

A UN Press Release SC/8372 dated 29th April 2005 boasted that Syria had notified the UN formally on 26th April 2005 that it had withdrawn all of its troops, military assets and intelligence apparatus from Lebanon. The UN described the date the withdrawal was completed an historic day for the Syrian and Lebanese peoples, and for the Middle East. Syria was implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1559. So far so good but what the press release did not say and the UN did not know was that Syrian intelligence operatives, secret agents and local collaborators like Hezbollah stayed put.

Syria has a long history of meddling into Lebanese affairs. The Washington Post reported on 20th October that for 30 years "Lebanon lived under Syrian military and political domination. Damascus has often stirred tensions within Lebanon's explosive sectarian mix of Christians and Muslims to advance its regional interests, including during the country's 15-year civil war that ended in 1990. Syria's powerful allies in Lebanon include the Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah".

Bashar al Assad the beleaguered President of Syria threatened on several occasions to spread mayhem and chaos into neighbouring Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. Lebanon is considered as the easiest target. Hezbollah which is the effective ruler of Lebanon is the Syrian regime's loyal agent. So it is easy for Syria in collaboration with Hezbollah to orchestrate assassinations and unrest. The recent killing of Wissam al-Hassan the security chief in Lebanon is just the latest victim of a Syrian campaign to eliminating opponents. Wissam al-Hassan, a top Lebanese security official who worked closely under Rafik al-Hariri, Lebanon's former prime minister, was killed in a Beirut car bombing on Friday 19th October 2012.

Prior to his death, the 47-year-old general had suspected the leadership in neighbouring Syria of orchestrating the assassination of his mentor al-Hariri in 2005.

As intelligence chief of Lebanon's police, the Internal Security Forces (ISF), Hassan dismantled networks of armed religious movements in his country and shut down Israeli-linked spy operations.

He was also instrumental in the ongoing investigation against Michel Samaha, former Lebanese information minister. The investigation led to the August 9 arrest of Samaha over allegations that he was plotting to plant explosives in the northern city of Akkar at the behest of Ali Mamlouk, a Syrian intelligence official. Mrs. Bouthaina Shaaban an adviser to President Bashar al Assad was also implicated in the plot. Many believe this was the catalyst for the latest outrage.

Hassan had previously pointed the finger at Damascus, not only for the Hariri assassination, but also for a series of killings of Lebanese figures opposed to Syria over the following three years.

Friday's attack, coming as it did against another foe of Mr. Assad and in a similar manner, recalled for many Lebanese the killing of Mr. Hariri, whose death set off widespread unrest and ultimately led to Syria's withdrawing its troops from Lebanon. The Syrian government issued a statement on Friday condemning the bombing. No one in the Middle East believes the Syrian denial and condemnation. The Syrian regime is notorious for lying and deception.

The list of victims of Syrian assassinations in recent years included Rafik al-Hariri, former prime minister, was assassinated in a massive bombing in Beirut on 14 February 2005. At least half a dozen Lebanese politicians and journalists were liquidated by Syrian agents including Samir Kassir a journalist killed on 2nd June 2005. George Hawi, a former Communist Party leader and anti-Syrian politician, was killed by a bomb planted under his car on 21st June 2005.

Elias Murr, deputy prime minister and defence minister, survived a car bombing that targets his vehicle as he drove in north Beirut. May Chidiac, prominent TV anchorwoman, of the leading anti-Syrian TV station LBC lost an arm and a leg from a bomb placed under her car on 25th September 2005. Gibran Tueni, a prominent anti-Syrian newspaper editor and politician, was killed by a car bomb on 12 December 2005. Pierre

Gemayel, the industry minister and a prominent Christian politician, was shot dead by gunmen in a Beirut suburb on 21 November 2006. Captain Wissam Eid a senior police intelligence officer was killed by car bomb, along with a bodyguard and at least four others in Hazmieh, a Christian neighbourhood on the edge of Beirut 25 January 2008. The common link between the victims is that most of them are opposed to the Syrian regime.

According to media reports US says it will help with the investigation into a bomb that killed the head of Lebanon's internal intelligence Wissam al- Hassan. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton spoke to Mr Mikati by phone after the funeral of Wissam al-Hassan, the security official killed on Friday. She had agreed with Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati that her country would provide assistance.

Opposition figures have blamed neighbouring Syria for the attack. The Washington Post put it like this on Monday 22nd October: "If speculation turns out to be accurate that the Syrian government was behind the blast, and that it killed Hassan intentionally, it would mark an escalation and a small degree of internationalization of the Syrian conflict. This would not be shocking but still geopolitically significant increase in the war's impact on the broader region." The regime has a long history of assassinations to get rid of opponents. In 2005, the coalition was formed by political parties and independents to be a united force against Syrian intervention in Lebanon.

According to Middle Eastern media sources the bombing of a Beirut neighbourhood on Friday is a message by President Bashar al-Assad's regime to regional and international powers to stop their support to Syrian opposition. A member from the March 14 Coalition (anti-Syrian Block), Ali Hamade, told Al Arabiya that Assad is sending his message to regional and international powers that the security situation in Lebanon can be exploited and destabilized if support to the Syrian opposition is not withdrawn.

Many observers in the Middle East, me included, believe that the regime will continue its campaign of assassinations in Lebanon to destabilize the country. It has tried but so far failed to destabilize Jordan and Turkey. We must not forget that since the Arab Spring protests erupted in Syria in March 2011, the regime has killed more than 30,000 Syrians.

This regime has thwarted each and every UN and Arab League peaceful initiative. The latest attempt by the UN/Arab League envoy Lakhdar Brahimi to persuade the Syrian regime to agree a 4 day truce during the Muslim Feast of Sacrifice has failed. Bashar al Assad refused to play ball. I wrote in April 2012 in the Huffington Post that the Syrian regime will only understand the language of the big stick. This regime should have been toppled over a year ago.

To neutralise Hezbollah, to weaken Iran, to save Lebanon and to save the Syrian people the regime of Bashar al Assad must be dismantled and by military force if necessary and the sooner the better.

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