

Salam says decision for war should solely be with state

BEIRUT: Newly appointed Prime Minister-designate Tammam Salam said Sunday the resistance against Israel was legitimate but the decision to go to war should remain in the hands of the state.

“The resistance against Israel is legitimate but the decision of war and peace should be in the hands of the Lebanese state and limits should be set to any use of weapons domestically,” Salam told BBC, referring to Hezbollah.

Salam was officially appointed Saturday to form a new government to replace the outgoing government of Prime Minister Najib Mikati who resigned last month.

During the interview, Salam said he received support from both Iran and Russia through their ambassadors to Lebanon who were among hundreds of officials, diplomats and politicians who flocked to the Beirut lawmaker’s Mosaitebeh residence to congratulate him.

Salam, son of six-time former Prime Minister Saeb Salam, hoped that domestic consensus would reflect positively on the formation of a new government.

He hoped that all political parties recognize the critical period Lebanon is going through given the developments in Syria and the region which necessitates a unified stance.

Nearly all of the country’s parliamentary blocs named Salam for the premiership during two days of binding consultations with President Michel Sleiman that began on Friday.

Hezbollah has insisted that any future government should commit to the tripartite formula of the

"Army, the people, and the resistance," which it maintains is the only viable defense of Lebanon against Israeli aggression.

The party's rivals, however, have said that the issue of Hezbollah's arms should be resolved on the National Dialogue table because it is the only remaining item on the agenda of the inter-party talks.

Some lawmakers with the March 14 coalition have rejected that Hezbollah's formula would be mentioned in any Cabinet's ministerial statement.

The coalition, however, has supported the adoption of the so-called Baabda Declaration, agreed to by rival groups last year, as the next Cabinet's ministerial statement.

The declaration stipulates Lebanon remain at a distance from regional turmoil particularly events in Syria.

In an interview with Agence France Presse Saturday, Salam said he supported the freedom of the Syrian people while insisting his country remain neutral in its neighbor's civil war.

"My position is that I am on the side of the Syria people; I support the freedom and the sovereignty of the people," Salam said.

He also favored a "policy of disassociation" from the war in which rebels aim to oust Syrian President Bashar Assad.

But he said this strategy can only be effective if all parties in Lebanon adhered to it.

"We will work... to distance Lebanon from all the negative repercussions" of the war in Syria," he added. -With AFP

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