



Lebanon's Former Ambassador to U.S. Killed in Car Bomb Attack

[Mohammed Chatah](#), who served as Lebanon's Ambassador to the United States from 1997 to 2000, was assassinated on December 27 when a car bomb struck his car in downtown Beirut.

The blast killed five others, including Chatah's bodyguard, Mohammed Badr. Seventy-one people were also wounded in the attack.

Only an hour before the attack, Chatah posted a tweet about Hezbollah, the Lebanese-based Shiite militant group: "#Hezbollah is pressing hard to be granted similar powers in security & foreign policy matters that Syria exercised in Lebanon for 15 yrs."

The governments of the United States, Britain, Israel, and the European Union, among others, have classified Hezbollah as a terrorist organization.

Despite its militant stance and often-violent history, Hezbollah condemned the attack in a statement broadcast on Hezbollah TV, saying that the bombing "only benefits the enemies of Lebanon."

The group called on "all the security and judicial agencies to be on high alert to expose the perpetrators and bring them to justice."

Lebanon's former Prime Minister Saad Hariri, whom Chatah had served as an advisor, issued a statement Friday condemning the killing, calling it "yet another terrorist message sent to us, we the free men of Lebanon in the Future Movement and March 14 coalition."

Hariri took on a role as leader of the Movement of the Future, which forms a major part of the March 14 Alliance, in 2005. The March 14 Alliance, in which Hariri also has a leadership roll, is a political coalition comprised mainly of Sunni Muslims, but also includes Maronite Christian and secular groups. The alliance is considered to be pro-Western.

Hariri's father, Rafik Hariri, who preceded him as prime minister, was killed in an explosion targeting his convoy in 2005, just blocks away from Friday's bomb attack. AFP noted that Chatah was the ninth high-profile anti-Syria figure killed in Lebanon since the elder Hariri's assassination. AP noted that Hariri's allies accused Syria of being behind his assassination as well as other killings, a claim Damascus denied.

Chatah's killing came just 24 days after the assassination of Hassan al-Laquis, a senior Hezbollah commander who was shot outside his home southwest of Beirut. In a statement released to the media, Hezbollah blamed Israel for Laquis' killing: "The Israeli enemy tried to kill Lakkis many times ... but its attempts failed until this foul assassination overnight."





Written by [Warren Mass](#) on December 27, 2013

Chatah was strongly critical of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, whom he accused of interfering in Lebanon's internal affairs.

"A united and peaceful Syria ruled by Assad is simply not possible anymore. It has been like that for some time," CNN quoted Chatah's last blog post. "The status quo ante cannot be restored. Iran and Hezbollah realize this more than anyone else."

CNN reported that the civil war in Syria has spilled across the border into Lebanon, where dozens have been killed. Among the violent episodes were two bombings last month that killed 23 people in Beirut.

According to the CNN report, the Abdullah Azzam Brigades, a Sunni jihadist group linked to al-Qaeda, claimed responsibility for those bombings, warning that more attacks would come unless Hezbollah stopped sending fighters to support al-Assad.

A report from AFP quoted a man identified as Hatem, a security guard who stood near the site of the bomb blast: "This attack is a message to everyone in Lebanon that says: everyone can be killed, anytime, anywhere. The country is heading towards destruction.... The worst thing is the feeling of insecurity. A car bomb can hit anyone, anywhere. And you can't predict it or take any precautions," said Hatem.

An AP report carried by [USA Today](#) attributed the current wave of violence in Lebanon to the division among Lebanese who support opposing sides in the civil war in Syria, noting that the Western-backed March 14 Alliance headed by Hariri is engaged in bitter feuding with Hezbollah, a top ally of Syrian President Assad.

Hariri has implied that Hezbollah is responsible for Chatah's assassination, accusing "the ones who run away from international justice and refuse to appear before the international tribunal."

Five Hezbollah members have been indicted for alleged involvement in the elder Hariri's assassination, but Hezbollah rejects the accusations, and has refused to hand over the suspects. The trial is scheduled to begin in less than three weeks.

Hariri, in his statement quoted by AP, said those behind Chatah's assassination are "the same ones who are opening the doors of evil and chaos into Lebanon" and "brought regional fires to our country," a reference to Hezbollah's involvement in Syria's civil war.

Lebanon's [Daily Star](#) newspaper quoted a statement issued by the U.S. Embassy in Beirut: "The United States condemns in the strongest terms the terrorist attack that killed former Finance Minister Mohammad Shatah [Chatah]," noting that the slain leader had "a long history of promoting Lebanon's stability and democratic principles in both Lebanon and abroad through his work within the Lebanese government, as Lebanon's Ambassador to the United States, and at the International Monetary Fund."

Continuing, the embassy statement stated, "We reiterate our support for the Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces as legitimate government institutions that protect and serve all Lebanese.... Today's attack only reinforces the United States' commitment to advocate for implementation of UN Security Council resolutions 1559 and 1701, the Taif Agreement and Baabda Declaration as the means to support a stable, secure and free Lebanon."

Security Council resolution 1559, approved on September 2, 2004, supported free and fair presidential elections in Lebanon and called upon remaining foreign forces (from Israel and Syria) to withdraw from the country.

Security Council resolution 1701, approved on August 11, 2004, called for a full cessation of hostilities



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in Lebanon, the withdrawal of Israeli troops from southern Lebanon, the disarmament of armed groups (such as Hezbollah) in Lebanon, and several other provisions, including supporting full control of the Lebanese government over the entire country.

The “Baabda Declaration,” an agreement made between rival March 8 and March 14 leaders in 2012, calls for “keeping Lebanon away from the policy of regional and international conflicts and sparing it the negative repercussions of regional tensions and crises.”

Photo of Lebanese soldiers at the scene of the car bomb attack that killed Mohammed Chatah: AP Images

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