

End the occupation

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When is the last time you heard about a demonstration on a university campus calling for the end of the Syrian occupation of Lebanon? How about never?

Syria has been occupying Lebanon by force of arms for more than 20 years. Its 20,000 foreign soldiers and hundreds of "intelligence officers" rule that Muslim-Christian nation with an iron fist.

No longer a democratic state - as it was for decades under joint Christian-Muslim leadership - Lebanon has become a terrorist state in which Hizbullah and other terrorist groups have a free hand to operate against Israeli and American civilians.

Syria and its surrogate terrorist groups sternly enforce the occupation with executions, assassinations, kidnappings, threats and military actions, while at the same time publicly denying that there is an occupation.

"An occupation suggests images of daily violence and hatred of the occupiers, which does not occur in Lebanon," claims an official Syrian statement.

That self-serving fabrication could have been issued by the Soviet Union when it denied it was occupying Czechoslovakia. Some occupations are enforced so ruthlessly that no public dissent or displays of hatred are tolerated.

The Syrians claim they were "invited" into Lebanon and have never been asked to leave, despite public opinion polls (which are anonymous) showing widespread opposition to their presence and improper influence on what remains of Lebanese politics.

YET THOSE who shed crocodile tears for the Palestinians - whose leaders turned down statehood and the end of occupation of Gaza and some 96% of the West Bank in 2000-2001 - remain silent over the Syrian occupation of Lebanon. Some, including the Palestinian leadership, even support it.

This should not be surprising because many of those same hypocrites also support the continuing occupation of Kurdistan by Turkey, Iraq and Syria, as well as the continuing occupation of Tibet by China.

Nor did they complain when the West Bank was occupied for nearly two decades by Jordan and the Gaza Strip by Egypt. It is not occupation they oppose; it is Israel they oppose.

They apply a double standard, singling out for condemnation only the Jewish state that offered to end its occupation in exchange for a peace that the Palestinian leadership refuses to accept so long as the Jewish state remains in existence.

Now the Syrians may have overplayed their hand. (You can always tell when an Arab state overplays its hand by whether even the French are prepared to criticize it.) The Syrian occupiers fixed the presidential election in Lebanon by forcing parliament to amend the Lebanese constitution to give the Syrian hand-picked incumbent three more years in office.

The hasty vote was arranged after Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri, who had opposed the amendment, received a late-night visit from Syrian intelligence officers who "persuaded" him to change his mind. It was an offer he couldn't refuse.

The amendment then passed by a 96-29 vote, despite the fact that 74% of Lebanese citizens wanted a new president and 84% believed that "foreign and outside parties" - namely Syria - "dictated the results of presidential elections."

Now even the United Nations has become a bit nervous over Syria's high-handedness. Syria quickly complained, arguing that any UN action - or even discussion - would constitute external interference with Lebanon's internal affairs.

This is the way Syria's deputy chief of mission put it: "The Security Council's discussion of the presidential elections of Lebanon, a sovereign, independent member state of the United Nations, constitutes an illegal intervention into the internal affairs of a state."

Talk about hutzpa. Syria, which has done nothing but interfere with Lebanon's internal affairs for 20 years, is now complaining about efforts by the UN to end Syria's occupation and restore Lebanese sovereignty.

Let those who oppose occupations work against all occupations. Selective opposition to only one occupation should have no credibility.

I have long opposed Israel's continuing occupation of the Gaza Strip and West Bank. I oppose the other occupations as well. The difference is that Israel is in the process of ending its occupation of Gaza, and has offered to end the occupation of nearly all of the West Bank in exchange for peace.

China has not offered to end its occupation of Tibet. Nor have the countries occupying

Kurdistan offered to end their occupation. And Syria has certainly not loosened its grip on Lebanon.

Yet only Israel is condemned on university campuses. Why? The answer is not one that most selective protesters would like to hear.

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