

## Bush blames Assad for Lebanese crisis as March 14 envoys plan trek to Cairo

Contributed by Daily Star staff  
Wednesday, 05 March 2008

BEIRUT: US President George W. Bush accused Syrian President Bashar Assad on Tuesday of blocking the election of a new head of state in Lebanon.

Bush blames Assad for Lebanese crisis as March 14 envoys plan trek to Cairo  
By Hussein Abdallah  
Daily Star staff  
Wednesday, March 05, 2008

BEIRUT: US President George W. Bush accused Syrian President Bashar Assad on Tuesday of blocking the election of a new head of state in Lebanon and impeding the success of the country's government. "I am extremely disappointed that the Syrian leader continues to make it harder for the Lebanese government to succeed," Bush said. "I really don't appreciate the fact that they've made it hard for this government to elect a president."

Also Tuesday, visiting EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana said Tuesday that the EU backs the three-point Arab plan to end the Lebanese impasse.

"We back the Arab initiative and we will try our best to find a solution to the crisis ahead of the upcoming Arab summit," Solana said after meeting Speaker Nabih Berri.

After the talks with the speaker, Solana also met with Premier Fouad Siniora, renewing renewed the EU's support for Siniora's government.

Solana dismissed the notion that a civil war might erupt in the country, but stressed the need to solve all tensions on the Lebanese political scene. However, he did not explicitly blame any parties for the deadlock.

He added the deployment of the US warship the USS Cole off "is not indicative of anything."

Amid reports saying former President Amin Gemayel, parliamentary majority leader Saad HaririSaad-Hariri-Profile Sep-07 , and opposition Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) leader Michel Aoun will head to Cairo in the coming days for a meeting with Arab League chief Amr Moussa, Gemayel said such a meeting was unnecessary in the absence of true will to end the crisis in Lebanon.

"The Lebanese are fed up of painkillers. We must find a serious solution," Gemayel said.

Ahead of a meeting with Saudi King Abdullah on Tuesday, Gemayel said Saudi Arabia has always extended its hand to help Lebanon overcome hard times.

"We will not forget Saudi Arabia has placed deposits at the central bank, while the opposition was and still is paralyzing the country's economy," he said.

Representatives from the pro-government March 14 coalition and the opposition headed to Cairo ahead of an Arab foreign ministers' meeting on Wednesday that is supposed to make the necessary preparations for the upcoming Arab summit, scheduled for March 29-30 in Damascus.

Siniora on Tuesday contacted the Egyptian and Saudi foreign ministers and discussed the latest developments ahead of the meeting in Cairo.

The March 14 delegation is expected to present to the Arab ministers a list of its demands.

The pro-government daily Al-Mustaqbal said March 14 MPs will submit a report to the Arab ministers, accusing the Syrian regime of blocking solutions to Lebanon's crisis.

Moussa and Berri are said to have discussed "new ideas" to settle the crisis during a phone conversation on Monday.

Resigned Health Minister Mohammad Khalifeh, a member of Berri's parliamentary bloc, is also expected to meet Moussa

in Cairo on Wednesday.

Well-informed sources said Hariri has sent MP Bassem Sabaa to meet Moussa on his behalf.

FPM MP Ibrahim Kanaan told The Daily Star Tuesday that no arrangements had been made so far for Aoun to visit Cairo.

Kanaan said there will be no progress in talks between the ruling coalition and the opposition as long as the ruling coalition is rejecting all opposition proposals without suggesting alternative solutions.

"The Arab initiative is made up of three points. It has been there for more than a month and yet the pro-government forces have not made up their mind on two main items of the initiative and those are the government make-up and the new electoral law," he said. "We said we want the 10+10+10 formula for the next Cabinet. They rejected that without presenting an alternative."

"We proposed adopting the 1960 electoral law for the 2009 parliamentary elections. They rejected that without proposing an alternative electoral law.

"It is clear that they never were serious about anything. They are just wasting time. They want presidential vacuum to persist in order to keep the country in the hands of the Siniora government," Kanaan added.

Lebanese Forces boss Samir Geagea said Tuesday that Lebanon should not participate in the Damascus summit unless a new president is elected.

Syria has not yet delivered invitations to the summit for Lebanon or Saudi Arabia.

Geagea said the Damascus summit will not produce any solutions for Lebanon.

"Arab parties have approached Syria repeatedly, asking it to facilitate the election of a new president in Lebanon, But Syria has not responded to any of the Arab requests," he said.

A number of Arab leaders are expected to boycott the summit if Lebanon's crisis remains unsolved. - With agencies

-----For Immediate Release

Office of the Press Secretary  
March 4, 2008

President Bush Meets with His Majesty King Abdullah of Jordan  
Oval Office

Video (Windows)  
Presidential Remarks  
Audio

11:47 A.M. EST

PRESIDENT BUSH: And of course we talked about Lebanon. We strongly -- I strongly support Prime Minister Siniora and the March 14th coalition. I strongly condemn Syrian interference in the Lebanese political process. It is -- I am extremely disappointed that the Syrian leader continues to make it hard for the Siniora government to succeed, and I really don't appreciate the fact that they've made it hard for this government to elect a President. We had diplomatic success in the past, when the U.N. Security Council passed a resolution seeing to it that Syria left this young democracy, to be able to grow on its own -- and now here they are once again interfering inside the politics of this country.

And so, yes, we discussed the subject.

KING ABDULLAH: And all I can add to that, on the issue of Lebanon is how we discussed the role of Arab countries, and how we can be effective in supporting the process in Lebanon, so that as quickly as possible a government is formed which will enable them to take (inaudible).

PRESIDENT BUSH: Thank you all very much. We've got to go have lunch with our wives.

END 12:00 P.M. EST