

LBC Interview with Under-Sec Def. Policy Eric Edelman

Contributed by Naharnet, LBC
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U.S. to Build "Strategic Partnership" with Lebanese Army

A senior Pentagon official said Thursday the U.S. military would like to see a "strategic partnership" with Lebanon's army to strengthen the country's forces so that Hizbullah would have no excuse to bear arms.

The comments by Eric Edelman, undersecretary of defense for policy, in an interview aired on Lebanese television two days after his visit, followed a published report in Beirut that Washington is proposing a treaty with Lebanon to make it a strategic partner to counter increased Russian influence in neighboring Syria.

The report, published by the opposition-leaning newspaper As-Safir, was at the time vigorously denied by the government and ridiculed by the U.S. ambassador to Lebanon.

"This is totally untrue, said Ahmed Fatfat, a leading member of the government team who holds the youth and sports portfolio, adding that Lebanon neither sought nor had the Americans asked for such a treaty.

Edelman's remarks, however, shed a new light on the emerging relationship between the Lebanese and U.S. militaries two months after the al-Qaida-inspired Fatah Islam group was crushed in a 3-month long battle.

"What we've been trying to do consistently is to create circumstances in which Lebanon can have a strong state, strong army, a democratic system with the military accountable to civilian control and to the government and to the people's representatives in the parliament," he said on the privately owned Lebanese Broadcasting Corp. television.

"We believe it's in our interest to have a strong democratic state in Lebanon ... That's what we're working toward."

The military in Lebanon is an all-volunteer force of 56,000, with about 220 battle tanks, no effective air power and no air defense system. It has over the decades been unable to halt Israeli incursions and take full control of its territory from armed groups like Hezbollah and Palestinian guerrillas.

Since last year's war between Hizbullah and Israel, Lebanon's army deployed for the first time along the Israeli border with the help of 13,000 peacekeepers.

Since that time, the United States has sharply increased its military assistance to Lebanon to US\$270 million in 2007 -- more than five times the amount provided a year ago.

Lebanon's opposition led by Hizbullah, the Shiite Muslim militant group allied to Iran and Syria, has accused Washington of seeking to take control of Lebanon and destroy the it.

The heavily armed guerrilla group fought Israel to a standstill during last year's devastating summer war.

Asked whether helping the Lebanese army aimed at eventually taking on Hizbullah, Edelman said that as the army strengthens its capabilities "there will be less excuse for other armed groups to continue to bear arms."

"I think what we will see over time is if we have an army that is capable of fulfilling all the normal requirements of a state then the idea of having other armed forces that are not accountable to the government or the people's elected representatives would no longer be necessary."

Beirut's As-Safir newspaper reported Thursday that the U.S. proposal for a treaty was to counter the "heavy Russian presence" in northern Syria which presents a danger to the American presence in the region.

There has been speculation for the last two years of Russia seeking to establish a naval base in northern Syria, once a close Russian ally in the Middle East.

Under the blueprint of the alleged treaty, the United States will provide the Lebanese army with assistance and training and intelligence while Beirut would allow the establishment bases, radar stations and other facilities.

The report added that the Americans wanted the Lebanese army's current doctrine, which describes Syria as a friendly state, Israel an enemy and Hezbollah as the "resistance" to the Israeli occupation, changed.

In his interview, however, Edelman maintained the United States was not putting conditions on Lebanon for assistance, saying it was up to the Lebanese to decide what strategy and military doctrine to adopt.

But in a remark that is certain to anger the opposition, particularly Hizbullah which Washington brands as a terrorist organization, Edelman added: "I don't see any reason why Israel and Lebanon have to be enemies. Israel has peace treaties with two of its neighbors. I think in time there is no reason why there shouldn't be one between Lebanon and Israel as well."(AP)

Beirut, 19 Oct 07, 13:44

<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&C0DD9610365CD5D6C2257379004043A1>

Note: Naharnet pulled this story shortly after publishing. Reason: Unknown. CRNews

Comments on this Story

1. I saw the interview - WOW LBC Is in Trouble!

I saw this interview, the person from LBC was

RUDE

The Questions put forth by him did not reflect well on the Lebanese.

LBC wake up!

Every time you interview someone from the West you portray Lebanon and the Lebanese in a terrible manner.

No professionalism in Journalism.

Fadi, Washington D.C., United States (19/10/2007)

2. I saw the interview as well. Not Good.

I saw this interview as well.

If I were the Pentagon official I would have walked off the set a couple times.

The Questions were terrible, very unprofessionally written and I agree with Fadi - did not show any professionalism in journalism.

The interview person from LBC was rude as well. I was thinking he is an Iranian Agent and not a Lebanese. True - he did not reflect Lebanon or the Lebanese but seemed to be an arrogant Iranian Agent. I may not blame him, I may blame LBC for not having any Professional Journalists.

LBC get with the program, you are on center stage in the world - you are not a local news agency in the back hills.

LBC - Go on the world scene and hire some professional journalists:

TWO Types

One that keeps up to date with Current affairs and can ask professional questions

and

One that performs the interview in a professional manner.

John, Jbeil, Lebanon (19/10/2007)