

## Phares Says U.S. Must Deploy a Naval Task Force off Lebanon

Contributed by The Tank Blog W. Thomas Smith  
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W. Thomas Smith Jr. writes in the National Review's Military Blog, The Tank

Dr Walid Phares, director of the Future Terrorism Project at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, just checked in with "The Tank." Here's what he tells me:

The Cedars Revolution is on the verge of a crushing political defeat over the next few days, and at the hands of its own politicians.

Instead of electing a strong anti-terror president, the Lebanese members of parliament are trying to cut deals with Hezbollah, Syria and Iran to select a candidate who:

- a) would not commit to disarming the terrorist organization, and
- b) would not side with the world campaign against terrorism.

Some of these MPs are telling Lebanon's friends in Washington and Paris that "the pressure from Syria and Iran is too great and the counter-pressure from the U.S. and France is too low."

The Lebanese March 14 coalition, which was elected to parliament in 2005 after the Cedars Revolution, seems to have abandoned the policy of withstanding Syro-Iranian pressure and is now considering names of individuals who have never marched in the Cedars Revolution and who will not express the aspirations of the majority of the Lebanese people.

According to many of the leading politicians in Lebanon, it appears that the America-supports-Lebanon message wasn't clear enough. Still it is too early to know whether or not the current situation is due because of March 14's inability to sustain the "axis" pressure, or because of an American diplomatic failure to effectively convey the message to Syria that it must stay away from Lebanon's Presidential election. The next few weeks will bring about the answer. Assad: a winner?

A last strong move by the U.S., involving dispatching a high-ranking official to Lebanon to reassure March 14 that Washington would counter any Iranian threat might save the situation a few minutes before the political midnight. Deploying an aircraft carrier strike group into the eastern Mediterranean could balance the weight of the Iranian Pasdaran and their missiles deployed in Lebanon, so that Tehran and Damascus aren't the only powers present in that small country.

Short of a high ranking American diplomat and the U.S. Navy present at the scene, it will be a miracle if the Cedars Revolution won't be defeated politically.

"March 14 must elect a President regardless"

Cedars Revolution: Can it still win? Speaking with Mideast Newswire this afternoon, Dr Phares said the US should reaffirm its support to March 14 majority and warn the terror forces in Lebanon not to embark in an urban coup in the next few days. "But March 14 has the obligation to proceed with a simple majority vote (50% + 1) and elect a strong and committed President so that the international community can proceed in its obligation of supporting Lebanon's democracy. The Lebanese are responsible first for their future and thus they need to courageously elect their President notwithstanding the terror threats coming from Hezbollah. For the latter would find itself facing off with the majority of the Lebanese people. But at the same time, said Phares, the US, France and the UN must clearly state that they will not accept a fait accompli by Hezbollah and its allies on the ground if a simple majority President is elected. This is the real equation today. If both March 14 and Washington fail to see where their roles are, there will be bad news coming from Lebanon by next week.

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