

# Hezbollah's Coup in Lebanon Targets Cedars Revolution

Contributed by Walid Phares  
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Last week, Hezbollah overthrew the Lebanese government. The constitutional coup, which effectively strips Prime Minister Saad Hariri of his powers, was timed with precision. As soon as news broke that he would meet President Obama in Washington, the group brought down Lebanon's cabinet. Hariri's father, Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, was blown up along with his escort and a number of other Lebanese politicians almost exactly six years earlier, on February 14, 2005.

Hezbollah's latest political maneuver, along with its strategic re-arming over the past six years, has dangerous ramifications for Lebanon, and U.S. and Western interests in the Levant. But perhaps more imminent are the threats Hezbollah now directs against the United Nations Special Tribunal for Lebanon, formed to investigate and charge the perpetrators of the country's own Valentine's Day massacre.

Hours after the government collapsed, Hezbollah ally and former minister of parliament Wi'am Wahhab told Orange TV—an outlet owned by another Hezbollah ally, General Michel Aoun—that "we buried the Special Tribunal in 2011. It is a gang of Zionists which we've stopped." Wahhab also warned any Lebanese official against cooperating with the U.N. agencies, "or else."

In the wake of the Hariri killing in 2005, tens of thousands of Lebanese citizens took to the streets to protest what they saw as Syrian- and Iranian-sponsored terrorism, despite heavy Baathist occupation since 1976 and the menace of Hezbollah since 1982. The demonstrations, gathering Christian, Sunni and Druze citizens in addition to a few anti-Hezbollah Shiites, peaked in what was coined as the Cedar Revolution on March 14 of that year, which brought 1.5 million protesters into downtown Beirut, from a total population of only 4 million.

It was the greatest democratic march in the history of the Arab Middle East. As a result of this street referendum, the United States, France and the United Nations ordered Syrian troops to withdraw under the terms of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1559, which Washington had introduced in September 2004 at the request of Lebanese Diaspora leaders. Assad pulled out his troops quickly in April, but Hezbollah kept its militia intact.

A "March 14 coalition" of politicians rose to represent the Cedars Revolution and won the first post-Syrian-withdrawal legislative elections. It collected a strong majority in the Parliament, but it perpetrated two lethal mistakes. One, it didn't oust the pro-Syrian president and speaker of the previous assembly as Tunisian masses did last week with Bin Ali. Thus the pro-Syrian elements remained in the bureaucracy and the military, slowing the Cedars Revolution. Two, the naïve March 14 politicians invited Hezbollah—even though as a minority faction in Parliament—to join the cabinet, before it surrenders its weapons.

Between July 2005 and May 2008, Hezbollah waged an urban terror campaign against the Cedar Revolution and the government it had formed after winning Lebanon's legislative elections. The Lebanese were living a Prague Spring-like hiatus between receding Syrian oppression and the Hezbollah suppression that ultimately plunged the country back into chaos.

During those years, Hezbollah and its pro-Syrian allies murdered lawmakers, journalists, activists, Lebanese Army officers and civilians, and in July 2006 started a ruinous war with Israel. Iranian and Syrian masters instructed their Hezbollah henchmen to take back the country and crush the Cedars Revolution, but above all, to achieve one goal at any price: keep them out of the investigation of the Hariri assassination.

The United Nations formed its Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) to investigate Hariri's murder by a Security Council resolution in 2006. After four years, the STL has pinned the killing on members of Hezbollah and possibly the Syrian security services. Indicting Hezbollah could lead to international measures and sanctions against the Iranian-backed network, depriving Tehran of its most efficient tool of terror, and pressuring its cells from Iraq, Yemen, Egypt and West Africa all the way to Latin America. As Rep. Sue Myrick (R-NC) of the House Intelligence Committee claims, Hezbollah has significant operations as far away as Mexico, on the U.S. southern border.

By charging Hezbollah, the STL could make it much harder for Iran to keep Hezbollah in motion. The stakes are high, so for months, Tehran and Damascus have been planning to take down Lebanon's government.

Commentators on Hezbollah's al-Manar TV and in the pro-Syrian daily al-Akhbar have often threatened to do away with

the Hariri cabinet. The group's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, has delivered speech after speech threatening terrible reprisals if the Lebanese government "dares collaborating with the STL."

Hezbollah ultimately made its move at a highly symbolic moment: on the eve of Hariri's meeting with President Obama to seek Washington's support for justice in his father's killing. Hezbollah's March 8 coalition resigned from Lebanon's unity cabinet, depriving it of a majority.

In Lebanon today, a democratic government faces political sabotage and the threat of worse from Hezbollah, Syria and Iran. The Cedar Revolution, which cost Rafiq Hariri his life, is under the terrorists' knife. At its discretion, Hezbollah can kill hundreds of its political opponents, and reignite a devastating war with Israel.

The United States is obligated to support those brave Lebanese who marched for democracy, freedom and justice in 2005. This is a test of President Obama's will to stand by the weak and oppressed in the Middle East and beyond.

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