

Sunni leader says Hezbollah leading Lebanon into 'Syrian fire'

By Reuters

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(Reuters) - Lebanon's leading Sunni Muslim politician Saad al-Hariri accused Hezbollah on Saturday of dragging the country deeper into Syria's civil war after the Shi'ite militant group's leader said he was ready to go to [Syria](#) himself to fight.



Lebanon's Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah makes a rare public appearance as he addresses his supporters during a rally to mark Quds (Jerusalem) Day in Beirut's southern suburbs, August 2, 2013. Credit: Reuters/Sharif Karim

Hariri, a former prime minister, was responding to a speech by Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah who said that a car bomb in Shi'ite southern Beirut would only redouble the group's military support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

"(Nasrallah's) speech takes Lebanon into deeper involvement in the Syrian fire," Hariri tweeted. "It's a pity to squander the blood of the Lebanese in such a way".

The death toll from Thursday's car bomb, already the deadliest attack in Beirut since the 1975-1990 civil war, rose to 27 on Saturday when the body of a six-year-old boy was found in the damaged ground floor of a nearby building.

Hariri's father Rafik al-Hariri, who also served as prime minister several times, was killed along with 21 others in a 2005 bombing. A U.N.-backed tribunal has indicted four Hezbollah members over the killing.

"What happened (on Thursday) was an ugly crime, but Hezbollah's war in [Syria](#) is crime as well," Hariri said, criticizing Nasrallah for calling for restraint at home while reinforcing his commitment to the battle in Syria which has polarized Lebanon and sharply raised sectarian tensions.

Most Sunni Muslim Lebanese support the rebels battling to overthrow Assad, whose Alawite sect is an offshoot of Shi'ite Islam. Many Shi'ite Lebanese support Assad and Hezbollah's support in the neighboring country has grown from a political to a full military role.

Hezbollah guerrillas led Assad's fight to recapture the Syrian border town of Qusair in June from mainly Sunni rebels, and have also fought in the city of Homs and near the Shi'ite shrine of Sayyida Zeinab south-east of Damascus.

Nasrallah said on Friday the Syrian war was a battle against radical Sunni "takfiri" groups, who he also blamed for Thursday's bomb.

Many Sunni jihadi fighters from Lebanon and other Arab countries have joined the fight against Assad, and some have threatened retaliation in Lebanon unless Hezbollah withdraws from [Syria](#).

The two-year conflict has killed 100,000 people inside Syria and the violence has spread across the Lebanese border, with rocket attacks in the Bekaa Valley, street fighting in the Mediterranean cities of Sidon and Tripoli, and bombs in Beirut.

(Reporting by Dominic Evans; Editing by Andrew Heavens)

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