

The significance of the meeting between Rice and Siniora

Contributed by Administrator
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The one and a half hour meeting between the Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice has a great significance.

Shortly before meeting Siniora, Rice met with the new French President Nicolas Sarkozy and urged him to support and strengthen the position of the Lebanese government and its head since it came as a result of a democratic process and represents legitimacy in Lebanon. Rice also called upon Sarkozy and his foreign minister Bernard Kouchner to take a clear stand on the side of the March 14 forces, and avoid playing the role of the mediator who stands at an equal distance from the various Lebanese parties.

The US administration which followed the policies of former French President Jacques Chirac with regard to Lebanon and Syria, particularly after it adopted Security Council Resolution 1559, wanted to make sure of the nature of the new French direction in Lebanon. Ever since he came to power, Sarkozy stressed that he supported the majority in Lebanon. This has been clear during his meeting with the head of the Future Trend, deputy Saad al-Hariri, shortly before the end of Chirac's term in the presidency. Sarkozy never announced that he changed his policy toward Lebanon but always insisted on the country's sovereignty and independence.

However, the meeting called by Kouchner to gather all Lebanese parties in France gave cause for concern to the American side which came to believe that the French foreign ministry has gone back on its backing of the majority particularly as the French foreign minister received general Michel Aoun twice and invited Hezbollah to take part in the meeting under preparation. Nevertheless, France stresses that there is no change in its policy toward Lebanon. It backs the democratic forces in Lebanon and the Siniora government. The proof of this is that Sarkozy received Siniora and the ministerial delegation that accompanied him in the Elysee Palace.

The support given to Siniora at this stage by such international parties as the United States and France is very important because the fall of the Siniora government would mean the fall of democracy in Lebanon and its failure to regain full sovereignty while Syrian and Iranian interventions remain on the political and security arena. In this regard the most important thing said by the Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal, during his meeting with the foreign press in Paris, expediting the establishment of the international court is necessary because it is the only way to protect Lebanon from assassinations. He added that the role of the investigations committee is essential for Lebanon because that body can expose those involved in the various crimes seen by that country which has become open to various battlefronts.

The Lebanese army deserves to be hailed as it is fighting against forces that have been exported to Lebanon to destabilize it. The army also needs tangible support and equipment from all countries that want to defend democracy, legitimacy and sovereignty. For words are not enough in the face of crimes and terrorist operations. What is required is the sending of equipment and support in deeds.

In her talks with French officials, Rice also dwelled negatively on the positions of President Emile Lahoud whom Washington considers to be the symbol of Syrian hegemony over Lebanon and the symbol of the forces that obstruct the path of democracy and sovereignty there.

Rice also wanted through her meeting with Siniora to bolster the position of the head of a government besieged by forces that do not recognize an independent and sovereign Lebanon and do not want it to recover its health away from foreign interventions.

The conflict now before the elections due for the Lebanese presidency is raging between regional forces that hinder the path towards sovereignty and international forces that want to support democracy and openness to modernity, the west and the world instead of leaving Lebanon hostage to regimes that live in isolation and that impose their hegemony through crimes, assassinations and terrorism.

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