

Crisis in Lebanon: Renewed tensions in Beirut as the Lebanese unity government collapses

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Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Al-Hariri was visiting president Barack Obama in Washington when Jubran Basil the Lebanese energy secretary announced in Beirut the resignations of eleven Hezbollah ministers, which led to the immediate demise of Lebanon 's unity government. [1].

The resignations' announcement was apparently planned to take place while the Prime Minister visits the American capital.

According to Al-Jazeera news the unity government has collapsed after the Hezbollah movement and its political allies resigned from the cabinet over arguments stemming from a UN probe into the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri, the former Lebanese prime minister, in 2005. Ten ministers tendered their resignations on Wednesday after reports that al-Hariri's son Saad, the prime minister, had refused their call to convene a cabinet meeting to discuss controversial issues including the investigation by the STL. An eleventh member, Adnan Sayyed Hussein, later stood down from the 30-member cabinet, automatically bringing down al-Hariri's government. The request to convene a cabinet meeting came on Tuesday after Syria and Saudi Arabia , who have for months been attempting to act as mediators in Lebanon 's political crisis, announced their efforts had failed. [1].

Despite evidence that implicates Israel in the 2005 Hariri assassination, the politically driven STL has focused on Hezbollah in the hope that implicating the party of God would eventually lead to their disarmament. As a result, political tensions have been recently fomenting in Lebanon amid signs that Hezbollah members were entwined in the Hariri assassination and could be indicted by the UN-backed Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL).

Apparently, Hariri's visit with the American president was cut short as he was driven to Dulles international airport after talks with Obama at the White House. The US President threw his full support behind the embattled Lebanese Prime Minister as Hezbollah toppled his unity government during his White House visit. [2]. Hariri will also be stopping in Paris on his way back to meet Nicolas Sarkozy, the French president for additional guidance. Al-Jazeera also reported that a spokesperson for Ban Ki-moon, the UN secretary general, said that the secretary general is monitoring closely developments in Lebanon , where the situation is fast evolving. He also emphasized the importance that calm be preserved. "The secretary-general further called for continuing dialogue among all parties and respect for the constitution and the laws of Lebanon . He also reiterated his full support for the independent work of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon . [1].

Hezbollah, which has denied any role in the assassination, has denounced the tribunal as an

“Israeli project” and urged al-Hariri to reject any findings by the court, which has not yet announced its decisions. But al-Hariri has refused to break co-operation with the tribunal, What led to the political muscle flexing by the Hezbollah party and their withdrawal from the government. Meanwhile, Hillary Clinton told a news conference in Doha, Qatar, where she was attending a meeting of regional leaders “we view what happened today as a transparent effort by those forces inside Lebanon, as well as interests outside Lebanon, to subvert justice and undermine Lebanon’s stability and progress.” [1].

Apparently, Mr. Hariri was shafted by Hezbollah when he decided to run to Washington for directions instead of dealing directly and honestly with the brewing problems in his country. Lebanon ’s puppet government has once again collapsed because of the continuous loyalty of the Lebanese factions to outside forces instead of loyalty to Lebanon .

What is next for Lebanon ?

Could this standoff between Al-Hariri’s camp and Hezbollah over the UN tribunal spark a new sectarian violence similar to the one that brought the country close to civil war in May 2008? Or is the purpose of the STL to disarm Hezbollah and destabilize Lebanon ?

References

1. Al Jazeera English (01- 12, 2011). Lebanese Government Collapses Government falls after Hezbollah and allies withdraw from coalition in row over UN probe into murder of Rafiq al-Hariri.
2. Kaleej times (01-12-11). Obama backs Hariri as Lebanon in turmoil.

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