

Assassination of Syrian general seen as revenge

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LONDON — A leading military adviser to Syrian President Bashar Assad has been assassinated, opposition sources said. Newspaper reports here on Aug. 3 and 4 said the reports had been confirmed.

Gen. Mohammed Suleiman was said to have been shot dead on Aug. 1 in the Syrian port city of Tartous. Suleiman was identified as Assad's liaison with the Iranian-sponsored Hizbullah.

"It was believed to have been an attack by Hizbullah to avenge the assassination of Imad Mughniyeh," a Syrian opposition source said.

The source said Hizbullah has determined that Assad's brother-in-law, Assaf Chawkat, ordered the assassination of Mughniyeh in February 2008. Chawkat, whose plans to overthrow Assad was frustrated by Mughniyeh, has been dismissed and placed under house arrest.

The opposition movement Free Syria was the first to report the assassination of Suleiman. On Aug. 2, Free Syria said Suleiman was killed by an unidentified sniper along the Tartous beach late the previous night.

On Aug. 3, the London-based Al Hayat reported the death of an unidentified senior army officer close to Bashar. The newspaper said the officer dealt with "sensitive files."

As liaison to Hizbullah, Suleiman was said to have facilitated arms shipments from Iran to Lebanon. Suleiman, trained in the former Soviet Union in weapons development, was also said to have been Assad's leading military adviser on Lebanon as well as Syrian military modernization.

On Aug. 4, the London-based A-Sharq Al Awsat quoted a Syrian source that confirmed Suleiman's death. The source said the killing marked a harsh blow to the Assad regime. For his part, Assad has been meeting Iranian leaders in Teheran.

Opposition sources said the Assad regime was trying to suppress news of the assassination. They said the general was buried on Aug. 3 in his hometown of Driekesh. Suleiman, sought by the United Nations in the investigation of the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, has long been associated with the Assad regime. He was said to have been close to Bashar's brother, Basel, killed in a mysterious car crash in 1994. Basel had been regarded as the successor to his father, the late President Hafez Assad, who died in 2000.

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