

Opinion

Hezbollah's Prestige

By Mohammad Mehdi Mazaheri

After a few weeks of dispute between Lebanon's Hezbollah and the coalition with the ruling party also known as March 14, under the leadership of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, over the issue of dismantling the internal telecommunication system of Hezbollah and firing the chief of security of Beirut International Airport, Arab League mediated and subsequently the involved parties reached a six-article agreement to end the rift and resume talks in Doha.

It is obvious that the organized effort of March 14 and collaboration of Walid Jumblatt, leader of Druze community, for taking over Hezbollah's telecommunication system and the repeated baseless accusations against Hezbollah Leader Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah for engineering a political coup in Lebanon are merely parts of a scenario masterminded by Washington and Tel Aviv. As Nasrallah recently said, the internal telecommunication system was Hezbollah's trump card in the 33-day war, which helped protect the resistance against Zionist attacks. The timely move of Hezbollah in handing occupied territories to Lebanon's Army and the group's preparedness for holding direct talks revealed that despite the assumptions of resistance's enemies, Hezbollah is willing to do whatever possible to protect national interests. This way Hezbollah are rest assured that tension would not spread, a civil strife would be avoided and the conditions would eventually become ripe for establishment of a legitimate government and prevalence of the rule of law in Lebanon.

Another good omen is that the doctrine of Israel being undefeatable proved false during the 33-day war and Hezbollah managed to assume a direct political role in Lebanon's internal developments in wake of their enhanced popularity both at home and abroad. In the meantime, Zionist leaders directly supported the March 14 Front in a bid to prevent Hezbollah's influence in Lebanon and severe the spiritual support of Iran and Syria for the militia. Moreover, being disappointed with their defeat, America and Israel resorted to the UN Security Council to start a new political war against Hezbollah, Iran and Syria. This led to the ratification of Resolution 1559 by the Security Council against Syria, which in turn intensified international pressures against Damascus and Hezbollah.

The financial and propagandistic support of Saudi Arabia and Egypt for March 14 Front and their increasing efforts for widening their political influence in Lebanon reveals that conservative Arab states, under the influence of Zionist policies and strategies, are working to block the increase of Iran's spiritual influence in the volatile region. The two countries have leveled the baseless accusations against Iran that it poses a threat against the Arab world due to its so-called doctrine of 'Shiite crescent'. In fact, the Saudi and Egyptian stance fully complies with the American-Zionist notion of a "New Middle East", on the basis of which the resistance and all forces against regional peace should be disarmed and grounds should be paved for reconciliation with Israel.

Hezbollah's move in handing the territories it has occupied in Beirut to the army hints at the indisputable fact that the group's leaders are farsighted and prepared to hold direct negotiations. Hezbollah is even ready to be disarmed and join Lebanon's Army if a legal government is established. This can not only boost the militia's popularity among the people of Lebanon, but also provide them with a significant advantage in the future developments.

It is also shown one more time that Syria will not cease to support its strategic partner Iran despite the propaganda warfare of Israel, the west and some Arab states that the Islamic state intends to dominate Lebanese state of affairs.

At any rate, it seems that the situation in Lebanon will remain to be dependant on regional and international developments. Amid all this, the reality is that after its victory in the 33-day war and its effective crisis management, Hezbollah's prestige has increased substantially at home and also overseas.

Kuwaitis Go to Polls

Kuwaitis voted to elect a 50-seat parliament, the second in two years, after a series of disputes between MPs and the government held up development in this wealthy OPEC member, AFP reported.

A total of 275 candidates are standing in the elections, which will be contested under a new system in which the number of constituencies has been cut from 25 to five, a demand which united the opposition in the June 2006 polls.

The candidates include 27 women, the same number of female hopefuls as in the previous election.

Women are standing and voting for only the second time. No female candidate won a seat in the last polls.

About 361,700 people are eligible to vote in a country with a native population of just over one million. The voting age is 21 and servicemen in the police and army are banned from taking part in the ballot.

Early results are expected early on Sunday as ballot papers are still counted manually.

Parliament in oil-rich Kuwait, which is elected for a four-year term, has legislative and monitoring powers and can vote ministers out of office. Unelected ministers become ex-officio members of parliament.

Hamas Leaders to Visit Cairo

A delegation from Islamic Hamas Movement will visit Egypt on Monday for more discussions on achieving a ceasefire deal between Hamas and Israel in Gaza, a spokesman for the Islamic movement said on Saturday.

The visit to Cairo aims at outlining the mechanisms for implementing the lull and the time to put it into effect," the spokesman Ayman Taha told reporters in Gaza, Xinhua reported.

He added that Hamas has learnt that Israel has "an initial acceptance" of the Egyptian ceasefire offer.

The Palestinian factions, led by Hamas, agreed on the Egyptian proposal. Last week, Egyptian Intelligence Chief Omar Suleiman visited Israel to present the offer.

Israel did not announce its acceptance of the ceasefire and linked its fate with resolving the issue of Gilad Shalit, a soldier held hostage by Hamas in Gaza since June 2006.

The Egyptian offer is meant to ease the siege that Israel has been imposing on Gaza since Hamas took over the territory last June. It also aims at stopping the increasing Israeli military operations in Gaza.

Meanwhile, a Palestinian newspaper reported that Egypt plans to invite other Palestinian factions into Cairo again "to agree on the basics of performance for the next phase."

Quoting Egyptian sources, 'Al-Quds' daily added that Egypt expects the Palestinian groups to agree on the lull's principles in return for a final Israeli acceptance of the truce.

Meanwhile, an Israeli daily has quoted the chief of military intelligence as saying that Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas may flee the area if peace efforts fail.

Haaretz newspaper wrote Maj. Gen. Amos Yadlin is not optimistic about prospects of reaching a final deal with the Palestinians by the end of the year.

News Diary

MONDAY, MAY 19

■ **GENEVA** - Ministers from trade powers are expected to meet to seek a breakthrough in long-delayed negotiations for a global trade deal (in the week of May 1)

■ **PARIS** - France is to try 17 Chileans in absentia over the disappearance of four French or French-Chilean nationals in Chile during the rule of dictator Augusto Pinochet (to May 23)

■ **ABUJA** - Court hearing resumes in the 5.3 trillion naira lawsuit brought by the federal government against three tobacco companies - British American Tobacco, Altria unit Philip Morris International and Nigerian International Tobacco Ltd.

■ **BONN, Germany** - The governing body of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity will hold its ninth meeting (to May 30)

Lebanon Pins Hope On Doha



Hezbollah MP Mohammed Raad (l), representing his party chief Hassan Nasrallah, and Christian opposition leader General Michel Aoun speak during a roundtable meeting in Doha on May 17.

Lebanon's political leaders on Saturday began Arab-brokered crisis talks in Qatar in a bid to end a long-running feud that drove their country to the brink of a new civil war.

After 65 people were killed in nearly a week of fighting, the government and the opposition agreed to a national dialogue aimed at electing a president and forming a unity government, AFP reported.

The talks officially started on Friday evening with a brief opening session chaired by Qatar's Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani who stressed the need to preserve Lebanon's unity and hoped the rivals would reach an agreement.

Qatari mediation reportedly continued overnight with the Emir shuttling between rival parties, according to the Lebanese pro-government newspaper 'An-Nahar'.

The head of Hezbollah movement Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah is not in Qatar, reportedly because of security concerns and is represented by Hezbollah MP Mohammed Raad.

Nineteen opposition members and 34 ruling party supporters are attending the meeting.

Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and parliament majority leader Saad Hariri flew to Qatar on a private plane on Friday.

Christian leader Samir Geagea, former president Amin Gemayel and Druze community leader Walid Jumblatt of the ruling coalition arrived separately on a Qatari aircraft that also brought opposition member and parliament speaker Nabih Berri and his ally Christian leader Michel Aoun.

An-Nahar said that in addition to seeking agreement on a unity government and a new electoral law for legislative elections due next year, the Doha talks are

also expected to address the question of weapons.

The feuding politicians agreed on Thursday to launch a dialogue as part of a six-point plan, following Arab League mediation led by Qatari Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jasssem bin Jabr Al-Thani.

Hopes of a Lebanon deal rose on Wednesday after government cancelled measures against Hezbollah.

Parliament in Beirut is due to convene on June 10 for a 20th attempt to elect a president. Emile Lahoud stepped down at the end of his term in November, exacerbating a crisis that began in late 2006 when six pro-Syrian ministers quit the cabinet.

Both sides agree on Army Commander Michel Suleiman as Lahoud's successor, but they remain at odds over details of the proposed unity government and new electoral law.

> Support for Resistance

Meanwhile, Sheikh Nasr Al-Din Al-Gharib, a Druze leader stressed the need for supporting the resistance movement in Lebanon.

Addressing a number of Druze members, he said resistance should continue against foreign conspiracies in Lebanon, according to IRIB.

Al-Gharib said circumstances require that Lebanese groups maintain unity.

> Siniora-Bush Visit Cancelled

Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, meanwhile, cancelled talks with US President Bush in Egypt on Sunday, the White House said on Friday.

White House said Siniora had dropped out of the talks "because of the situation on the ground" in Lebanon.