

Hezbollah says its 'arm won't be twisted' as Lebanon crisis deepens

Author:

Reuters

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1573401568389066300

Sun, 2019-11-10 15:11

BEIRUT: Political talks to agree an urgently needed Lebanese government are still deadlocked, as Hezbollah indicated it would not be forced into concessions.

The latest failure to break Lebanon's political impasse will worsen pressures on an economy gripped by its deepest crisis since the 1975-90 civil war, amid protests against a political establishment widely regarded as corrupt and inept.

Since reopening a week ago, commercial banks have been seeking to stave off capital flight by blocking most transfers abroad and imposing curbs on hard-currency withdrawals, though the central bank has announced no formal capital controls.

A big part of Lebanon's economic crisis stems from a slowdown of capital inflows which has led to a scarcity of US dollars and spawned a black market where the Lebanese pound has weakened below its official pegged rate.

A meeting on Saturday evening between caretaker Prime Minister Saad Hariri and senior officials from Hezbollah and its Shiite ally Amal failed to yield any breakthrough toward forming the new cabinet, the sources said.

"The crisis is deepening," one source familiar with Hariri's position said. A senior source familiar with the view of Hezbollah and Amal said: "Nothing has changed. So far the road is completely blocked." A third senior source said the situation was still deadlocked.

Hariri quit on Oct. 29 in the face of unprecedented protests fueled by poverty, joblessness and lack of basic services like electricity.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

Hariri wants to lead a technocratic government devoid of other politicians, while Amal, Hezbollah and its Christian ally the Free Patriotic Movement want a government mixing technocrats and politicians.

The source familiar with Hariri's views has said he believes a cabinet composed of both technocrats and politicians would not be able to secure Western assistance and would also anger protesters who want to see a change of leadership.

Hariri reiterated his position in the meeting with caretaker Finance Minister Ali Hassan Khalil of Amal and top Hezbollah official Hussein Khalil, the senior source familiar with Hezbollah and Amal's view said.

Both Hezbollah and Amal communicated their view – that Hariri should return as premier of a new ‘technopolitical’ cabinet – at the meeting. Hariri said he would only agree to head a technocratic cabinet.

“Practically, what he wants is a government devoid of Hezbollah,” the senior source said. “After 10 days have passed, matters must be decided.”

The source familiar with Hariri’s position said he believed Hezbollah, Amal and the FPM were seeking the inclusion in the cabinet of politicians rejected by the protesters.

These include FPM leader Gebran Bassil, foreign minister in the outgoing cabinet and a son-in-law of President Michel Aoun.

“If these faces return to government we will have pushed the street to return to protest in a greater way,” the source familiar with Hariri’s position said.

One dollar was buying 1,800 pounds or more on Friday compared to 1,740 on Thursday, two market sources said. The pegged rate is 1,507.5 pounds.

In a statement apparently referring to the deadlock and to Hezbollah’s loss of fighters in various conflicts, Hezbollah lawmaker Mohammad Raad said: “Our arms will not be twisted nor can we be neutralized from achieving the goals of the martyrs.”

Lebanon’s highest Christian authority urged the president to hasten the appointment of a prime minister and the formation of a government that meets protesters’ demands.

“The country’s situation cannot withstand another day of delays,” Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros Al-Rai said.



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Petrol pumps shut down in protest-hit Lebanon over dollar shortage
Lebanon's grand mufti calls for protesters' demands to be met

Blast in northern Iraq injures five Italian soldiers -army

Sun, 2019-11-10 18:53

ROME: A roadside blast wounded five Italian military members on Sunday in northern Iraq as they returned from a mission aimed at helping Iraqi troops combat Daesh, Italian military officials said.

The Italian Defense Ministry said three of the wounded were in "grave condition" after the explosion.

Rear Admiral Fabio Agostini said the five – three members of the navy and two of the army – are part of a special forces team that was traveling back after a mission aimed at finding Daesh refugees.

Agostini told Italian Rai state TV that Iraqi armed forces members were also injured in the blast but didn't say how many.

An Iraqi security official said the bomb exploded next to their vehicle as they were traveling just outside Kirkuk, wounding six Italian soldiers.

The discrepancy in the number of wounded wasn't immediately explained.

Italy's wounded were evacuated by US military helicopters to hospital in Baghdad.

"Our men were training Iraqi security forces engaged in fighting Daesh,"

Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio said, using an alternate term for Daesh.

"I am following the situation with sorrow and apprehension," he wrote on Twitter.

One Italian soldier lost a leg to amputation due to injuries from the bomb and another suffered serious internal injuries, Italian Gen. Nicola Lanza de Cristoforis told state TV.

The blast happened three days before the 16th anniversary of a suicide attack in the southern Iraqi city of Nassiriya, which killed 18 Italian servicemen, an Italian civilian and nine Iraqi civilians.

Iraq declared victory against Daesh militants two years ago, but the group continues to stage insurgent-type attacks across the country, particularly in northern Iraq.

Italy currently has more than 800 regular soldiers and some 80 special forces in Iraq.

(With AP and Reuters)



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Three killed in southern Iraq protests as Amnesty calls for urgent end to 'bloodbath' Rockets hit Iraq base with US troops; no word on casualties

[Ayat Oraby: Anchor of intolerance](#)

Sun, 2019-11-10 01:23

DUBAI: With more than 1 million followers on Facebook, Ayat Oraby blurs the lines between reporting and hate speech.

She blatantly expresses her opinions in her articles and videos, which range from anti-Christian rhetoric to support for a religious scholar believed to be the inspiration behind some terrorist groups to allegations against individual politicians for supporting Israel.

A whole section on her personal website calls for the economic boycott of Christians in Egypt, whom she accuses of plotting against Muslims and

trying to form their own Coptic state.

Oraby explained in a video posted on YouTube how and why she came to that conclusion, with stories dating back to the times of French colonization.

According to Oraby, Egyptian Christians helped France take over the country, betraying the Muslim populations.

“This is the reason for the call for an economic boycott against them. To tell you the truth, I have been postponing this call for a long time, but now I am asking for all Muslims who are zealous for their religion to heed this call,” she said.

Her Facebook posts contain material targeting Coptic Christian popes in Egypt, such as Shenouda III of Alexandria and Tawadros II.

Oraby called Tawadros a “criminal” and an “arch-killer,” and accused Shenouda of having a sexual relationship with his personal driver.

She also publicly spoke against the celebration of Christmas in Egypt, because some aspects of the festivity are financed by taxpayers, who are a Muslim majority in Egypt.

“You are in a Muslim country with over 95 million Muslims, so why is the TV celebrating Christmas?” she asked in a YouTube video.

BIO

Name: Ayat Oraby

Nationality: Egyptian

Place of residence: New York, US

Occupation: Journalist

Legal status: Emigrated to the US from Egypt in 1993

Medium : YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and her website
www.ayatoraby.com

Oraby supports her anti-Christian rhetoric with claims that the military controls the church and uses it to store weapons.

She also accuses Christians in Egypt of waging a war against Islam and believes that they are planning to betray the Muslim populace “again.”

Oraby spreads her messages mainly via Twitter and Facebook, where she enjoys followings of more than 540,000 and 1 million, respectively.

The activist's rhetoric appeals to some people for a variety of reasons, according to Johannes Van Gorp, assistant professor at the American University of Sharjah.

It could be a reactionary political act, trying to bring back lost glory, or to unite against perceived targeting and attacks, Van Gorp said.

Her ideas sound radical and problematic, but she is able to express them because she lives in the US. As long as the speech does not result in clear and present danger, "it is protected under the First Amendment," Van Gorp said.

Oraby first moved to the US about a year after starting her career as an anchor on Egyptian TV's Channel 3 in 1992. A few years later, in 1996, she left home to co-host the famous Good Morning Egypt show on Channel 1.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

In 1999, she returned permanently to the US and worked as a foreign correspondent for Egyptian TV. During her stay, she founded and chaired Noon Al-Niswa, the first Arab women's magazine in the US.

Oraby supports the Muslim Brotherhood and openly adheres to Sayyid Qutb's ideology.

His ideology, sometimes called Qutbism, is believed to have inspired several radical groups, including Al-Qaeda.

The academic John Calvert explores Qutb's influence in his book "Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism."

"Given the dire condition of the world, Qutb said that Muslims had a duty to reactivate the principle of jihad (literally, 'striving') against the jahili forces responsible for humankind's 'misery and confusion'," Calvert said.

Qutb was also a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, which he joined in the 1953.

Oraby's stance on Egyptian authorities has transformed over the years, from support to extreme hostility. She uses a cover image of ousted President Muhammad Mursi on Facebook and often publishes posts attacking Egyptian leader Abdel Fattah El-Sisi.

In earlier reports, the US-based journalist accused Egyptian soldiers killed in a fire fight with militants of being paid by El-Sisi to murder unarmed Muslims during the "Rabaa massacre."

But her accusations against the national army do not end there. She nicknamed

it the “Misraeli army,” alluding to an allegiance with Israel, and has repeatedly called for it to be dismantled.

Oraby attacked several heads of states and political leaders, such as Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and former Saudi King Faisal, accusing some of propagating a false image of Islam and others of giving away Palestine to Israeli occupation.



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[Lebanese fear economic chaos](#)

Author:

Sun, 2019-11-10 00:50

BEIRUT: Lebanese worries rose on Saturday as economic chaos began to seep

into the country's life cycle. The dollar crisis is resurfacing. Lebanese banks closed on Saturday and will be closed next Monday for the Prophet's birthday. Over the past two days, the banks witnessed pressure from depositors to withdraw funds for commercial purposes both in dollars or Lebanese pounds, but the banks were reluctant to pay them on the pretext of lack of liquidity. Social media reported many arguments between bank employees and customers.

The financial situation was the focus of a meeting between caretaker Prime Minister Saad Hariri and Lebanese Central Bank Governor Riad Salameh on Friday night. It was also the focus of a meeting between President Michel Aoun and Governor Salameh on Saturday, Chairman of the Association of Banks Salim Sfeir and members of the board of directors of the association. According to information distributed after the Hariri-Salameh meeting, Governor Salameh refuted with figures and facts the temporary measures taken by the banks "to protect the depositors and their money and maintain the stability of the lira's fixed exchange rate (1,507 against the dollar) with the support of the great potential possessed by the Banque du Liban." He stressed the necessity of accelerating the formation of a government that "rebuilds confidence and contributes to the restoration of things to the right level to relieve monetary and banking pressures."

Salameh described what has been happening as "a state of confusion resulting from the loss of confidence and fears of the development of political matters to the extent of unrest."

Sfeir assured the Lebanese that "things are under control and there is no need for fear or concern for the citizens on their deposits and their money. Despite precautionary measures that protect their deposits and protect the Lebanese pound, banks continue to serve their clients."

FASTFACT

The financial situation was the focus of a meeting between caretaker Prime Minister Saad Hariri and Lebanese Central Bank Governor Riad Salameh on Friday night.

Fady Gemayel, president of the Association of Lebanese Industrialists, met with Governor Salameh and complained to him about "the suspension of facilities, stopping transfers and the scarcity in hard currency, which does not allow the provision of basic raw materials necessary for the industry." After the meeting, Gemayel said: "This puts the industrialists on the brink of collapse for reasons unrelated to them, and this collapse will first affect the banks."

However, the reassurances did not alleviate the confusion and concern of the Lebanese. Protests were held in Tripoli in front of money exchange bureaus, which closed their doors. Money exchange bureaus in Lebanon are pricing the dollar differently from the official dollar pricing. The dollar reached 2,000 Lebanese pounds on the black market because of low volumes.

Many fuel stations in Beirut and the region were closed due to the lack of stock, while other stations rationed the distribution of fuel. Fadi Abu Shakra, the representative of the companies and distributors of fuel, said

the reason for this was that "the owners of the stations are struggling to get the dollars to buy fuel and that the stations are currently closing one by one because of running out of stock."

Things are under control and there is no need for fear or concern for the citizens on their deposits and their money.

Salim Sfeir, Chairman of the Association of Banks

Two laboratories that produce vaccines told hospitals on Saturday that any hospital that was late in paying the laboratories would not get vaccines until it paid in cash, Al Markazia news agency (CNA) said.

The Order of Nurses in Lebanon warned that "some hospitals have begun procedures to affect the salaries of nurses, on the grounds that hospitals did not receive their dues from the state treasury and guarantors, and the Order will be forced to take ominous escalatory measures because the nursing sector can no longer tolerate more prejudice."

The street protests remained unchanged on the 24th day of the civil movement. The protest groups targeted the Foreign Ministry because "the ministry is not a public facility to serve the minister and his group," amid heavy security deployment.

The political discussions on the issue of scheduling binding parliamentary consultations to appoint a new prime minister did not make any progress due to the preconditions for forming a government.

Asked whether the street protests are in a dilemma because economic concerns have overridden the anger of young protesters, Dr. Kholoud Kassem, a political sociologist, told Arab News: "We must not forget that what moved people on the street was the economic situation and people were not thinking about politics. People just want to live. The street uprising may have taken a second facet that is related to politics. But people are not taking into consideration the specificity of the Lebanese structure."

Dr. Kassem added: "After this time, the revolution must monitor the daily reality and how it should move accordingly. What is happening now in the country puts the revolution in a dilemma if it is not directed by people who are known for their competence and lack of political affiliation. People need to be realistic. The structure in Lebanon that people want to change is not just ministers, deputies and presidents. It is a complex system in the Lebanese structure."

Dr. Qassem stressed that "the revolution has attained an achievement represented by monitoring and accountability. This was not available before, but there is an urgent need now for competent figures who follow this monitoring and follow-up what people have achieved."



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Lebanon's grand mufti calls for protesters' demands to be met
Syrian, Turkish forces reignite clashes near border town

[Will Turkey abandon S-400? Trump meeting will give answer](#)

Author:

Sun, 2019-11-10 00:45

ANKARA: During his meeting next week in Washington, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced that he will discuss Patriot systems, F-35s and the Russian air defense system S-400 with US President Donald Trump.

"The only thing that would make Erdogan's visit to Washington worthwhile to either side would be a breakthrough on the S-400 and F35 question," Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, Ankara office director of German Marshall Fund of the US, told Arab News.

"If Turkey could find a way to keep the S-400 nonoperational in return for being readmitted to the F35 program and acquiring Patriot batteries, this

would be a big step toward improvement of US-Turkey relations and putting Ankara back on a Western track," he also added.

Turkey's Defense Industry Directorate recently announced that delivery of a second batch of S-400 systems to Turkey may be delayed beyond the planned timeline, which is 2020. The reason of the delay is believed to be about talks on technology sharing and joint production.

For Washington, the S-400 system, which is not compatible with the NATO defense system, brings a threat to its F-35 fighter jets. As Turkey started receiving its first batch of S-400s in July, Washington removed Ankara from the F-35 program, where Turkey was a significant manufacturer and buyer. Russia offered to sell its SU-35 fighter jets to Turkey as an alternative to F-35s. Ankara is still evaluating the offer's strategic and financial repercussions.

On the other hand, if there is no such deal on the table, Erdogan's visit to Washington will have an unnecessary public relations cost for both leaders, Unluhisarcikli thinks.

Ali Cinar, a US-based foreign policy expert, thinks Turkey has a legitimate air defense need, however it has also been made clear by both the Pentagon and NATO officials that the Russian S-400 system is a direct security threat to the F-35 stealth fighter jets, which serve as the core air defense system for NATO.

"With Turkey purchasing the S-400 and the US imposing sanctions on Turkey for doing so, it is clear that policymakers on both sides downplayed the severity of the situation. Now, leaders of both nations must come back to the table and look for a way forward which would include Turkey taking part in the F-35 program, receiving an acceptable Patriot missile system offer and working to deactivate the S-400 system," he told Arab News.

Cinar also noted that this is the expectation from the US side that Ankara keeps the S-400 but deactivates the system.

FASTFACT

For Washington, the S-400 system, which is not compatible with NATO defense system, brings a threat to its F-35 fighter jets.

"Even Republican Senator Lindsey Graham has indicated that this would be acceptable to Congress. Turkey is very clear to use S-400 from now on; however, it is open to purchasing Patriot missiles as well," he said. According to Cinar, the result of the meeting between the two presidents will depend on which side will give up or convince the other side.

But, Joe Macaron, a resident fellow at the Arab Center in Washington, thinks that Erdogan wants to acquire these Patriot missiles while keeping the S-400 deactivated, and is betting that Trump's inclination to make lucrative deals will override the Pentagon's veto.

"Ankara is offering both carrots and sticks to Washington, either a Patriot deal or deepening military ties with Moscow, which reflects how Erdogan has the upper hand in the relationship with Trump," he told Arab News.

Therefore, Macaron added, if Erdogan pulls this through, it remains to be seen what preconditions the Pentagon will be able to force on this deal to

make sure the S-400 is never operational.

"With US troops remaining in Syria for now based on a fragile US-Turkish cease-fire, an emboldened Erdogan has a bargaining card to use in his White House meeting next week," he said.



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