

Former Lebanese Minister Sejaan Azzi: We Don't Want War with Israel

by Hugh Fitzgerald



In an interview on a Lebanese television station, a former minister, Sejaan Azzi, recently declared that Lebanon did not want war with Israel, and was against anyone in the country who did.

At [MEMRI.org](https://www.memri.org), there is a summary of his remarks, followed by a partial transcript:

In an interview aired on LBC TV (Lebanon) on May 26, 2020, former Lebanese Minister Sejaan Azzi said that Lebanon does not want war with Israel or anyone else. He said that Lebanon must complete negotiations with Israel in order to achieve secure borders and to make sure the Lebanese army is the only military force in the country. Azzi also said that he is against anyone who wants to wage war with Israel, and that

Lebanon has paid a steep price while having helped the Palestinians since 1948. He added that Lebanon cannot withstand another war against Israel, and he asked why it should fight against Israel while the other Arab countries and even the Palestinians are making peace and negotiating with Israel.

Sejaan Azzi: "I believe that Lebanon has done its share in the Arab-Israeli conflict and in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Today, we do not want war with Israel or with anyone else. We want the Lebanese state to complete the negotiations, in order to secure the borders, and so that there will be no force on the ground except for the Lebanese army. If anyone wants to wage war against Israel – I'm against him, not because I support Israel, but because I... Enough! Since 1948 and to this day, we have paid a steep price. We have liberated our land, we have helped the Palestinians, we suffered wars because of the militarized Palestinian presence [in Lebanon]... Today, we cannot cope with a plan to liberate [the entire territory of] Israel. This plan should be the burden of all the Arab countries together, with the Palestinian people at the forefront. At a time when the Palestinians are making peace with Israel, are present in Israel, and are negotiating with Israel – even [the Palestinians] in Gaza – and at a time when the Arab countries have called it quits regarding wars, and engaged in peace plans, why am I [supposed to fight]?"

What Sejaan Azzi leaves unstated, but what his audience would clearly have understood, is his opposition to Hezbollah, the terror group in Lebanon that most emphatically does want war, when it deems the time is right, with Israel. Hezbollah dragged Lebanon into a catastrophic conflict with Israel in 2006, resulting in billions of dollars of destruction to the country's infrastructure. Millions of Lebanese have not forgotten that, and like Sejaan Azzi, do not want to repeat the experience.

Azzi mentions that Lebanon had done its share in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It hosted hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees after 1948, many of them continue to live in squalid camps. The PLO established its presence in Lebanon, and in the Lebanese civil war, Palestinians were responsible for murderous attacks on Christian Lebanese, as in the massacre of 583 Maronites at Damour. When Palestinian operatives in Lebanon conducted raids into Israel, Israel staged retaliatory attacks on Lebanese villages to encourage the Lebanese people to themselves deal with the fedayeen. After an Israeli airline was machine-gunned at Athens Airport, Israel raided the Beirut International Airport in retaliation, destroying 13 civilian aircraft. Israel also staged raids in Beirut to assassinate PLO terrorists, and to drive the PLO leaders out of Lebanon altogether.

Sejaan Azzi summarizes all that Lebanon has done for the Palestinians: "Since 1948 and to this day, we have paid a steep price. We have liberated our land, we have helped the Palestinians, we suffered wars because of the militarized Palestinian presence [in Lebanon]." The wars he has in mind are the Muslim-Christian civil war, which was provoked by the largely-Muslim PLO against the Maronites, the war of Israel against the PLO, which included a seven-week siege of Beirut, with much destruction of property – at least 500 buildings were completely razed, and the deaths of thousands of civilians. Then there was the 2006 Hezbollah-Israel war, where Hezbollah had deliberately dispersed its armory in civilian areas, and Israel's attempts to locate and destroy that armory resulted in great destruction.

And ever since its 2006 war with Israel, Hezbollah has continued to prepare for another war. It has accumulated 140,000 missiles from Iran, and continues to hide them in civilian areas across southern and even central Lebanon. At great expense, it has built huge terror tunnels, all of which – so far – are believed to have been discovered and destroyed

by Israel. Hezbollah claims to be a “national resistance” movement defending against Israel, but it is Hezbollah’s attacks that provoke Israeli retaliation. The Lebanese now see Hezbollah as a puppet of Iran, doing the Islamic Republic’s bidding in conflicts that have nothing to do with a Lebanese “national resistance.” Most telling has been the way that Hezbollah, at Iran’s command, sent tens of thousands of its fighters to Syria to support the Assad regime in a war that had nothing to do with Lebanon.

Azzi makes one claim that misstates the situation. He asks (in his interview on May 20) that “at a time when the Palestinians are making peace with Israel, are present in Israel, and are negotiating with Israel – even [the Palestinians] in Gaza – and at a time when the Arab countries have called it quits regarding wars, and engaged in peace plans, why am I [supposed to fight]?”

It is not true that the “Palestinians are making peace with Israel.” Mahmoud Abbas has claimed that in response to Israel’s planned annexation of the Jordan Valley and the settlements in Judea and Samaria (a/k/a the “West Bank”) all agreements with Israel have been torn up. There are no Palestinian negotiators currently “making peace” with Israel, and there have not been for many years. The last time there were serious negotiations was in 2008, when Ehud Olmert offered Abbas a near-total Israeli withdrawal from the entire West Bank and Israel relinquishing control of Jerusalem’s Old City. Abbas turned Olmert down, and walked out. Perhaps what Azzi means is that there is currently a cold peace between Israel and the Palestinians, and a disinclination by the latter to go to war with the former. His point about the other Arabs is well-taken: “at a time when the Arab countries have called it quits regarding wars, and engaged in peace plans,” why should Sejaan Azzi fight? Certainly no Arab state now shows an interest in war with Israel. Three of the most important and influential Arab states – Saudi Arabia, the UAE,

and Egypt – are engaged in security cooperation with Israel, and their leaders do not even bother to hide it. For all three countries share with Israel a deep alarm about Iran, and share hostility as well toward the Muslim Brotherhood. General el-Sisi announces on *60 Minutes* that he is engaged in such cooperation; Crown Prince Muhammad declares that Israel “has a right to its own land”; the Foreign Minister of the UAE has been shown on video supporting Israel’s “right” to bomb targets in Syria. And while pro-forma statements against Israeli annexation of part of the West Bank have been made by Arab states, privately a half-dozen of them agree with the Saudi Crown Prince who, fed up with the complaints of Mahmoud Abbas, angrily told him to “accept whatever deal” he is offered by the Americans. These states – Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, Oman, Bahrain – have shown by word (muted approval of the Trump Plan), or by deed (having their ambassadors attend the rollout of the Trump Plan), that they support Trump’s Deal of the Century.

Azzi surely speaks for many Lebanese who have a perfectly understandable desire not to be dragged into any further conflicts with Israel. The Palestinian presence has brought them nothing but woe: the Muslim-Christian conflict erupted, thanks to the PLO, into full-scale civil war; the seven-week siege, and bombing, of Beirut by Israel, in its attempt to force the PLO to surrender; the reduction to rubble of much of southern Lebanon during the Hezbollah-Israel war of 2006. Hezbollah continues to claim that it is the only legitimate “national resistance” despite so obviously doing Iran’s bidding in Syria, and in preventing the Lebanese National Army from assuming its rightful role as the sole guardian of the state. As Sejaan Azzi says, if the Arab countries “have called it quits regarding wars, and [now] engaged in peace plans,” why should he, or any other Lebanese, be dragged into fighting Israel by the likes of Hassan Nasrallah, fulfilling what his boss, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, tells him to do?

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