

Assad threatened to “destroy” Lebanon: Lebanese MP

Contributed by Asharq Al-Awsat
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Witness tells international tribunal that Syrian president threatened Hariri to secure a longer term for Lebanese counterpart

Beirut, Asharq Al-Awsat—Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad told Rafik Hariri that he would “destroy Lebanon” if Hariri opposed the extension of Lebanese President Emile Lahoud’s term in office in 2004, Lebanese MP Marwan Hamadeh said on Wednesday during his testimony before the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL).

Hariri, who served twice as Lebanon’s prime minister, was assassinated in early 2005 shortly after leaving office for the last time. The STL, an international criminal tribunal with UN backing, was established in 2007 to prosecute those accused of carrying out the killing.

The revelation came during a hearing before The Hague on Wednesday, as Hamadeh testified on Hariri’s assassination for the third day in a row. The testimony covered a meeting which Hariri had with Druze leader Walid Jumblatt on August 26, 2004, following a visit to Assad in Damascus.

According to the MP, Assad also threatened Jumblatt, who heads the Lebanese Progressive Socialist Party. He said both politicians were “betting on who will be killed first.”

“And if you try to object, I will break Lebanon on your head and on Walid Jumblatt’s head,” Hamadeh the court, quoting Assad’s words to Hariri.

During the visit, which lasted for ten minutes, Assad did not invite Hariri to sit and told him that it was Damascus’ decision to determine who the president of Lebanon will be, Hamadeh told the court.

“You think you can impose a new president on Lebanon. You are mistaken because it is we who can decide, not France or the US,” Hamadeh claimed Assad told Hariri.

After the meeting, Hariri left the presidential palace in Damascus to Beirut where he first met Jumblatt and the witness.

Several politicians in Lebanon maintain that Assad pressured Hariri and other officials to make the country’s parliament approve an exceptional law mandating the extension of Lahoud’s term for three additional years.

The controversial ruling was passed in September 3, 2004, sparking tensions among lawmakers.

Jumblatt advised Hariri to resign from his post as the prime minister and leave Lebanon in order to avoid threats from Assad, Hamadeh said. “Jumblatt was convinced that Hariri was unwanted by Damascus.”