



Interview With Nadia Bilbassy of Al Arabiya TV

C. David Welch, Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs

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QUESTION: We heard from many U.S. officials yesterday, all implicating Syria and Iran in the murder, do you accuse Syria directly of its involvement in the assassination?

A/S WELCH: First let me express my condolences to the family and to the people of Lebanon. Second, we're not making any direct accusations, but let me say that the trends and the record seems to be very clear. This is a very disturbing development during an already tense time. We call upon all who have any influence and want to play any positive role in this situation to exercise their responsibility. The implication that Syria may be involved is of course a very heavy one. But the burden of responsibility that Syria bears not to interfere in the situation in Lebanon could not be more important than at this moment. It is up to them to exercise that responsibility?

QUESTION: How will this complicate the administration's mission, they were talk about a window opening here in terms of cooperation with Iraq, there was recommendations of the Baker- Hamilton group. Yet, there is complete destabilization on the expense of stabilizing Iraq. How will this affect it?

A/S WELCH: Actually, this is not a burden upon the administration, this is a burden upon Damascus and Tehran, who fail to see the opportunity that lies before them, to play a positive role in the region. This is what the international community expects, it's not expecting the United States to do anything. It's expecting positive behaviors on the part of these countries. Regrettably, that's not what I see happening.

QUESTION: Does this mean you are not going to talk to them?

A/S WELCH: We talk to them all the time, we have an embassy in Damascus, the problem here is not conversation, its cooperation. In the case of Iran, of course, we don't have diplomatic relations, but we have an offer on the table in any number of ways to speak with them about Iraq or their nuclear program. For their own reasons, they don't see it appropriate to pick that offer up.

QUESTION: One of Hezbollah spokesperson yesterday accused American of being behind the assassination, how do you respond to that, well I think it is really ridiculous.

A/S WELCH: I think that is very ridiculous, I'm sorry that someone would say such a thing at a time like this.

QUESTION: And what can they do apart from calling for a UN Security council to condemn the attack and to investigate all the murders including Hariri?

A/S WELCH: We can stand with the people of Lebanon, this is a terrible crime. Why should this happen? Why should this happen right now? Who was motivated to do this? Only those who don't care about the future of Lebanon do these kinds of things. I think the unity of the international community behind a positive future for Lebanon is very strong. I commend the strength of this family, the people of Lebanon and the government of Lebanon for standing up to this.

Nadia: Thank you sir.

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