

## Hezbollah's arms under Army command in Sleiman's defense plan

BEIRUT: President Michel Sleiman said his national defense strategy entails that Hezbollah's arms be used under the sole command of the Army in defense of Israeli aggression against Lebanon, his media office said Tuesday.

"The [National] Dialogue committee is studying a national defense strategy for Lebanon that places the arms of the resistance under the Army's command in case of an Israeli aggression on Lebanese soil only and not for any other domestic or foreign reason," Sleiman told a gathering of Lebanese expatriates in Peru.

"The use of such arms will be under the request of the Army in case of an aggression and via a decision from the political authority," he added.

The National Dialogue committee made up of Lebanon's political leaders is reviewing a defense strategy by Sleiman aimed at benefiting from Hezbollah's arms and ending a long debate between the resistance party and its rivals.

Under the proposal, Hezbollah would not hand its arms over to the Army, as demanded by the March 14 coalition, nor would there be coordination between the resistance and the military, the defense strategy that Hezbollah has backed.

In his speech to the Lebanese community abroad, Sleiman said that such a proposal is necessary until the Army is equipped and capable of defending Lebanon against any Israeli violation or aggression.

The Cabinet last month approved a \$1.6 billion plan to provide weapons and equipment to the Army over five years.

Sleiman's speech focused on reassuring Lebanese living outside of their homeland of the political and economic situation, encouraging them to vote en masse in the upcoming 2013 parliamentary elections.

The president, who is heading the Arab delegation to the South American-Arab countries summit, praised the economic and financial situation in Lebanon given the global economic crises and the strategies adopted by the Central Bank to maintain sound monetary policies.

He also spoke about the "Baabda Declaration," which was agreed upon by Lebanon's rival leaders to distance the country from regional conflicts particularly events in Syria

“The Baabda declaration reinforced the idea of distancing Lebanon from conflicts and preventing the country from becoming an arena for others to settle their disputes, send messages to each other or send arms and weapons to Syria,” Sleiman said.

He also urged Lebanese abroad to turn out in large numbers to vote in the 2013 polls by registering in embassies via the mechanism proposed by the Foreign Ministry, which is yet to be approved in Cabinet.

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