

CNN LIVE SUNDAY

Israel Says Will Accept New International Peacekeeping Force in Southern Lebanon; President Bush Hears Pressure to Push for Cease Fire

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In the meantime, the Lebanese are caught in the middle, as well, as Israel and Hezbollah keep fighting. Adib Farha, spokesman for the American-Lebanese Coalition joins me to talk about that aspect of the crisis. Adib, Good to have you.

ADIB FARHA, FORMER LEBANESE GOVERNMENT ADVISER: It's nice to be here.

LIN: A short time ago we heard from the Saudi foreign minister at the White House, and this is what he had to say about who should handle this conflict.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

SAUD AL-FAISAL, SAUDI FOREIGN MINISTER: There's only one problem in this crisis. It is Lebanon. And the inability of Lebanon to exercise sovereignty over its territory. This what we believe is the primary concern of everyone. And everybody who needs help, who must help, should help. And we are not going to enter to these here about this -- I'm not going to say anything or be pushed into saying anything to prejudice the secretary's trip.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

LIN: All right. Essentially, Adeeb, this is what he said, that Lebanon, the Lebanese government needs to handle the situation, needs to get control of the southern part of its country and check Hezbollah.

Why isn't the Lebanese government stepping up, sending its military there and taking care of its own sovereign territory?

FARHA: As of now the Lebanese government, or rather the Lebanese army is indeed, not capable of handling Hezbollah by force. The Lebanese government has been trying to negotiate the disarmament of Hezbollah for the last year through an national dialogue. They had failed to do so before the last provocation by Hezbollah took place on the 12th of July.

And Hezbollah has not yet been weakened enough to where it would be amenable to coercion or to pressure by the Lebanese government or dialogue, whatever it may be. They are still too strong and they consider themselves to have won so far.

LIN: The U.S. secretary of state on her way right now to the Middle East. She has already said that she will not talk to Hezbollah or any of its supporters such as Syria. Is that the

best course of action do you think?

FARHA: Well, I think it is because it is not usual for states to negotiate with organizations they consider to be terrorist organizations. And any discussions she would have with Hezbollah directly or indirectly would be futile at this time. Until Hezbollah has been sufficiently degraded, I don't think that it would be easy to reach any agreement with them or any settlements.

LIN: Which is not to say that Israel has not negotiated with Hezbollah in the past over prisoner releases and exchanges. So, this concept of a multinational force, then, ultimately if there is a peace achieved in southern Lebanon, under what conditions would the Lebanese government accept that multinational force?

FARHA: If I may comment on the first sentence you just mentioned. The fact that Israel has negotiated with Hezbollah indirectly through German mediators before, in retrospect, has proven to the Israelis to have been the wrong thing. It sent the wrong message to Hezbollah. Last time Hezbollah kidnapped an Israeli and the Israeli government released 400 prisoners. That encouraged Hezbollah to do it again.

Now, the second part of your question, the Lebanese government indeed should be the leader in these negotiations. It should not be Hezbollah negotiating Lebanon's future on behalf of Lebanon. It should be the Lebanese government that does so.

LIN: Adib Farha, thank you very much for joining us. It's good to tap into your experience as a former adviser to the Lebanese government. Appreciate your time.

FARHA: Thank you for having me.