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The Syrian-Israeli courtship

Tariq al-Homayed

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<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=2&id=25954> ^[1]

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Article Author(s): Tariq al-Homayed

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Confirming what was exclusively reported by Asharq al-Awsat last Friday, the Syrian regime announced the day before yesterday its formal recognition of the Palestinian state. It comes as one of the last Arab states to grant this recognition, and state number 118 internationally. So why has the Syrian regime recognized the Palestinian state now?

A senior source said: The reasons are clear; this is a Syrian-Israeli courtship. Damascus's recognition of the Palestinian state today means it has officially acknowledged the 1967 borders, thus acknowledging that Israel has the right to the rest of the occupied territories. Of course, this means that the Syrian objection towards the Camp David Accords, signed between the late Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israel, has now come to an end. [This objection] cost the Arabs dearly in terms of inter-Arab disputes, largely because of Syrian incitement. The Syrian regime, under the weight of an unprecedented popular uprising, is doing today what Saddam Hussein did when he occupied Kuwait, where Saddam gave Iran all he had fought with it for, over eight years, with the stroke of a pen. Today, it seems like the regime in Damascus is ready to do the same thing by sending a sincere message to Israel!

Another official, well-informed on the issue of the Palestinian cause and Syria, believes that the Syrian recognition of the Palestinian state today means that the al-Assad regime may give up the idea of custody over the Levant, i.e. Lebanon and Palestine, especially as Damascus also previously prevented Lebanon from recognizing the Palestinian state. The Syrian recognition also indicates that the al-Assad regime has decided to stand with Mahmoud Abbas's project, namely the Palestinian state, and not with the vision of the Hamas leader Khaled Mishal. It also means that the al-Assad regime has abandoned the idea of a linked peace settlement in the negotiations, between the Syrians, the Palestinians and the Israelis, a matter which the Syrian regime previously fought for at length, through the corruption of every step of the negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis, even through dividing the

Palestinian ranks and deepening the divisions, in the framework of a battle between moderation and opposition, waged by Damascus. In reality it was a battle between the Arabism camp and the axis of Iran, i.e. Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas.

We must be aware that the Syrian recognition of the Palestinian state likewise means that the Damascus regime has abandoned its excessive enthusiasm to overthrow the Arab peace initiative, proposed by King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz in 2002. Syria previously sought every opportunity to demand the withdrawal of this initiative, yet here is Damascus now accepting its most important feature, namely the 1967 borders!

All of the above must be taken within the context of President al-Assad's cousin Rami Makhlouf's comments to the New York Times newspaper, in the first days of the Syrian uprising, when he said that there would be no stability in Israel unless there is stability in Syria, not to mention the other comments from Syrian officials at the beginning of the Syrian uprising, stating that Damascus was ready for the peace process.

Thus the Syrian regime, by recognizing the Palestinian state, is courting Israel by saying: I'm ready for peace. The main objective of course is to stay in power, despite the Syrian uprising which has been ongoing for nearly 5 months, and despite all the bloodshed and suppression of the Syrian people.

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