

Another Lebanese critic of Bashar al Assad is dead. A blast in Beirut Friday 27th December killed at least five people including Mohamad Chatah a former minister and advisor to the former Prime Minister Saad Hariri, the Lebanese News Agency reported. Hatah was named Minister of Finance of the 70th Lebanese Government in July 2008. He is affiliated with the Hariri 'Future Movement' political group, although he officially remained an independent figure in Lebanese politics.

Chatah was very critical of the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad as well as Hezbollah, the Shia group based in the south of Beirut and the southern areas in Lebanon. He was also a leading figure in an international tribunal which was formed to look into the assassination of Rafiq al Hariri, the Lebanese former prime minister assassinated in 2005. Beirut has been hit by several deadly attacks over the past months, including twin suicide blasts in November that targeted the Iranian embassy.

The assassination of the Muslim Sunni senior official marks the latest in a spate of attacks that have recently torn the multi-faith country, fuelled by the next-door civil war in Syria. Chatah, a Sunni Muslim, opposed to Hezbollah's political and military role in Lebanon, was on his way to attend a meeting when the explosion occurred. An hour before he was killed, Chatah tweeted messages slamming the Lebanese Shiite movement Hezbollah.

"Hezbollah is pressing hard to be granted similar powers in security & foreign policy matters that Syria exercised in Lebanon for 15 years," he said, in reference to Syria's nearly 30-year military and political hegemony in Lebanon that ended after Rafiq Hariri's murder in 2005.

This is not the first or the last political assassination in Lebanon. All the fingers are pointing to Syria, Iran and their Lebanese client Hezbollah. Hezbollah is actively helping the Syrian regime in the fight against the rebels and the Free Syrian Army. It is not possible to discuss the assassination in Beirut without reference to Syria.

Syria has a long history of meddling into Lebanese affairs. The Washington Post reported on 20 October 2012 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 killing of Wissam al-Hassan, the security chief in Lebanon just over two year ago was just another victim of a Syrian campaign to eliminating opponents. Wissam al-Hassan, a top Lebanese security official who worked closely under Rafiq al-Hariri, Lebanon's former prime minister, was killed in a Beirut car bombing on Friday 19th October 2012. Typical of the media coverage at the time was the Arab News/AFP report dated 21st October 2012 which ran a headline stating "Syria behind Lebanon Blast". Friday's attack which killed Mr Chatah, 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 in April 2005.

A long history of assassinations and murder:

The list of victims of alleged Syrian assassinations in recent years included Rafiq 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.

In October 2012 Aljazeera and the Global Post compiled lists of the victims of Syrian assassination campaigns in Lebanon which included:

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 anchor-woman, 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.

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 latest assassination on Friday 27th December 2013 is a message by Hezbollah and its masters in Damascus and Tehran to the Sunni Future Movement not to oppose Hezbollah's expanding role in Lebanon.

Many observers in the Middle East, believe that the Syrian 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 125,000 Syrians. This regime has thwarted each and every UN and Arab League peaceful initiative. It is not certain whether the much vaunted Geneva 2 conference scheduled to be held in Switzerland on the 22nd January 2014 will make any difference.

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