

Lebanon's Fate in Hezbollah's Hands

Contributed by Ryan Mauro
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Hezbollah has collapsed Lebanon's government and has issued an ultimatum to Prime Minister Saad Hariri: Withdraw support for the U.N. Special Tribunal or be replaced. The terrorist group is fearful of the repercussions it faces from its impending indictment for killing former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and is holding Lebanon hostage.

The U.N. Special Tribunal has issued its sealed indictment that is believed to accuse high-level members of Hezbollah of carrying out the 2005 assassination, including the cousin of Imad Mughniyeh. One report suggests that the tribunal will state that Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamanei ordered the murder and the Syrian regime was complicit in it. It will be six to ten weeks before arrest warrants are issued, but Hezbollah and its Iranian and Syrian sponsors are taking pre-emptive action.

Hezbollah withdrew from the government, bringing about its collapse and is demanding that Hariri no longer be prime minister. To form the next government, a bloc must have at least 65 members of parliament supporting it. Hezbollah currently has 57 and Hariri has 60 but Druze leader Walid Jumblatt has announced his support for Hezbollah, potentially tipping the balance in favor of the Shiite terrorist group.

His support for Hezbollah can be owed a desire to be on the winning side. He used to be fiercely anti-Hezbollah and a major opponent of Syria and Iran, but changed his tune in 2008 after Hezbollah made him a "hostage" in Beirut when clashes erupted. "Tell Sayeed Hassan Nasrallah I lost the battle and he wins. So let's sit and talk to reach a compromise. All that I ask is your protection," he said.

Jumblatt originally supported the U.N. tribunal but now says his "party will stand firm in support of Syria and the resistance [Hezbollah]." His other statements show that his position is based in a fear of Hezbollah. He said supporting Hariri for prime minister would have "catastrophic consequences" because "Hariri's regional and international backers only resort to statements, while his opponents turn to all manners of military and popular pressure."

Prime Minister Hariri now faces a predicament. His refusal to back down could cause Hezbollah to seize the country and engulf Lebanon in civil conflict. Already, grenades have been thrown at the offices of a Christian-led party aligned with Hezbollah and other acts of violence have happened. In 2008, Hezbollah took over half the country when the Lebanese government tried to dismantle its communication network and remove one of its spies as the security chief of the Beirut airport. Last week, the group practiced taking over Beirut and nearby airports and harbors.

Hariri is giving signals that he is willing to cave. "Any drop of blood that falls from any Lebanese citizen is more important to me than any post," he said. He has shown a willingness to embrace his enemies in the past. He has accused Syria of killing his father, but that has not stopped him from meeting with Bashar Assad and Hezbollah and declaring that a "new phase in our relations" with Syria had begun. An earlier report claimed that Hariri told Assad that he proclaim Hezbollah's innocence and would accuse an outside country of framing the group, an obvious reference to Israel.

The aggressive action by Hezbollah shows its tremendous strength in Lebanon, but it is also a sign of panic. The group has had its funding from Iran cut by 40 percent and an indictment for killing Hariri will discredit Hezbollah's propaganda that it is a "resistance" force. It will be exposed as a terrorist group that murders its political opponents and acts as a proxy of tyrannical foreign powers. Sheikh Nasrallah's boast that he is so at ease that he's sleeping an extra hour every night is an obvious exaggeration meant to sooth the anxiety of his supporters.

This is why Hezbollah is working so hard to discredit the tribunal. Nasrallah has held a press conference where he accused Israel of killing Hariri, showing footage allegedly from Israeli drones spying on his travel routes shortly before the attack. Nasrallah also claimed that a Lebanese spy for Israel has confessed to conducting surveillance on the site where it took place. The Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps has paid \$1 million to an author to write a book making the case that Israel carried out the assassination with an American missile. The anti-Israeli and anti-American propaganda machine is going into overdrive to save Hezbollah from the blowback it faces for killing the popular prime minister.

Joe Bains, the president of the World Council of the Cedars Revolution, told FrontPage that Hezbollah has political weaknesses that can be exploited.

“The last two elections in Lebanon have demonstrated that the majority of Lebanese do not support Hezbollah and its mafia-style politics. Hezbollah can only control Lebanon if the U.N. Security Council fails to enforce Resolution 1559,” he said.

If Hariri is able to hold onto power and the U.N. Special Tribunal indicts Hezbollah, another dilemma arises of how to act on the arrest warrants. The group has been vocal about its determination to violently resist any action against it and the 2008 clashes showed the Lebanese government does not have the power to defeat it. No outside countries are willing to deploy their soldiers to Lebanon and fight a guerilla war against Hezbollah.

Hezbollah will replace Hariri and control the Lebanese government, force Hariri into submission or will militarily seize the capital. Whichever way the crisis unfolds, Lebanon seems certain to be absorbed into the Iranian-Syrian-Hezbollah axis without outside intervention.

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