

Welch: Hizbullah Keeping its Arms Because it Lacks Persuasion Techniques

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U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Welch said he believed that Hizbullah is strong only because it has arms, adding that the Shiite group's other capabilities were limited.

Welch also told Asharq al-Awsat newspaper on Wednesday that he believes Hizbullah is not stronger than before and that it is a group similar to other parties in the country, expect that it carries weapons.

He said the Lebanese rejected the use of arms against the people after the events of May 6 when Hizbullah gunmen and al-Mustaqbal partisans clashed in Beirut and other areas.

The party is clinging to its weapons because it is not capable of persuading the Lebanese into accepting its cause, Welch told the daily.

Welch said it was not possible for Hizbullah and Lebanon to attack and defeat Israel.

He also described as unfortunate the prisoner swap deal between Hizbullah and Israel last month when the Jewish state released Samir Qantar and other Lebanese prisoners in return for the bodies of two Israeli soldiers kidnapped by the Shiite group in 2006.

About a decision by President Michel Suleiman and his Syrian counterpart Bashar Assad to establish diplomatic ties, Welch said that such an agreement should also pave the way for a greater movement of people and goods and a common understanding on economic issues.

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<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&7D03C94647D65199C22574A5003A3DCA>