

Exiled ex-Syrian VP gets life over Hariri - w/Documentary Video

Contributed by AP, AFP, IHT
Sunday, 31 August 2008
Last Updated Sunday, 31 August 2008

Syrian ex-vice president condemns life jail term

Former Syrian VP sentenced to hard labour: lawyer
Sunday, August 31, 2008

DAMASCUS: A military court in Damascus has sentenced former Syrian vice president turned opposition leader Abdel Halim Khaddam to hard labour for life, his lawyer said on Saturday. "Judge Mohammed Kaddour Assad of the Damascus first military criminal court has handed Abdel Halim Khaddam 13 sentences, including hard labour for life," lawyer Hossam Eddine Al Habash said. Khaddam, who resigned as Syria's vice president in 2005 to join the opposition and now lives in Paris, is accused of "slandering the Syrian leadership and lying before an international tribunal regarding the killing of former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri," according to the charge sheet. afp

Exiled ex-Syrian VP gets life over Hariri
Sun, 31 Aug 2008 07:53:41 GMT

Ex-Syrian vice president, Abdel-Halim Khaddam

A criminal court in Damascus has sentenced the former Syrian vice-president, Abdel-Halim Khaddam, to life in prison with hard labor.

Khaddam has been found guilty of lying to UN investigators about the assassination of Lebanon's former prime minister Rafik Hariri.

The verdict was issued in absentia as Khaddam currently resides in France in self-imposed exile, having fled Syria in 2005.

The lawyer who brought the case to court, Hussameddine Habash, noted that it is the first attempt by the Syrian government to summon Khaddam to court through different means, including cooperation with Interpol, the international police organization.

If Khaddam returns to Syria and surrenders to police, the court verdict will be revoked and he will be tried once again.

The former vice president accused Syria's President Bashar Assad of having threatened former Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri, before he was assassinated in a February 2005 bombing. Syria's government has denied having any role in the killing, which is being investigated by a UN commission.

The full charges brought against the former vice president include false testimony against the Syrian government regarding the assassination of Hariri, plotting to overthrow Syria's government, contacting the Israeli regime and encouraging foreign countries to invade Syria.

The first UN team to probe the death of Hariri and 22 others in a massive explosion in Beirut on February 14, 2005, German Detlev Mehlis, implicated Syrian officials.

Damascus has strongly denied any connection with Hariri's death.

HSH/CW/BGH

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=68047§ionid=351020206>

Syrian dissident convicted of lying about Hariri

The Associated Press
Saturday, August 30, 2008

DAMASCUS, Syria: A self-exiled former vice president of Syria has been found guilty by a military court of lying to U.N.

officials investigating the assassination of Lebanon's former prime minister, a lawyer said Saturday.

Former Vice President Abdul-Halim Khaddam, who left the country in 2005, has accused Syria's president of having threatened former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri before he was assassinated in a February 2005 bombing. Syria's government has denied having any role in the killing, which is being investigated by a U.N. commission.

From his home in France, Khaddam has also called for the Syrian government's overthrow.

The lawyer who brought the case against Khaddam said the First Military Criminal Court convicted him in absentia on Aug. 17 of giving false testimony against the Syrian government to U.N. officials investigating Hariri's killing.

Khaddam was convicted of a dozen charges in total and sentenced to life in prison and hard labor, said the lawyer, Hussameddine Habash.

Among the other charges, Khaddam was found guilty of conspiring with a foreign country to carry out "aggression against Syria," Habash said, without elaborating. Khaddam was also convicted of having contacts with Israelis because of an interview he gave to an Israeli journalist.

Having contacts with Israelis is punishable by 100 years in jail in Syria, which has fought three wars with Israel.

Syrian authorities will ask Interpol to arrest and extradite Khaddam, Habash said.

The verdict comes two months after authorities ordered the seizure of Khaddam's assets.

Khaddam traveled to France in 2005, ostensibly to publish a book, but never returned to Syria.

Khaddam was Syria's top official in Lebanon and a member of the ruling Baath party's regional command, its most influential body, for nearly 30 years. But he lost favor in ruling circles after President Bashar Assad took power upon the death of his father, Hafez, in 2000.

In an interview aired on Al-Arabiya TV, the former vice president accused Assad of directly threatening Hariri before his killing.

In another case, a Syrian military court in April 2006 convicted Khaddam of plotting to seize power and trying to incite a foreign attack against Syria.

The Syrian parliament has also demanded he be tried on charges of high treason.

<http://www.iht.com/bin/printfriendly.php?id=15754489>

Syrian ex-vice president condemns life jail term
7 hours ago

PARIS (AFP) — Syrian ex-vice president Abdel Halim Khaddam said Sunday a life jail term issued against him for "treason" is proof the Damascus government is transforming the country into a prison for its people.

"This verdict does not worry me or affect my determination," the former senior official turned opposition figure, who now lives in exile in Paris, said in a statement sent to AFP by his office.

The sentence of life in prison with hard labour showed "the isolation of the Syrian regime, which is transforming the country into a huge prison and increasing its repression of the people," the statement said.

A Syrian lawyer close to the prosecution Hossam Eddine Habash said on Saturday that a military tribunal held in Damascus had on August 17 sentenced Khaddam, 73, to hard labour for life on 13 charges, including high treason.

Khaddam, who was one of the key figures of the "old guard" Baath party which held power in Syria, resigned in June 2005 to become a Paris-based opposition leader.

According to the charge sheet, Khaddam had been accused of "conspiracy to unlawfully seize political power" and of having "illegitimate links with the Zionist enemy, undermining the prestige of the state and of national sentiment and worst of all, plotting with a foreign country to launch an aggression against Syria."

Khaddam founded the Syrian National Salvation Front, an opposition coalition group which includes the Syrian Muslim

Brotherhood.

<http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5hh8btImUCyQ9NrtYCJdn-APyAh8w>

Future TV Al Mustaqbel - Abdel Halim KHADDAM-27-8-06- SYRIA
{google}-4445331300637969650{/google}

The Syrian former Vice President Abdel Halim Khaddam Nov 19, 2006
{google}2100274773840720642{/google}

Abd al halim khaddam 05/04/2008

Al Isti7kak - Khaddam talks about Imad Mughniyeh's assassination and Il'gha2 war
{youtube}iH8PH_Ax2lw{/youtube}

Khaddam's Revelations: Is the Asad Regime Unraveling?

By Robert Rabil
January 6, 2006

Abdul Halim Khaddam, who was vice-president of Syria from 1984 to June 2005, gave an explosive interview to the Dubai-based al-Arabia TV on December 30 implicating the Syrian leadership, including President Bashar al-Asad, in the assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri. Khaddam's action widened irrevocably the crack in Syria's political system.

Khaddam and the Hariri Case

Khaddam's allegations went far beyond anything the UN investigation into the murder of Hariri has been able to establish. The former vice president revealed that the Syrian leadership had harshly threatened Hariri before his death; that the former Syrian chief of intelligence in Lebanon, Rustom Ghazaleh, had acted as the absolute ruler in that country; that only an apparatus with strong infrastructure could have carried out the assassination; and that no security apparatus could have taken the decision unilaterally.

Immediately after the interview, the UN investigation commission renewed its request to interview Asad and Foreign Minister Farouk Sharaa, giving Syria a deadline of January 10 to respond. Damascus approved the commission's request to interview Sharaa but has not given its final word regarding the interview with Asad, which it initially rejected. Syrian parliamentarian Faysal Kalthoum insisted, "This request must not contradict the constitutional and legal rules surrounding the dignity of the presidency, the symbol of sovereignty and national unity." This could signal that Asad may agree to an interview so long as he could claim that Syrian sovereignty was not violated.

Sidelining Hafiz al-Asad's Old Guard

Khaddam's testimony tears apart the facade of regime solidarity the Syrian leadership has been careful to project. The Syrian parliament and the ruling Baath Party therefore responded with great fury. Parliament voted unanimously to charge Khaddam with treason and accused him of corruption, and the Baath Party expelled the former vice president for betraying his country.

Bashar al-Asad has recently consolidated his power by appointing loyalists in sensitive positions and retiring senior officials. The Baath Party regional congress in June 2005 saw the retirement of high-ranking officials who helped create the country's political system under Bashar's father, Hafiz al-Asad, including the defense minister, Mustafa Tlas; two vice presidents, Zuheir Mashariqa and Khaddam; and the assistant secretary-general of the Baath Party, Abdullah al-Ahmar. Meanwhile, Bashar narrowed the base of his regime to the most trusted, mainly Alawi officials. The sheer magnitude of the change pointed to a bargain whereby the interests of the old guard would be protected in exchange of their departure.

The manner with which the regime operated by silencing potential opposition and ignoring former senior officials engendered a deep personal animus toward Bashar al-Asad among those like Khaddam who considered themselves pillars of the political system. Against this background came the death -- reportedly, the assassination -- of Ghazi Kenaan, the interior minister, in October 2005 and the Khaddam interview.

By giving the interview, Khaddam jeopardized the lavish lifestyle he could have had in Syria. Presumably, a mixture of reasons led him to speak out against the regime: his friendship with the murdered Hariri; his ambition to once again play a role in Syrian politics; and most importantly, a personal antipathy toward Bashar, who has not only ignored Khaddam's advice but also was ungrateful to the vice president's efforts to smooth the younger Asad's transition of power. Taken together, these two incidents, Kenaan's death and Khaddam's statement, show that the Syrian leadership is split over the direction Asad is taking Syrian politics. Apparently, the old guard, who served Hafiz al-Asad, have become disillusioned with the new guard of Bashar al-Asad's regime. In his interview, Khaddam spared no harsh words against Ghazaleh and Sharaa. Though he denounced Sharaa's diplomatic blunders, he squarely placed the blame on Ghazaleh for creating the anti-Syrian conditions that preceded the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon and accused him of corruption. Following the assassination of Hariri, Khaddam said he advised Asad in a meeting on February 28 to "cut the neck of the criminal Ghazaleh." But Asad kept Ghazaleh and even rewarded him.

The Fraying Regime

There are several indications that Khaddam's turn heralds a fraying of the Asad regime:

- 1) He set off a chain reaction of charges, further undermining the legitimacy of the regime. Ali Sadr al-Din al-Bianouni, head of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, said, "Khaddam's testimony will break up the power monopoly of the regime." Some members of parliament, mainly independents, began renewing their calls for investigations into official corruption. Khaddam is expected to appear on the al-Jazeera to defend himself and accuse others of corruption. There are ample targets from which he may choose; some of Asad's close relatives, such as the Makhlufs, are notorious for corruption.
- 2) The delicate confessional balance within the regime has been disrupted. Hafiz al-Asad was careful to cultivate Sunni alliances and appoint Sunnis to important posts across the political system, while real control remained in the hands of an informal power structure led by Alawi security officials. Bashar al-Asad has narrowed the base of his regime mainly to close, trusted Alawi officials, cutting out the key Sunnis with whom his father allied, especially Khaddam and the former defense minister, Mustafa Tlas. The regime recently closed the influential forum run by the Sunni Atassi family. (One of Khaddam's sons is married to a member of the Atassi family.)
- 3) Given his past stature in the Hafiz al-Asad regime, Khaddam may find some former senior officials ready to collaborate with him. It is rumored that Khaddam is coordinating with former chief of staff Hikmat Shihabi, who is in Paris. It is no idle speculation that disgruntled Alawi officials may rally around Khaddam. In this case, Khaddam may approach former chief of military intelligence Ali Douba, who is also currently in Paris. Khaddam may even contact Rifat al-Asad, Bashar's uncle, who has been exiled by the regime. This potentially emerging nexus between former senior Sunni and Alawi officials could strengthen itself by attracting alienated Alawis in Syria. For example, Khaddam's wife and daughter-in-law are from the influential Alawi al-Kheir Bek clan. Similarly, it is reported that the family of Gazi Kenaan, from the powerful Alawi al-Kalbiyyah tribe, is mortified by the ill treatment they received at the hands of the regime. It is noteworthy that Kenaan's son is married to the daughter of Bashar al-Asad's uncle Jamil, who has been at odds with his late brother and nephew. According to unconfirmed reports, Munther al-Asad, son of Jamil, was recently arrested in Lebanon at the request of the Syrian regime.

All of this shows that the fabric of the Syrian regime is fraying.

Prospects

Bashar al-Asad could regroup and survive. Cooperating with the UN investigation would matter to the international community, but that is not the key issue now. More important for Asad would be opening the state to influences outside his narrow circle. The most effective step would be to appoint a powerful Sunni as prime minister to oversee genuine reforms. However, Asad's record suggests that he is unlikely to opt for such a course.

Robert Rabil, an adjunct scholar of The Washington Institute, is an assistant professor and director of graduate studies in the Department of Political Science at Florida Atlantic University. He is the author of *Embattled Neighbors: Syria, Israel and Lebanon* (Lynne Rienner, 2003) and of the forthcoming *Syria, the United States and the War on Terror in the Middle East* (Praeger, 2006).

Former Syrian Vice President Fingers Assad

Syria's former Vice President Abdul Halim Khaddam went on Dubai's Al Arabiya TV in Paris where he kicked the crap out of his former boss Bashar Assad and called him out as the lying murderous scumbag that he is.

BEIRUT: Syrian President Bashar Assad directly threatened former Lebanese Premier Rafik Hariri months before the latter's assassination, it was revealed Friday night in a devastatingly frank interview by a former Syrian vice president.

In a wide-ranging discussion with Al-Arabiyya Television in Paris, Abdel-Halim Khaddam added that Lebanon's President Emile Lahoud and Jamil al-Sayyed, former head of the Surete Generale, had "incited" Assad against Hariri.

"I will crush anyone who tries to oppose our decisions," Assad told Hariri during a meeting August 20, 2004 in Damascus, Khaddam told the Dubai-based Al-Arabiyya. "Hariri's nose started to bleed after this meeting," he added.

Khaddam said that it was "impossible that any apparatus in Syria could have taken a unilateral decision to murder Hariri," without Assad's prior approval. "The campaigns launched by Lahoud and Sayyed were immense and Assad was greatly influenced by them," he added.

Asked if there were any specific parties in Damascus or in Lebanon that threatened Hariri, Khaddam said: "Yes, there were many threats."

Pressed on whether they were "death threats," Khaddam replied: "When the Chief of the Intelligence apparatus in Lebanon (Rustom Ghazaleh) speaks with his guests while playing with his gun ... a lot of threatening words were used against Hariri" during one of the occasions when he was summoned to Damascus [the August 2004 meeting].

"I heard about this meeting from three sources. I heard it from Ghazi Kenaan [former Syrian Interior Minister], President Bashar Assad and the late Hariri," said Khaddam.

"Hariri was on the receiving end of some very vicious words. I knew about that from [President Bashar Assad], he told me of the conversation," the former vice president said.

"I told [Assad] you are talking to a prime minister in front of Ghazaleh ... How can you say such things in front of junior officers?" Khaddam continued.

Khaddam said Ghazaleh acted as if he was "the absolute ruler of Lebanon. He insulted senior Lebanese officials such as Hariri, Speaker Nabih Berri and Druze leader Walid Jumblatt on many occasions."

The Baath Party booted Khaddam from its ranks. Syria's "parliament" charged him with treason.

In other news, Bashar Assad's cousin was just arrested at Beirut's international airport on unrelated murder charges.

What a lovely regime that country has.

Posted by Michael J. Totten at January 2, 2006 7:04 AM

Abdul Halim Khaddam (Arabic: 9(/ 'D-DJE ./E&Irm;; born 15 September 1932 in Baniyas) is a Syrian politician and former Vice President of Syria.

Contents

Early life and career

Abdul Halim Khaddam was born on 15 September 1932 in Baniyas, Syria, Abdul Halim was one of the few Sunni Muslims to make it to the top of the Alawite-dominated Syrian leadership, Khaddam was long known as a loyalist of Hafez al-Assad, and held a strong position within the regime. He served as foreign minister of Syria from 1970 to 1984 and as Vice President of Syria from 1984 to 2005. He was interim President of Syria from June 10 to July 17, 2000, between the death of Hafez and the election of his son, Bashar al-Assad, as the new President. At the time, there were rumours in Damascus that Khaddam would try to seize power.

Resignation

As the new President strengthened his grip on the Baathist bureaucracy, Khaddam, and other members of the "old guard" of the regime, gradually lost influence. He announced his resignation on 6 June 2005, during the Ba'th Party Conference. That made him one of the last influential members of the "old guard" to leave the top tier of the regime. The

announcement came at a point when his political wings had already been clipped, but still the most powerful Sunni member in an Alawi Shi'ite regime. After resigning, he relocated to Paris, France, ostensibly to write his memoirs[1].

In an interview with Al Arabiya network from Paris, France, on December 30, 2005 Khaddam denounced Assad's many "political blunders" in dealing with Lebanon. Khaddam himself, along with Rafik Hariri and Walid Jumblatt, was a principal actor in the corruption that plagued Lebanon in the post-war era. He especially attacked Rustom Ghazali, former head of Syrian operations in Lebanon, and defended his predecessor Ghazi Kanaan - Syria's Interior Minister, who is believed to have committed suicide, or assassinated in October 2005. Khaddam also said that former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri, to whom Khaddam was considered close, "received many threats" from Syria's President Bashar al-Assad. The assassination of al-Hariri in February 2005 triggered the massive protests that eventually ended the 30-year long Syrian military presence in Lebanon.

Exile

The Syrian parliament responded the next day by voting to bring treason charges against him, and the Baath Party expelled him. Following the Khaddam interview, the UN Commission headed by Detlev Mehlis investigating the al-Hariri murder said it had asked the Syrian authorities to question Bashar al-Assad and Syria's Foreign Minister Faruq al-Sharaa. According to the Lebanese Daily Star newspaper, the Commission has interviewed Khaddam on January 5, 2006.

On 14 January Khaddam announced that he was forming a 'government in exile', predicting the end of al-Assad's government by the end of year 2006. His accusations against al-Assad and his inner circle regarding the al-Hariri murder also grew more explicit: Khaddam said he believed that al-Assad ordered al-Hariri's assassination.

Khaddam is the highest ranking Syrian official to have publicly cut his ties with the Syrian government, with the possible exception of Rifaat al-Assad, brother of former President Hafez al-Assad, who was exiled in 1983, following an attempted coup d'état. Khaddam leads the opposition group NSF (National Salvation Front) that promises to bring down the government of Bashar Assad peacefully. The NSF had its last meeting on September 16, 2007 in Berlin, where some 140 opposition figures attended. On Feb 16th, 2008, he accused the Syrian government of assassinating a top Hezbollah fugitive "for Israels sake." [2]

External links

- Political biography at "Middle East Intelligence Bulletin", February 2000
- Ex-Syrian VP denounces government: report (Reuters) accessed on December 30, 2005
- Hariri threatened by Syria head BBC, December 30, 2005
- Former Syrian VP says Assad was involved in Hariri's death Haaretz, December 31, 2005
- Syria party kicks out 'traitor' BBC, January 1, 2006
- UN asks to meet Syrian president, BBC, January 2, 2006
- The Fox Speaks - Sami M. Moubayed in Al-Ahram Weekly
- Former Syrian VP set to form government in exile, Haaretz, January 15, 2006