



## Press Conference Following Meeting With Patriarch Mar Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir

**William J. Burns, Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs**

Bkerki, Lebanon  
February 16, 2005

**Assistant Secretary Burns:** Good afternoon. As all of you know, this is a sad day for Lebanon after the tragic murder of Mr. Hariri, but I was pleased to have the opportunity to meet with his Eminence the Patriarch, and we had a very good and thorough discussion. I stressed the importance the United States attaches to a serious, credible investigation into the act of terrorism that occurred so that those who were responsible are brought swiftly to justice. I stressed also the continuing strong American commitment to the implementation of Resolution 1559 and I also stressed the importance the United States and many others in the international community will attach to the ability of the Lebanese people to conduct the parliamentary elections in the spring on their own, in a way that is free of any outside interference or intimidation. In that regard, I did note the very strong statement that was issued recently by the Maronite Bishops, so again, it is a pleasure to be here today and to have had a chance to meet with his Eminence. I'll be glad to take a question

**Question:** The Lebanese opposition has accused Syria of committing the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri. What is your comment?

**Assistant Secretary Burns:** I don't know who is responsible for this horrible act of terrorism. What I know is that those who are responsible, need to be brought to justice quickly, and that there does need to be a serious, credible, and thorough investigation. What I also know is that Syria has responsibilities which are made clear in Resolution 1559 and those responsibilities need to be implemented immediately.

**Question:** How will the assassination affect the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559?

**Assistant Secretary Burns:** I think it is a reminder to all of us in the international community and the Security Council and throughout the region of the importance of moving ahead to implement that resolution, so that a free, independent and sovereign Lebanon, what Rafik Hariri worked so hard to achieve, becomes a reality. I think that it is a reminder to us, not only Americans, but to our partners in the international community, to redouble our efforts towards that end.

**Question:** Do you expect additional sanctions against Syria?

**Assistant Secretary Burns:** As you know, we recalled our Ambassador in Damascus to Washington for consultations. This is a clear sign of our growing concern about Syria's behavior, about the difficulties we are having in our relationship with Syria, and it is an opportunity for us to review a number of options that we may have. As you know, the Syria Accountability Act, which was passed by the U.S. Congress, and which President Bush has begun to implement, contains a number of further provisions. So, it will certainly be a subject of our consultations over the coming days.

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