

Edelman: U.S. Wants Closer Military Cooperation with Lebanon

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U.S. Defense Official Meets Lebanese Leaders

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A senior U.S. defense official said that his government wants to strengthen military cooperation with Lebanon.

Visiting U.S. Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Eric Edelman "stressed the United States' commitment to enhancing the LAF's (Lebanese armed forces) capabilities," the U.S. embassy said.

"The United States will continue to support the government of Lebanon and the LAF as they continued to safeguard the peace, unity and sovereignty of Lebanon," a statement added.

Edelman had met earlier with newly elected President Michel Suleiman, Prime Minister-designate Fouad Saniora, caretaker Defense Minister Elias Murr, acting army chief Maj. Gen. Shawki al-Masri and parliamentary majority leader Saad Hariri.

The statement said they continued discussions of plans to strengthen the bilateral defense relationship.

Since 2006, Washington has committed more than 371 million dollars in security assistance to Lebanon.

Edelman's visit comes as Saniora works to form a government of national unity and bring an end to 18 months of political feuding that burst into deadly violence earlier in May and took the country to the brink of a new civil war.

After mediation by Qatar, the opposing sides agreed to put their weapons aside and work toward national unity.

Asked whether Washington would continue its support for the government if politicians from the Syrian- and Iranian-backed Hizbullah were included, Edelman said only that future ministers "will represent the Lebanese people." (AFP)

Beirut, 01 Jun 08, 08:54

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U.S. Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Ambassador Eric S. Edelman held talks with Lebanese officials on plans to strengthen the bilateral defense relations, a U.S. embassy statement said.

Edelman held separate meetings with President Michel Suleiman, Prime Minister-designate Fouad Saniora, Minister of Defense Elias Murr, Acting Lebanese Armed Forces Commander Major General Shawki Al-Masri, and Parliamentary Majority Leader Saad Hariri.

Edelman's talks, according to the embassy statement, focused on "plans to strengthen the U.S.-Lebanon bilateral defense relationship."

Since 2006, the United States has committed over \$371 million in security assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), and the United States will continue to provide equipment and training to the LAF, the statement said.

Part of this assistance is modern body armor and helmets which were delivered to the LAF during Edelman's visit, the statement added.

In his meetings, Edelman stressed the United States' commitment to enhancing the LAF's capabilities, it concluded.

Beirut, 31 May 08, 18:05

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