

Lebanese Situation Continues to Deteriorate

The situation in Lebanon has continued to deteriorate since 12 Jan 11 when the ten Hezbollah ministers and one Christian minister resigned from the cabinet of Prime Minister Saad Hariri. The Hariri government has been reduced to caretaker status while Lebanese President Sleiman attempts to find a new prime minister. So far it appears he has had little success even with the intervention of several other Arab nations.

On the morning of 18 Jan Beirut time, groups of young men gathered at various parts of Beirut. (<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=231996>).

The gatherings, each totalling around 30 people, took place in several areas of Beirut – notably the mixed Sunni-Shia neighborhoods of Basta, Beshara al-Khoury, Nweiri, Ouzai, Salim Salam, Tayyouneh and Zoqaq al-Blat – before the crowds dispersed at around 8:00 a.m.

Since the gatherings took place the morning after Special Tribunal for Lebanon Prosecutor General Daniel Bellemare handed over the indictment into former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri's 2005 murder to the pre-trial judge (an indictment which is suspected to include the names of several Hezbollah operatives), many believe they were a show of force by opposition supporters, who share Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah's view that the tribunal is a "US and Israeli tool."

In response to the gatherings, in a move presumably orchestrated to prevent tensions from mounting, Lebanese army vehicles – including armored cars and tanks – were scattered across the city, especially in areas inhabited by mixed religious groups.

Now Debka is reporting that the leader of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, almost had his people lay siege to United Nations facilities in Lebanon. (<http://www.debka.com/article/20563/>).

With minutes to spare, Wednesday night, Jan. 19, Hizballah called off its plan to hold to siege UN buildings in Beirut and their staff of 1,000, as a show of strength in the face of the threatened UN Hariri tribunal's indictment of its high officials for the Hariri assassination six years ago. debkafle's military sources report.

The sites targeted were the offices of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia which Hizballah militiamen were ordered to seal against ingress and egress, while its armed units were to encircle and pin down UNIFIL patrols in South Lebanon and cut off isolated UN outposts and lookout posts.

Hizballah also planned to besiege the offices of the UN's Special Lebanon Emissary Michael Williams, UNWRA which deals with Palestinian refugees and various UNIFIL contact offices in Beirut.

This desperate action was planned to blackmail UN Secretary General Ban ki-Moon into discussing the reassessment of the STL's indictment of Hizballah's security and intelligence chiefs for the murder of the former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri.

According to our sources, at 1800 hours Lebanese time, as Hizballah forces were about to set out on their missions, they received an order from their leader, Hassan Nasrallah to hold their horses for now. He offered no explanation for the postponement but, according to some sources, he was deterred by being informed of consequences of this act. Ban would have asked the Lebanese government to send troops to relieve the Hizballah siege on UN institutions, failing which he would have called on the UN Security Council to send armed units to Beirut to rescue the beleaguered UN staffers.

This step might well have ended in US, French and German marines lifting of the warships opposite

Lebanese shores and landing in Beirut. (Bold mine.)

Please read all of the articles for further important information.

Analysis. There should be no doubt remaining that Hezbollah pretty much owns Lebanon. There is also little doubt that had Nasrallah taken the step and laid siege to the UN facilities, that eventually Secretary General Moon would have asked the Security Council to lift the siege.

The last time the US Marine Corps sent people to Lebanon, Hezbollah homicide bombers killed 243 of them in their barracks at Beirut Airport. I saw a lot of the wounded land at Ramstein and go to the 2nd General Hospital at Landstuhl. It was not a happy sight. You can be sure that the Marines would be very happy to extract some retribution for that act. Hezbollah may believe it can take on anybody. I would reconsider taking on a unit of battle hardened Marines with the USS Enterprise battle group supporting them.

This does not help the situation in Lebanon. As long as Hezbollah exists in its present form, Lebanon is a province of Syria at best and Iran at worst.

Addendum. The situation continues to be unstable at best. Saad Hariri has announced that he will be a candidate for prime minister again. (<http://www.debka.com/article/20566/>).

Lebanon swerved closer to a factional conflagration Thursday night, Jan. 20, after Saad Hariri, whose coalition Hizballah toppled eight days ago, announced he would form a new government in defiance of the opposition. Hassan Nasrallah's supporters warned he was leading Lebanon to disaster. ... Thursday afternoon, Lebanese forces showed themselves willing for the first time to stand up to Hizballah's superior strength and ward off its takeover of the capital. Extra security was laid on for Hariri, guards were reinforced at government institutions and traffic hubs secured. Police units were seen unloading concrete blocks at the main city intersections after which military units moved in to man them.

A Lebanese military official commented that these measures were prompted by "concerns over movements on the ground by some parties."

No one doubted he was referring to Hizballah and its repeated exercises this week to practice the rapid seizure of Beirut.

This situation doesn't have the "flash" of the Korean situation. It is, however, every bit as dangerous and must be watched closely.