
Syrian kidnappers release Lebanese hostage

Sat, Aug 25 2012

BEIRUT (Reuters) - Syrian rebels released a Lebanese hostage on Saturday who was among a group of Lebanese Shi'ite pilgrims kidnapped after crossing into Syria from Turkey in May.

A rebel source said the release of Hussein Omar, the first hostage to be freed, was a "goodwill gesture".

Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati said he received a call from Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu confirming the release of Omar.

"(Mikati) wished that Turkish authorities will continue its efforts to release all the kidnapped Lebanese in Syria as soon as possible," a statement from Mikati's office said.

Turkey has strong ties with the Syrian opposition, and most of the leadership of the rebel group the Free Syrian Army is based in Turkey. It also shelters army defectors and allows foreign funds and weapons to reach rebels fighting President Bashar al-Assad, according to several sources.

Al Jazeera news channel showed footage of Omar crossing on foot into Turkey accompanied by three men and carrying a small bag.

It quoted him as saying he was well treated and he urged Arabs to support the revolt against Assad.

The kidnapping of the Shi'ite pilgrims inflamed tension in Lebanon, a country divided between friends and foes of the Syrian armed revolt against Assad.

The kidnapping, with the abduction of another Shi'ite man this month in Syria, triggered abductions of Syrian activists in Lebanon in retaliation.

It revived memories of Lebanon's own civil war, reinforcing fears that the Syria conflict could trigger more instability in Lebanon, where Damascus has had a major influence over politics and security for decades.

(Reporting by Mariam Karouny; Editing by Rosalind Russell)
