

Cabinet Crisis Put the Breaks on U.S.-Syrian Relations

Contributed by Naharnet
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U.S. and French officials agreed that the crisis over a Cabinet lineup has put the breaks on relations between Washington and Damascus.

A senior U.S. official told the daily An-Nahar that Washington "will not dispatch any senior official to Syria as long as Syrian behavior in Lebanon remains the same."

The official stressed that a visit to Beirut by U.S. Special envoy to the Mideast George Mitchell and his meeting with President Michel Suleiman were a "message" to both the Lebanese and Syrians that Washington continues to support Suleiman as well as legitimate Lebanese institutions.

He believed that if Syria wanted to resolve the "obstacle" facing Cabinet formation "it is able to do so quickly."

The official said the same obstacles that impeded efforts by PM-designate Saad Hariri to form a government "are still there and have perhaps increased."

Meanwhile, well-informed sources told the daily Asharq al-Awsat that relations between Washington and Syria have returned to a stalemate, stressing that "no serious breakthrough toward full normalization has been achieved between the two sides."

They said failure by Mitchell to visit Damascus "reflects a state of alienation."

The French sources stressed that the main reason for the dispute was Lebanon.

They also believed there is Iranian-Syrian "rivalry" over influence in Lebanon, adding that Damascus is seeking to avoid the increasing Iranian influence on the Lebanese situation, at the same time, it does not want Iraq to fall under the influence of Tehran.

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<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&534C7DCAB29788D6C2257635003AA6D8>