

Hezbollah Accused of Undermining Syria Peace Effort

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Demonstrators remembering civil war victims in Syria in Berlin, Germany on Saturday. The theme was "Ignorance supports mass murder in Syria." **Joerg Carstensen**

Foreign ministers from Gulf Arab states at their meeting Sunday condemned the interference of the Lebanese Shia militia group Hezbollah in the Syrian conflict and accused it of undermining the efforts to settle the conflict peacefully.

"This interference will prevent the efforts of holding the Geneva 2 conference [on settling the Syria conflict]," the foreign ministers said in a statement adopted after their meeting in the Bahraini capital of Manama.

The foreign ministers from the Gulf Arab states urged the Lebanese government to stick to "the policy of non-interference in the Syrian conflict." The foreign ministers also supported a recent decision by Western and Arab nations in the Friends of Syria group to increase military aid to Syrian rebels to "restore the balance of power" ahead of the Geneva international conference on Syria.

Lebanese Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah earlier admitted that the militia group was taking part in the Syria armed conflict.

Hezbollah and Iran are believed to be the main allies of Syrian President Bashar Assad while some Persian Gulf countries openly support the Syrian opposition, including rebels fighting against the government troops.

On Friday, Lavrov said Russia's embassy in Damascus as well as its naval base in the port of Tartus were continuing to perform regular operations, though "in very stressful and unsafe conditions."

He dispelled rumors that the facilities were to be shuttered due to the ongoing Syrian civil war, denouncing such reports as "speculation and provocation."

Regarding the naval base, which for Russia is the last remaining military foothold beyond the former Soviet Union, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said "there are no plans to evacuate this facility, as well as its staff."

In February, the minister said the base, used for the maintenance and resupplying of Russian warships in the Mediterranean, had a staff of "several dozen." Only civilians currently work at the facility, Russia's Defense Ministry said Thursday.

In May, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and US Secretary of State John Kerry proposed holding a second international conference on Syria. The planned gathering has been dubbed "Geneva 2" because the first such conference on Syria was held in Geneva last summer.

More than 90,000 people have died since fighting broke out between Syrian government forces and rebel groups in March 2011, according to the latest UN figures.

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