

Hezbollah leadership divided over Syrian crisis

By Antoine Ghattas Saab

Europeans are concerned by the ongoing violence in Lebanon; Iranians are scrambling to find a solution to the Syrian crisis through dialogue between the regime and the opposition; and Hezbollah is divided on how to proceed in the face of the unrelenting bloodshed next door.

No one who follows developments in the Middle East can deny these realities, nor can anyone ignore Russia's recent actions in the region. Moscow, which has strongly rejected intervention in Syria, has sent powerful naval vessels, the Yarsolav Mudry and Neustroshimyy, into the Mediterranean for drills.

Meanwhile, American Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta announced that the U.S.S. John Stennis would arrive four months ahead of schedule to the Gulf, and Iran is responding to Saudi naval maneuvers with its own, each trying to have a say in the Syrian crisis.

Diplomatic sources told Lebanese leaders that Iran is preparing to announce a new initiative, prepared by Iran's Foreign Minister of Arab and African Affairs Hussein Amir Abdel-Lahyan, to end the Syrian crisis during the upcoming meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement in Tehran.

But Western diplomatic sources say the crisis is far from over and there's no solution in sight, especially in light of the opposition's rejection of dialogue with the regime. The fighting in Aleppo is evidence that there is no ready victory for either side, they add. They maintain, however, that the repercussions of the unrest should remain under control in Lebanon as long as the Syrian crisis does not devolve into the worst case scenario.

At the same time, a French diplomatic source expressed the European Union's concern over the violence in Lebanon, especially Tripoli, adding that EU countries are closely following the security incidents – particularly the tit-for-tat kidnappings – in the country. The source called on Lebanese leaders to prevent these incidents from escalating further and vowed that Europe would continue to support Lebanon's stability.

Others in Lebanon believe that the Syrian attempts to export its violence to its neighbor is a real and present danger, especially considering the discovery of the terrorist plot that led to the arrest of Michel Samaha.

Diplomatic sources who have closely followed Hezbollah's recent statements say that the party is cautiously studying developments in the region before moving forward. The sources say that the party is in a precarious position since a major part of the Shiite axis that stretched from Tehran to Baghdad to Beirut is being hit by developments in Syria.

The French source says that the party is preparing to decide between fully backing the Syrian regime by pushing violence in Lebanon or keeping its distance from Damascus and engaging in

National Dialogue.

There is a significant division in Hezbollah's leadership over the decision, says the source. Some believe that the party should stand by Tehran and Damascus even if it means taking part in full-on regional conflict and forcing its terms on its rivals in Lebanon through violence.

Other leaders, including party chief Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah, see that partnership with the Lebanese is important and should not be overlooked and believe that National Dialogue would serve the party best. These leaders contend that Hezbollah's demands will only be fulfilled through the dialogue and that without it, the party would risk losing a decade of the resistance's achievements.

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