Has Saudi Arabia Decided to Put an End to the Small and Defenseless Lebanon?

Recently, Saudi Arabia and its satellites Bahrain and Kuwait have decided to expel Lebanese ambassadors amid the rising tensions between Beirut and some countries of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC). In addition, Riyadh severed economic ties with Lebanon, which looks like a deliberately malicious move aimed at pushing Lebanon into a deeper economic crisis.

Kuwait, and especially Bahrain, diligently obedient to their overlord, followed suit. If the stance of Bahrain, where the Saudi soldiers crushed the "pearl revolution" is understandable, since Riyadh still actively supports the regime of the Khalifa family now ruling there, then the position taken by Kuwait is both alarming and surprising. When Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah was in power in Kuwait, and he died in 2020 after a long stay in power, he tried and succeeded in pursuing a neutral policy towards neighboring countries in the best interest of his people. Often he would successfully extinguish conflicts in the Arab world and was even awarded the UN Peacekeeper International Prize for his outstanding feats. Apparently, times have changed now, and the ruler of Kuwait, Sheikh Nawaf al-Ahmed al-Jaber Al Sabah, is pursuing a new course.

Riyadh initially launched a series of large-scale economic strikes on Beirut to push the Lebanese government into forcing Hezbollah out of the country’s political and military scenes. Officials announced an indefinite ban on Lebanese agricultural products under the pretext of a failed attempt to smuggle 5.3 million amphetamine tablets
that were hidden in a shipment of pomegranates that was delivered to the port of Jeddah. Riyadh has banned Lebanon from importing its superb fruits and vegetables, while also closing Saudi territory for transit of Lebanese agricultural goods.

This decision caused a violent and harsh reaction in the Republic. The Lebanese newspaper As-Safir, expressing the opinion of the ruling circles, wrote, “Lebanon and the Lebanese people do not want to irritate the Saudi brothers. We want a better relationship with Saudi Arabia. We support Saudi Arabia in the fight against smuggling networks and their perpetrators.” In addition, Lebanese President Michel Aoun commented on Saudi Arabia’s ban imposed on Lebanon. “It is important for us to maintain economic cooperation with Saudi Arabia, and today we are working to clear the existing uncertainties and get back on track.” But many experts say that Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states are well aware of the fact that banning the import of Lebanese crops wouldn’t put an end to drug trafficking. This is an unfair decision in the eyes of Lebanese farmers and agricultural workers, who are surprised that a country like Saudi Arabia could make such a hasty and unwise decision against the brotherly Lebanese people. Lebanon is also concerned about the intention of other countries to follow Riyadh’s decision, as it eyes GCC member states.

It seems that a video of a popular Lebanese TV presenter that turned politician didn't just sparked a heated debate on social media platforms across the Arab world, but has also angered Saudi officials. This clip that showed George Kordahi vocally opposing the war between Saudi Arabia and the Emirates in Yemen appeared a few weeks before he became Lebanon’s minister of information. He made contradictory statements, accusing Saudi Arabia and the UAE of attacking “brotherly” Yemen, and said that the Ansarullah movement of the Houthis defends the country against aggressors and occupiers. This is true and is confirmed at least by the fact that it is not the fighters of the Ansarullah movement that invaded Saudi Arabia, it was the other way around. Moreover, Saudi military jets are regularly bombing Yemeni cities, towns and villages in the absence of any air defense systems that could put an end to this.

Kordahi’s message would spread quickly across social media platforms, given the fact that he worked with Saudi and Emirati television networks for a long time, and has until recently been a popular media figure in the media space of these two countries. Later on, to lessen the effect of his remarks, the Lebanese minister said that the interview was old, took place on August 5, and that what he said about the futility of the Yemeni war “was done out of conviction, not in defense of Yemen, but also out of love for the Saudi Arabia and the UAE.”

Lebanon is facing both the economic and political crisis, and it must be pointed out that prime minister Najib Mikati have made every effort to evade this recent aggravation that was the last thing his government needed. Mikati has officially stated that Kordahi’s remarks have nothing to do with the policies of the Lebanese government, which has a positive attitude towards Saudis. Moreover, Kordahi would seek ways to defuse tensions by saying whoever wants to paint him in anti-Saudi colors is dead wrong, as he has never attacked or insulted Riyadh. Moreover, he has described the UAE as his second home. Moreover, Mikati, in an attempt to “butter up” the Saudi moneybags and in the hope of their further financial assistance, asked for the resignation of Kordahi amid a diplomatic conflict with Saudi Arabia, Lebanese TV channel LBC has recently reported.

Many analysts believe that the actual ruler of Saudi Arabia, Prince Mohammad bin Salman, has been planning such steps against Lebanon for a long time and that Kordahi’s statements only gave the Saudis a reason to continue their punitive measures against Beirut, knowing that the country seriously affected by the crisis can no longer bear more economic pressure. Riyadh has turned its back on Lebanon since at least 2018, when it put heavy pressure on then-Prime Minister Saad Hariri to undermine Hezbollah’s influence. But the Saudis failed to weaken Hezbollah, and then they began to impose severe economic restrictions on Lebanon, while refraining from providing any financial assistance. Since then, experts say, the Saudis and their allies have been implementing a “free fall for all” tactics. In other words, they are seeking to bring the Lebanese state to complete collapse in an attempt to undermine the Hezbollah. Thus, the Kordahi situation is just one more step in the anti-Lebanese direction, the course currently pursued by the Saudi prince Mohammed.

A stark contrast to the Saudi policy of pressure, the introduction of a sanctions regime and the twisting of arms against the small and defenseless Lebanon is the peace-loving policy of Russia, which always and everywhere advocates a peaceful settlement of conflicts through negotiations and compromises. “Without any doubt, we always stand, including with regard to Lebanon, for the resolution of any conflicts through dialogue. We are in contact with almost all political forces in Lebanon and will try to do this in the future precisely in order to resolve the situation,” Vladimir Putin said at the Valdai Forum. “We cannot comment on any internal political processes that you are talking about ... Do we support the ultimatum by one of the parties? No, we do not. Do we support the position of the other side? This would mean that we take the side of one of the warring parties, and this would be counterproductive from the point of view of the possible effectiveness of our efforts at reconciliation,” he said answering the question of a Lebanese journalist. Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Russia is in contact with all political forces in
Lebanon, and stands for the settlement of the situation without bloodshed. This is how various conflicts in the countries of the world should be resolved in the 2020s.

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