

Al-Moallem: Border control with Lebanon 'not possible' now

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Damascus - Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem said that border control with Lebanon was 'not possible' for the time being, though diplomatic relations can be achieved before the end of 2008, al-Sharq al-Awsat newspaper reported on Wednesday.

'We cannot control the common border,' al-Moallem told the pan-Arab daily, adding that border control requires demarcation of the Lebanon-Syria border and reaching a security agreement.

Al-Moallem, pointed to the continuous smuggling 'from and to Lebanon' but refuted the idea that Syria is helping Hezbollah with the arms, saying that Hezbollah 'does not need that.'

The Syrian foreign minister said diplomatic relations can be resumed before the end of this year and that exchanging ambassadors is also possible.

Lebanon and Syria agreed last month to establish diplomatic relations during a meeting in Damascus between Lebanese President Michel Suleiman and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

It was the first top-level meeting between Lebanon and Syria since the February 2005 car bomb assassination of former Lebanese premier Rafiq Hariri, which triggered the pullout of Syrian forces later that year from Lebanon.

Al-Moallem's remarks were published as an unnamed US official is quoted by the pan-Arab daily al-Hayat as warning Syria against 'using the latest spree of bomb attacks in Damascus and Tripoli as pretext for Syrian intervention in Lebanese affairs.'

The senior US State Department official said that world powers have warned Syria against sending forces to Lebanon. 'The international community has made it clear to Syria that it cannot send its forces into Lebanon,' the official was quoted by al-Hayat as saying.

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