a victorious overlord visiting his fiefdom and encouraging it to carry out his belligerent bidding.

Iranian hopes and Western fears are much exaggerated. Contrary to the predictions, Ahmadinejad's two-day trip is of almost no long-term consequence. He played it deftly enough, meeting Lebanon's leaders and calling for the country's unity (he could hardly do less). But the Lebanese paradigm has not shifted one iota as a result of his going there. Politically, it is no different now than before. Its unity remains as tenuous as ever.

Nor has Hezbollah's power and standing been strengthened by the visit, even if its supporters felt good about the visit and turned out en masse to cheer the Iranian president. His presence may have been a brief show of strength for a party that is a state within a state, but it changes nothing. Far more important, far more worrying for Hezbollah and far more dangerous to Lebanon's peace and stability will be the findings of the UN-backed Special Tribunal for Lebanon into the 2005 assassination of Rafiq Hariri. They are expected soon and all sides of the Lebanese divide are convinced it will indict members of Hezbollah.

As for the visit resulting in a new regional power structure that may play well on the Iranian stage but it is a fantasy. The Middle East fault lines have not changed. The Palestinians do not feel that freedom has been brought any closer. The Israelis did not shake in their boots. If this were a major event, then the assessment has purely to be on the basis of the Warhol principle — that any visit anywhere by an international political figure is a major event, for about 15 seconds.

The trip should be seen far more in an Iranian context than a Lebanese one. It provides a boost back home for a president seen to be internationally beleaguered and whose popularity is far from assured. That is its real significance - although whether it will have any effect there is questionable. As was only to be expected, the Israelis and Americans called the trip provocative. Hillary Clinton inferred that it was intended to 'destabilize or inflame tensions' in Lebanon. She too is playing to a domestic gallery and such language does nothing to help calm tensions either in Lebanon or regionally. Moreover, it is not the Americans or Israelis' prerogative to decide who can or cannot visit Lebanon. It is not acceptable that an outside power interferes in the

affairs of Lebanon or any other Arab state. That is the same whether it is Israel, the US, France, the UK or anyone else. Internal Arab problems are for the Arabs to solve. No one else.

Source: <http://arabnews.com/opinion/editorial/article161056.ece>



8. Shameful silence: Nuke-mad Iranian nut job preaches war from Lebanon and world yawns

EDITORIALS, Saturday, 16 October 2010, Saturday

The triumphalist visit to Lebanon by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was designed to deliver to the world - to Israel in particular - a message as to who fancies being in charge in the Mideast.

Ahmadinejad strutted virtually to the border between Israel and Lebanon, openly declaring his intent to annihilate the Jewish State from little more than a stone's throw away. And there was nothing empty about his threats.

The Hezbollah terror gang rallied to Ahmadinejad's side, only too happy to beat their chests with the man who bankrolls their weaponry. Trifles such as the Lebanese government's right to conduct its own relations with Israel were easily trampled.

In 2006, Iran's Hezbollah surrogates in Lebanon provoked an armed confrontation with Israel that lasted 34 days and killed 160 Israelis. Indifferent to the 1,200 Lebanese killed in the fighting, Hezbollah and Iran consider the conflict to be a big success.

So much so that, as a gross reflection of their pride, Hezbollah chief Sheik Hassan Nasrallah presented Ahmadinejad with an Israeli rifle supposedly captured in 2006 to cap off his visit.

Since the end of that conflict, Tehran has rearmed its terrorist foot soldiers generously. Hezbollah now has four times as many rockets - 45,000, it is believed, including more powerful and accurate models - as it used to.

Unless he is stopped, Ahmadinejad will soon have missiles and nuclear weaponry with which he could devastate Israel from a long distance. His point now is that he is perfectly positioned to strike at short range.

And the global community - apart from the U.S. and Israel - barely said boo about such naked, up-close-and-personal warmongering. Disgraceful, as always.

Source: http://www.nydailynews.com/opinions/2010/10/16/2010-10-16_shameful_silence.html

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