

Hezbollah warns of U.S. gunboat diplomacy

by UPI

BEIRUT, Lebanon -- Deployment of U.S. naval vessels to the eastern Mediterranean Sea sends mixed signals to the region and is a provocative statement, Hezbollah leaders said. Nawaf Moussawi, the militant organization's international relations officer, said opposition forces in the Middle East have intensified, the Daily Star, a Beirut newspaper, reported. Moussawi said a concerted U.S. naval presence failed in past. Several U.S. vessels moved off the coast of Lebanon last week as "a show of support for regional stability," the White House said at the time, as airstrikes in areas on either side of the Gaza Strip intensified. "Initially we thought it might have been to support Israel vis-a-vis Gaza," said Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, a visiting scholar at the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut. "I don't think we can say it's there to target Syria or the Gazans or whomever. The statements coming out of the (U.S. President George) Bush administration all mention Lebanon." The scholar said officials said the naval presence targets Syria. "It could also be a message to target Iran," Saad-Ghorayeb told the Daily Star. "In and of itself, this is simply going to increase tension."

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