

## Anti-Syrian lawmakers seek safety abroad amid mounting security threats

Contributed by Administrator  
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Lebanon desperately needs a UN Chapter 7 Resolution to expand UNIFIL Forces to 1. Stabilize the Security of the Nation, 2. Protect the Legislators, 3. Monitor the Borders, 3. Provide Security for the Gov Institutions - Parliament, Elections 4. Disarm Militias - Eblan Farris, Spokesperson Cedars Revolution WashD.C.

BEIRUT, Lebanon: About 20 pro-government Lebanese lawmakers have temporarily left the conflict-ridden country this summer apparently seeking safety abroad amid mounting security threats and the assassination of an outspoken politician.

According to an Associated Press count of legislators who have left Lebanon, more than two dozen, many from the leading majority party bloc, have flown out of the politically divided country over the past 10 days.

Though some of the legislators have since returned, 20 are still abroad. The trend reflects growing concern about their safety &mdash; and overall security in the country.

A senior Arab intelligence official said Lebanese lawmakers who are allied with U.S.-backed Prime Minister Fuad Saniora have been advised to seek temporary shelter abroad after names appeared on a hit list. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitive nature of the matter.

Many of the legislators have traveled to Egypt, an ally of the United States and Saniora's government whose relations with Damascus have been tense in recent months, according to the official and other officials familiar with the travel plans.

On June 13, a car bomb killed Walid Eido, a pro-government lawmaker and fierce critic of Syria. He was the seventh high-profile anti-Syrian personality assassinated in the last two years.

Pro-government leaders have accused Syria of killing Eido to undermine Saniora's government, which could fall if it loses two more Cabinet ministers or four legislators. Syria denies the accusations and has condemned the killing.

The Lebanese As-Safir daily newspaper, which tilts toward the opposition that is led by the Hezbollah militant group, said in a June 20 report that "an Arab security agency chief has informed a number of leaders in the majority team that they should take summer vacation outside Lebanon."

Another pro-opposition newspaper, Al-Akhbar, on Friday also reported that arrangements were being made to move 65 pro-government lawmakers, or more than half the legislature, as well as 35 other politicians to Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and France. The report said party leaders would remain in Beirut.

One lawmaker from Lebanon's majority who was staying in the country denied receiving warnings about moving abroad but added that some colleagues had left for their own safety.

"Some lawmakers have left Lebanon temporarily because they don't have security capabilities to protect themselves," Samir Franjeh said. "There is no decision from our leadership or the Lebanese security authorities to leave the country. This is a self-made decision by members after the assassination of Eido to guarantee their own safety."

He said since Eido's assassination, lawmakers have been taking "precautionary measures," including leaving to visit family abroad or to temporarily live somewhere that they believe is safer.

An atmosphere of apprehension has descended over Lebanon in recent weeks, with the army fighting al-Qaida-inspired militants up north, a car bombing that killed six peacekeepers in the south and half a dozen bombings in the Beirut area.

Saniora has been largely holed up with some members of his Cabinet at government headquarters in downtown Beirut, behind razor wires and troops. Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah's whereabouts are a deep secret. Parliament speaker Nabih Berri rarely leaves his heavily guarded residence, and when in Beirut, Saad Hariri, leader of the majority party bloc and son of slain Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, lives in a fortified compound.

Increasingly yellow tape forbidding parking has appeared on many city streets. Random military checkpoints have

become a routine.

Recent U.S. statements in support of the government also have highlighted the security concerns.

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, after a recent meeting with Saniora in Paris, issued a veiled warning to Syria, saying a Lebanese-international tribunal created by the U.N. Security Council must be safe while it handles the murder of Rafik Hariri, who was killed in a 2005 truck bombing.

The White House on Friday stepped up the pressure on Damascus and its allies to stop what Washington says is Syrian destabilization of its neighbor, banning the entry into America of a number of individuals. The White House listed 10 names that included Syria's intelligence chief and several low-level Lebanese politicians allied with Damascus.

The departure of legislators comes amid a deepening political crisis. The news media has repeatedly referred to a "hot summer" &mdash; political parlance here for trouble &mdash; that the country is expected to face in the coming months.

The pro-government camp wants to hold an election to fill the seats of Eido and Pierre Gemayel, a Cabinet minister and legislator killed by assassins' bullets on a suburban street in November. Saniora's Cabinet has already called a vote for Aug. 5. But President Emile Lahoud, a staunch ally of Syria and the Hezbollah-led opposition, is refusing to sign a decree calling for the balloting.

Another political crisis is also fast approaching: the presidency. The legislature must vote on a replacement when Lahoud's term ends in November. But it is highly unlikely that Lebanon's divided leaders can agree on a candidate, threatening a power vacuum or even worse &mdash; the creation of two rival governments.

Parliament is supposed to open a session late September during which it can elect a president.

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