

Last Updated: Tue Oct 16, 2012 08:26 am (KSA) 05:26 am (GMT)

Washington says Hezbollah is part of Assad's war machine

Tuesday, 16 October 2012



Washington said that Hezbollah's leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah is continuing to plot new measures to keep Assad in power. (Reuters)

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
UNITED NATIONS

The United States said Monday that Lebanon's Hezbollah militia is stepping up support for the Syrian government and has become part of President Bashar Assad's "killing machine."

U.S. Ambassador Susan Rice told the U.N. Security Council's monthly meeting on the Mideast that Hezbollah leaders are also continuing to plot new measures with Iran to keep Assad in power.

Rice's comments — and those of Israel's U.N. Ambassador Ron Prozor — gave the clearest indication that Hezbollah, which fought a war against Israel in 2006 and is a major political and military force in Lebanon, is sending an increasing number of fighters to help the embattled Syrian regime.

Syria's ruling Alawite minority is an offshoot of Shiite Islam and has had close ties to Iran and Hezbollah which are Shiite-dominated. Assad has long helped Iran aid Hezbollah and Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, in destabilizing Lebanon and threatening Israel's security and U.S. interests in the Middle East.

The U.S. ambassador accused Hezbollah's leader, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, of being two-faced about his claims that he is promoting Lebanon's interests.

"Hezbollah's active and growing support for Assad's war exposes Hassan Nasrallah's claims of promoting Lebanon's national interest as nothing more than a deadly form of deception," Rice said.

“The group’s leaders may try to change the subject by invoking hollow rhetoric about so-called resistance, but the truth is plain to see: Nasrallah’s fighters are now part of Assad’s killing machine and Hezbollah’s leaders continue to plot with Iran new measures to prop up a murderous and desperate dictator,” she said.

Rice said the United States is encouraging the international community “to counter Hezbollah’s terrorist activity and do more to expose Hezbollah’s deepening involvement in Assad’s war.”

Israel’s ambassador Prozor said Nasrallah claims he needs a private army with advanced missiles to defend Lebanon against the Jewish state.

“Today we see that Hezbollah’s army is far more preoccupied with butchering their Arab brothers and sisters in Syria,” Prozor said.

He said Nasrallah and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad form a “trio of terror” with Assad, “offering the tyrant of Damascus guidance on how to butcher the Syrian people more efficiently.”

The U.S. ambassador said the 19-month Syrian war now poses a challenge to all of the Mideast country’s neighbors, including Lebanon which has experienced cross-border attacks and an influx of Syrian refugees.

She commended the Lebanese government and armed forces “for maintaining stability and law and order at this critical juncture” and welcomed efforts by Lebanese President Michel Suleiman and others to promote dialogue including on disarmament of illegal militias as demanded by the U.N. Security Council.

Many speakers at the day-long council meeting mentioned the escalating casualty toll in Syria -- now estimated by activists at over 33,000 – and the divided council’s failure to take action to halt it.

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