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Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center  
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## **A Tribute to Assassinated Lebanese Journalist Samir Qasir: A Brief Political Profile**

The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI)

On June 2, 2005, Lebanese journalist Samir Qasir was killed<sup>[1]</sup> when a bomb exploded in his car. Qasir, who was born in 1960 and held dual Lebanese and French citizenship, had a doctorate in contemporary history of the Middle East from the Sorbonne, and had published many essays. He was one of the founders of Lebanon's Democratic Left movement and a member of its executive council. Qasir was also a lecturer in political science at the University of St. Joseph in Beirut.

Qasir wrote for numerous newspapers, among them France's *Le Monde Diplomatique*, and was a former editor of that paper's Arabic-language edition. Since 1988, Qasir had written a regular column for the Lebanese daily *Al-Nahar*. In 2001, the Lebanese security apparatuses confiscated his passport as a penalty for writing critically of the Lebanese military and intelligence apparatuses.<sup>[2]</sup>

In his columns, Qasir set out his political positions; he became one of the most prominent opponents of Syria's control of Lebanon and one of the harshest critics of President Bashar Al-Assad's regime in Syria.

This political brief includes representative excerpts from Qasir's writings over the past year.

### **A Call for Syrian Forces to Leave Lebanon and Implement U.N.S.C. Resolution 1559**

Qasir frequently criticized Syria's control of Lebanon and called for the implementation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1559. In a November 5, 2004 interview with the Kuwaiti daily *Al-Siyassa*, Qasir said: "If Resolution 1559 is a drawn sword, it is a sword drawn against Syria, not Lebanon. All we, as Lebanese, can do is to support this resolution, because we want sovereignty and independence for our country. If the Americans want to exploit this for other aims, that's their problem. We, as Lebanese, cannot be against this resolution, and we cannot be repelled by it, because all its sections intersect with previous U.N. and Arab League resolutions, and are compatible with the Taif Agreement. This resolution has come to be part of the international legitimacy that has been the refuge of Lebanon, Syria, and other countries."<sup>[3]</sup>

In his columns, Qasir protested against the extension of Lebanese President Emil Lahoud's term of office, which, he said, typified the Syrian regime's irrationality. On October 22, 2004 he wrote: "The world remains the same since the extension of [President Lahoud's] term. Some think that he [Lahoud] has made a tremendous achievement by not vacating his seat; this is the problem, and, moreover, this is the tragedy.

"But even though it is awful, this is a small tragedy in comparison with [the tragedy] whose reverberations are reaching us from Damascus – since it is clear that an atmosphere of irrationality that has no comparison in modern Syrian history prevails there...

"How did the Syrian regime that inherited the principles of political realism come to such recklessness? Of course, when Syria's foreign minister reaches the point of [attributing] such little value to the Security Council, one can no longer be amazed at the loss of direction... However, Minister Farouq Al-Shara' is not everything in Syria – or at least, so it is to be hoped – and the search should continue for the reasons why the Ba'th regime is persisting in not dealing realistically and pragmatically with the new international reality ...

"The Syrian regime's tardiness in adapting to the reality that is renewing itself all around it reflects a structural flaw. Therefore, it is logical for the Syrian leadership to ignore Resolution 1559, and to violate it less than 24 hours after it was passed, by extending the term of the Lebanese president.... Enough time has passed to realize that Damascus will not change its ways, and that it persists in marching confidently toward the abyss." [4]

In his January 3, 2005 column, Qasir argued that Syria's insistence on extending Lahoud's term was a tactical mistake that contributed more to Lebanon's freedom than the Lebanese opposition's activity did: "The regime's mistake, which was handed down by Hafez Al-Assad [to his son Bashar], of insisting on extending the concluding term of the Lebanese president, did more for Lebanon's freedom than what many opposition demonstrations have done... Of course, this doesn't mean that the opposition's efforts were meaningless. On the contrary: at the end of the year, the opposition can congratulate itself on how it functioned in the battle that the Ba'th wanted to be the battle of the 'breaking of bones [of the opposition],' but in the end, [the Ba'th] was forced to break all the rules of the game..."

"Although the remaining Ba'thists and their supporters in Lebanon do not notice it, they are at the end of their days. Everything around us – the international policy, the opposition that is passing test after test, the public debate on what will happen to Lebanon after the end of the Syrian guardianship – attests that in the months to come there will be a significant change in Lebanese national life." [5]

In a September 10, 2004 column, Qasir called on Arab League Secretary Amr Moussa to resign because of his opposition to the implementation of Resolution 1559: "When a respected diplomat such as Amr Moussa reaches the point where he expresses his 'amazement' at the Security Council's call to respect Lebanese sovereignty and to withdraw non-Lebanese troops from its land, he abandons diplomacy for political propaganda. When the owner of a Egyptian school for diplomacy [alluding to Amr Moussa] expresses amazement at Security Council intervention in Lebanon's and Syria's affairs, while saying nothing about the daily Syrian intervention in Lebanese affairs in general, nor about the fact that this intervention reached its height in forcing an extension of President [Lahoud's] term, he has abandoned all reason – not to mention his Egyptian leadership perception, which we thought he was acting to promote... The secretary should either resign or be silent..." [6]

In another column following the assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Al-Hariri, Qasir stated that the concept of Lebanon and Syria sharing a single destiny was a lie: "The pan-Arab problem lies today in being rid of the terrorist and revolutionary regimes and in the restoration of the people's freedom, as a prelude to the new Arab revival. Thousands of free residents walked at Rafiq Al-Hariri's funeral, while at the funeral of Hafez Al-Assad, a few years earlier, there were only convoys [of people] bussed in by the sole party [the Ba'th] and its intelligence apparatus... This is the clearest proof of the end of the lie regarding the 'unity in path and destiny' [of Lebanon and Syria] – the lie that says that tyranny is the armor of Arabism." [7]

### **Syria is Responsible for Al-Hariri's Assassination**

In his columns, Qasir stated that Syria was responsible for Al-Hariri's assassination. On February 25, 2005 he wrote that all attempts to prove that the Ba'th regime in Damascus is innocent of Rafiq Al-Hariri's blood are futile. [8]

One month later he wrote: "It has become certain that the Ba'th regime's control of Lebanese politics is a thing of the past. Even if we assume that the Syrian regime has managed to convince the world that it is clean of Rafiq Al-Hariri's blood, the vocal popular protest against [this] crime makes it possible to blame the remaining Ba'thists for suppressing public freedoms in Lebanon, and for leaving political life and the lives of politicians under constant threat of the guillotine – [the threat] that began with the assassination of Kamal Jumblatt, through the arrest of Samir Ga'ga', the murder of Salim Al-Louzi, Sheikh Hassan Khaled, Mahdi 'Amel, Hussein Muruwa, and many others." [9]

### **Bashar Al-Assad is a Dictator; His Regime Represses Freedom of Speech and Thwarts Reform**

Qasir also criticized how Bashar Al-Assad ruled Syria. In an April 8, 2005 article, he censured statements made by Al-Assad in a Turkish TV interview: "Bashar Al-Assad said... that he doesn't care if the Americans call him a dictator, and that he isn't bothered by such an accusation unless it comes from the Syrian people. Perhaps 'the Internet fan' [i.e. Bashar Al-Assad] hasn't been paying attention to the Syrian websites, which might have told him that the Syrian people has been under house

arrest and emergency law for over 40 years.

"He also said that he did not come to power via a military coup. True. He did not carry out a military coup. He settled for inheriting the regime of a coup... [In the interview, Assad also said]: 'Had it not been for external interventions, we would be making greater strides in the reform process.' The truth is that the response to a claim like this can only be the 'model' of Lebanese reform, which [could] only make strides in its process [of reform]... via 'external intervention,' with its call to implement Resolution 1559, and [with the help of] internal pressures. This story has a continuation – in Syria ." [10]

In his final column, Qasir argued that the Syrian security apparatuses were repressing freedom of speech and thwarting the reform process [in Syria]: "The foreign journalists who stream to Damascus in advance of the Ba'th Party convention will certainly find that many things have changed in Syria in comparison to the era of Hafez Al-Assad – particularly in the area of freedom of expression..."

"But after all the years [since Bashar Al-Assad came to power], it does not interest anyone who has been following the news from Syria that the number of political detainees is much lower than a decade ago. Halfway through 2005, it interests him that this number is again rising because this is willed by the present rulers, headed Bashar Al-Assad, who refuses to begin a national dialogue with the opposition, and to reconcile with [Syrian] society.

"Note how Bashar Al-Assad's regime shut down the Jamal Al-Atassi forum, and arrested its chairman and board.... This forum is the only forum left from among those that were flourishing in 2000 and were closed down, one by one, by the security apparatuses... The recent arrests indicate that as far as the Ba'thists are concerned, reforms do not include accepting the opinions of opposition members." [11]

Qasir made similar observations in another column: "If the news is true that Nabras Fadel, one of the presidential advisors whose name is associated with reforms, left Syria out of fear for his life, it means that the end has not yet come for Syrian exile..." [12]

Qasir even expressed support for demonstrators at a March 8, 2004 demonstration organized by opposition groups in Syria . In response to statements by the current Syrian Information Minister Mahdi Dakhllallah, at the time editor of the Syrian government daily Al-Ba'th, that only 30 people attended the demonstration, Qasir wrote: "This demonstration, which was not a mass [demonstration], will nevertheless remain an important event. The 30 [participants] whom [Dakhllallah] disparages – and who apparently numbered around 100 – seem to pose a difficult and unusual problem for the regime in Damascus .

"If the Syrian regime does nothing, the Syrian street will emerge from its sense of fear, and the gates of the strikes and demonstrations will slowly open... If, [on the other hand,] the regime attacks this fresh move with repression, arrests, and defamation, it will [by doing so] announce to the entire world that it has no plans to change anything in how it rules, and it will expose itself to subsequent external pressure." [13]

### **The Syrian Regime Encourages Volunteers to Fight the U.S. In Iraq**

In an October 1, 2004 column, Qasir claimed that the Syrian regime was reaching out to Islamists in Syria and Lebanon so as to encourage the fighting in Iraq: "[We will not] mention again the tremendous paradox of the Syrian regime, which fought the Muslim Brotherhood group with an aggression that reached its height with the destruction of entire neighborhoods in the city of Hama in 1982, and which, two decades later, seeks to reach out to Syrian and Lebanese Islamists... in order to spend time uselessly in Iraq..."

"The preachers of Sunni Islam should be ashamed..." [14]

### **The U.S. Supported Syria 's Control of Lebanon for 28 Years**

In his columns, Qasir also criticized the U.S. for backing the Syrian regime for over two decades: "The Syrian military intervention [in Lebanon ] would not have taken place in 1976 had it not been for the green light from Washington during the era of the Kissinger policy. That green light was given again several times later, including in 1990 during the era of George Bush Sr. and his Secretary of State, James Baker. The U.S. backing continued for 28 years – except for two years during the

era of Ronald Reagan – and it was only one of the supports of the Syrian regime in Lebanon . The other support was, and remains, a large part of Lebanon 's political echelon." [15]

### **Hizbullah's Khomeinism is No Less Dark than Bin Laden's Wahhabism**

Qasir was harshly critical of Hizbullah in his columns following a statement by Hizbullah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah about the Baghdad and Karbala suicide attacks that were carried out during the Ashura day in 2004. After Nasrallah called the perpetrators of the attacks "a fanatical, dark, fossilized group that lives in the Middle Ages," Qasir wrote: "With regard to darkness, fossilization, and living in the Middle Ages, [it should be stressed that] anyone condemning this phenomenon must be willing to reexamine in depth his own party's path and ideology.

"When you meet someone whose darkness is greater than yours, it does not in any way mean that you have [suddenly] become a symbol of enlightened thought. The truth is that the source of the authority on which Nasrallah and his party rely are no less dark, no less fossilized, and cling no less to the Middle Ages. Perhaps Khomeini was a little more pragmatic than bin Laden, but he was without a doubt no less dark, and no less fossilized, than the Wahhabism on which the Al-Qa'ida organization and similar streams are based.

"Moreover, it can be said that despite all the jurisprudential and factional disagreement between Khomeinism and Wahhabism, they have many more ideological points in common than differences...

"It is true that years ago, under Nasrallah's leadership, Hizbullah abandoned the method of suicide operations. But he is connected to the first ideological-political milieu in modern Arab history to employ the suicide method, even if its pretext at the time was resistance against the U.S. , France , or [the legitimacy of] resistance to Israel .

"Similarly, Hizbullah is still closely connected to two groups – Hamas and Islamic Jihad – that have made suicide the symbol of their activity, and it broadcasts propaganda in their favor every day on its Al-Manar TV channel...

"[This] is the culture of violence that has begun to take over the way of the struggle, and Hizbullah was and remains the greatest influence in spreading it." [16]

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[1] The London daily Al-Hayat has a page paying "Homage to Samir Kassir." To read the series of articles, visit [http://english.daralhayat.com/arab\\_news/06-2005/Article-20050611-6b06f5a3-c0a8-10ed-00d4-1f0581cd0352/story.html](http://english.daralhayat.com/arab_news/06-2005/Article-20050611-6b06f5a3-c0a8-10ed-00d4-1f0581cd0352/story.html) .

[2] Al-Sharq Al-Awsat ( London ), June 3, 2005 .

[3] Al-Siyassa ( Kuwait ), November 5, 2004 .

[4] Al-Nahar ( Lebanon ), October 22, 2004 .

[5] Al-Nahar ( Lebanon ), December 31, 2004 .

[6] Al-Nahar ( Lebanon ), September 10, 2004 .

[7] Al-Nahar ( Lebanon ), February 18, 2005 .

[8] Al-Nahar ( Lebanon ), February 25, 2005 .

[9] Al-Nahar ( Lebanon ), March 25, 2005 .

[10] Al-Nahar ( Lebanon ), April 8, 2005 .

[11] Al-Nahar ( Lebanon ), May 27, 2005.

[12] Al-Nahar ( Lebanon ), April 22, 2005 .

[13] Al-Nahar ( Lebanon ), March 12, 2004 .

[14] Al-Nahar ( Lebanon ), October 1, 2004 .

[15] Al-Nahar ( Lebanon ), December 12, 2004 .

[16] Al-Nahar ( Lebanon ), M

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