

Lebanon nears deadline for new leader

by UPI

BEIRUT, Lebanon -- Time is running out for rival factions in Lebanon to agree on a replacement for President Emile Lahoud whose term of office expires at midnight Friday. Despite weeks of French-led mediation, the country's Sunni and Shiite communities are in disagreement and Christians remain divided into two camps, The Washington Post reported. Lebanon's political system mandates the country have a Sunni prime minister, a Shiite parliamentary speaker and a Christian president. The stalemate in parliament over selecting a successor for Lahoud is viewed as the worst crisis since the country's 15-year-long civil war. On one side is a coalition around the U.S.-backed government while on the other is an alliance between Hezbollah and Christian followers of a former general, the Post said. Lahoud said he could name the head of the army as caretaker leader in the event a compromise isn't reached by the midnight Friday deadline.

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