# LEBANON ON THE BRINK

## HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
THE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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# LEBANON ON THE BRINK

**THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2007**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST
AND SOUTH ASIA,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
*Washington, DC.*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:40 a.m. in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Gary L. Ackerman (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. ACKERMAN. The subcommittee will come to order.

Secretary Welch, welcome back to the subcommittee at last. I know you have been very busy. I had to go to the Middle East to see you this past weekend. Glad you are back safely.

We are here today to talk about the Presidential succession crisis in Lebanon and the implications of this struggle for the national security of the United States. Lebanon truly is on the brink of either the collapse of the Cedar Revolution or the return of civil war. Like most Lebanese, we want neither. For Lebanon to remain a sovereign and independent state ruled by a government elected and accountable only to the Lebanese people, the United States and the international community are going to have to act fast.

Lest anyone shrug their shoulders thinking that Lebanon's misfortunes are just another sad chapter in the dysfunctional history of the Middle East but nothing about which the United States should worry, I would say it is already too late for complaisance. We should be clear about the stakes involved in what happens over the next few weeks in Lebanon.

Throughout the world and certainly throughout the Middle East, Lebanon's ruling majority and the government of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora are perceived as pro Western and specifically as American backed. We have, for better or worse, put our imprimatur on them. We have provided them with both financial aid and with arms.

As surely as Syria and Iran have acted as patrons to Hezbollah, the three confessions that form Lebanon's majority are seen and are understood to be our allies. It would be nice if they were stronger and if they didn't have their own legacies of violence, corruption and shifting alliances, but these are the allies that we have.

Given the degree to which the United States is detested throughout the Middle East, I am sure they would have preferred to have turned to another country of enormous power, vast wealth and preeminent international influence. There is, of course, no other such

country, so until someone invents another United States of America we are it. As such, the success and the survival of the Cedar Revolution will have a tremendous effect on regional perceptions of our power and influence and our ability to protect our friends and our allies.

When it comes to Iraq, the Bush administration has frequently pointed out that precipitous departure would embolden terrorist leaders, destabilize the Middle East and encourage aggression by Iran. I would suggest that each of these arguments applies, and applies much better, to Lebanon.

While the murderous chaos of Iraq might be explained away as an impossible problem for any country to repair, the collapse of the Cedar Revolution would be likely understood as a clear victory for Syria and Iran over the United States. Failure to protect Lebanon would devastate our credibility in a region already unsettled by our inability to stop the mullah's march toward nuclear weapons or, as yet, to bring the Arab-Israeli conflict any closer to resolution.

Our national defense budget is, by itself, three times the size of Iran and Syria's combined GDP. If they succeed, despite our efforts, in returning Lebanon to its former status as a foreign fiefdom, that failure will not be seen as America just having a bad day.

The fact is the current Lebanese majority has planted its flag in our camp, and it has staked its fortunes on the West. They stand, perhaps imperfectly, for the idea of Lebanon as a peaceful, independent and democratic state whose sovereignty is protected by a single national authority bound by the rule of law. This vision is what America stands for, if it stands for anything. Syria, Iran and their Lebanese terrorist proxies have a different idea.

Having spent 14 years in the Minority, I can say from experience that the essence of democratic government is not the rule of the majority. That is merely counting. The test of democracy is whether the Minority will participate, lose and accept the outcome as legitimate. It is this idea that is at stake in Lebanon today.

Will Lebanon's President be elected according to the Lebanese constitution or according to the dictates of an aggrieved minority armed by and allied with foreign powers? Will Lebanon's majority actually rule, or will that nation's future be decided by bombs and militias and assassinations? Will Lebanon once again become the Paris of the Middle East, or will it once again become a war zone and stagnate as a den of jihadi terrorists, religious zealots and craven warlords happy to lick the fingers of Ba'athist goons?

There are two mutually inconsistent ideas competing for dominance in Lebanon and by extension the entire Middle East. One proposes the supremacy of thugs and clerics, endless violence, sectarian conflict and perpetual impoverishment and isolation. The other proposes the rule of law, peace among nations, reconciliation between communities and economic engagement and integration with the rest of the world. Amazingly, right now it is the second idea, the one that is associated with the United States, that is struggling for survival.

We cannot afford to be neutral in this contest. Our national security depends on the outcome. When Secretary Rice was here 2 weeks ago I suggested four steps that I believe should be considered urgently. First, America's commitment to Lebanon's sov-

ereignty and independence needs to be reiterated by the President in a major address.

Damascus and Tehran and the entire Middle East need to hear explicitly that the United States will not accept the resumption of foreign domination by Lebanon; that we insist that foreign states refrain from interfering in Lebanon's constitutional process: That we consider the assassinations of Lebanon's parliamentarians as acts of international aggression; and that we will never sacrifice the Special Tribunal for Lebanon to appease other states; and that we will push for the Special Tribunal to include all assassinations since Rafiq Hariri's in its purview.

Second, the President should immediately impose economic and political sanctions against the Syrian regime, specifically President Assad, his family and his coterie of close associates. I would note the four individuals sanctioned earlier this week are a good step, but I would suggest that the President has not come close to exhausting the expansive sanctioning powers and authority he has under United States law with regard to Syria.

Third, the United States needs to raise the profile of this crisis much higher. The informal group that met at the Istanbul Conference and produced a very good statement on Lebanon should be formally constituted as an international contact group with the explicit mission of protecting Lebanon's sovereignty and independence.

Further, I still believe the President should appoint a single figure in the United States Government to be responsible for managing this crisis to stability. Perhaps, Mr. Secretary, that person should be you, but at this point, other than the President himself, I don't think that all the parties interested in resolving this crisis know who to call.

Fourth, the House, twice, and the Senate, once, have passed resolutions supporting Lebanon and pledging our continued readiness to put our money where our mouth is. Mr. Secretary, if you believe that we need more resources to prevent this disaster, you have to ask for them. That support is here.

I turn now to my partner, the distinguished Minority ranking member, Mike Pence.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Ackerman follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE GARY L. ACKERMAN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW YORK, AND CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA

Secretary Welch, welcome back to the Subcommittee at last. I know you've been very busy, but we've missed you.

We're here today to talk about the presidential succession crisis in Lebanon and the implications of this struggle for the national security of the United States. Lebanon truly is on the brink of either the collapse of the Cedar Revolution, or the return of civil war. Like most Lebanese, we want neither. For Lebanon to remain a sovereign and independent state, ruled by a government elected and accountable only to the Lebanese people, the United States and the international community are going to have to act fast.

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pro-Western, and specifically, as American-backed. We have, for better or worse, put our imprimatur on them. We have provided them with both financial aid and with arms. As surely as Syria and Iran have acted as patrons to Hezbollah, the three confessions that form Lebanon's majority are seen and are understood to be our allies. It would be nice if they were stronger, and if they didn't have their own legacies of violence, corruption, and shifting alliances, but these are the allies we have.

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We cannot afford to be neutral in this contest. Our national security depends on the outcome. When Secretary Rice was here two weeks ago I suggested four steps that I believe should be considered urgently. First, America's commitment to Lebanon's sovereignty and independence needs to be reiterated by the President in a major address. Damascus and Tehran and the entire Middle East need to hear explicitly that the United States will not accept the resumption of foreign domination of Lebanon; that we insist that foreign states refrain from interfering in Lebanon's constitutional processes; that we consider the assassinations of Lebanese parliamentarians as acts of international aggression; that we will never sacrifice the Special Tribunal for Lebanon to appease other states; and that we will push for the Special Tribunal to include all assassinations since Rafiq Hariri's in its purview.

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Mr. PENCE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for calling this hearing. I am both personally and professionally an admirer of the Assistant Secretary and never want to miss an opportunity for recognizing the sacrifices you and your family and your staff make in the service to the United States of America.

From the Cedar Revolution of 2½ years ago to the hopeful developments of the March 14 coalition to the Syrian withdrawal of 2005, there was once great promise in Lebanon. Those events have long since yielded to stalemate and stagnation, which makes this hearing today all the more important.

Since we last heard from our distinguished witness some 6 months ago, precious little has changed. Very little progress and few encouraged developments in a troubled situation with a government in crisis. More ominously, Lebanon is a country in at least partial grip of a terrorist organization, Hezbollah, and subject to a campaign of assassinations against political leaders led by allies of Syria.

Syria remains a parasitic menace which withdrew only when it believed its penetration of the Lebanese Government was so complete that it was no longer required. Anywhere there is trouble in the Middle East, the ugly hand of Iran seems never far away.

Both these governments and their agencies clearly work closely with a heavily armed Hezbollah, which of course waged war on Israel a year ago. The evidence is clear. Syria is continuing an active terror campaign against its rivals in the Lebanese Government.

Mr. Chairman, I should note here that I do take issue with those, including some in this body, who argue that the wisest course America could pursue would be to take up negotiations with these two leading state sponsors of terror, Iran and Syria. Their malicious influence is felt across the region. Unconditional talks with either of them, I would reiterate, would be unwise.

As with the Palestinian situation, when a terrorist organization masquerades as a political party it cannot help but corrupt its target government and bring the political process to a halt. Since Hezbollah holds a pivotal 10-plus percent of the Lebanese Parliament, this is exactly what is occurring in my judgment.

While I hope our witness reports differently, it appears that the U.N. investigation into the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri is stalemated, blocked by Syria and its international and Lebanese allies.

A further discouraging sign is the looming deadline for the expiration of the government. Within 16 short days a Presidential elec-

tion is supposed to occur, an event which shows no signs of happening. The Syrian backed factions are threatening to set up their own rival government, and President Emile Lahoud appears to be blocking the election to choose his successor. This is a crisis which shows no signs of being resolved any time soon.

Mr. Chairman, the present situation in Lebanon is deeply troubling and not particularly hopeful right now. I sincerely thank you for calling this hearing. It is a testament to your leadership of this committee that before these issues are in the headlines they are before this subcommittee.

I also again want to reiterate my appreciation to Ambassador Welch and look forward to his testimony.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Scott?

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I too want to welcome Ambassador Welch to this very important hearing concerning the growing crisis in Lebanon.

Of chief concern to me, and I would think the full committee, is the growing instability of the government and the role that Syria, Hezbollah and ultimately Iran have in promoting that instability.

Lebanon's Government has been decidedly pro-West—I have no doubt about that—making it an isolate pocket of moderation in an increasingly extremist region. This of course has led to some consternation among those who favor extremism and detest moderation.

And so now we see attempts by various forces, both from within Lebanon and outside Lebanon, to destabilize this government. We find ourselves once again having a hearing to discuss instability in the Middle East, and part of that conversation is again the influence of these outside actors.

Most concerning to me is the role that Iran is playing in both funding and supplying many of the factions of extremism that would seek to topple this Lebanese Government. I am very much looking forward to the day where we can have a conversation about the Middle East and not talk about the destabilizing influence of Iran. I hope that day will come sooner than later, but today it would seem is not that day.

Recent news reports state that after extensive administration pressure Iran has, to a very small extent, kept its promise to stem the flow of weapons and money into Iraq. I certainly want to get your feelings on that to see if you agree with those news reports. It is a dubious claim to me at best, but I will assume for now that it is true pending what you have to say about that.

I would like to know, however, what sorts of conversations the Bush administration, or the international community for that matter, have had with Iran about its meddling in these Lebanese affairs and if those conversations have been similarly fruitful.

I think a key issue and question has to be that Hezbollah has been assisting the Lebanese who lost their homes during the second Lebanon war with cash grants and with reconstruction assistance. Routinely Hezbollah's efforts are described as being more effective and more generous than similar efforts being made by the Lebanese Government itself.

So the fundamental question is this: Are our allies and the Lebanese Government being outdone? Hezbollah's money comes directly from Iran. Lebanon is being supported ostensibly by the entire international community, so the real question then is: Is Iran's willingness to put its money where its interest is greater than our own?

Thank you very much. I look forward to your testimony.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Berman?

Mr. BERMAN. Mr. Chairman, I don't have an opening statement, and I haven't had a chance to read Ambassador Welch's testimony, but I would hope, Ambassador, you would cover the failures of the U.N. Security Council resolutions that passed at the end of the summer of 2006 regarding rearming of Hezbollah, the placement of UNIFIL.

I would be interested in knowing what we are doing to deal with the obvious deficiencies in terms of the Lebanon-Syria border, the smuggling, the return of rockets to southern Lebanon, generally the kinds of things that we were hoping that the Security Council action would prevent.

Thank you.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Berman.

Although not a member of our committee, Representative Charles Boustany has been very interested and active in these areas and has been very, very helpful to the Congress and has worked closely with myself on many issues and has suddenly risen to the prominence, although not on the committee, as ranking member.

Mr. Boustany?

Mr. BOUSTANY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I never expected to be sitting here next to you in this committee hearing, although I am pleased to be here.

Mr. ACKERMAN. People come and go so quickly around here.

Mr. BOUSTANY. Thanks for extending the courtesy. I really appreciate it. This is an area of special interest to me, and I look forward to hearing Ambassador Welch's comments.

You raised a couple of points in your opening statement. The U.S. should raise the profile of this crisis. I firmly believe that that is the case.

You mentioned the need for a single U.S. diplomat to manage this issue, and I fully agree with that. I can think of no one more capable than Ambassador Welch in this regard, working in tandem with our very, very capable Ambassador, Jeffrey Feltman.

You mentioned your support for more resources, and I hope that we will hear from Ambassador Feltman as to whether or not sufficient resources are available. If there are more needs, please let us know.

One final thing because I think we are all here to hear Ambassador Welch and not me speak. I want to issue a word of caution as we deal with these various parties in Lebanon and particularly Hezbollah because the situation is much more complex than what we tend to see here in the United States from afar.

The more I study this, there are some interesting openings that could be available by trying to develop channels of dialogue. I hope perhaps we might explore some of that as we go forward.

With that, I will yield back. Thank you.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you very much.

I am now very pleased to turn to our most distinguished witness. Since March 2005, Ambassador David Welch has served as Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs. Previously Ambassador Welch served as Assistant Secretary of State for International Organizations and as the United States Ambassador to Egypt.

Ambassador Welch has also served for 2 years as Charge d'Affairs in Saudi Arabia, at senior staff positions at the State Department and at the National Security Council and in a number of other diplomatic posts throughout the Middle East. It is a pleasure to welcome him back to the subcommittee.

Without objection, Mr. Ambassador, your entire statement is entered into the record, and you may summarize as you wish.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE C. DAVID WELCH, ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE**

Mr. WELCH. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, gentlemen.

First, Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank you and your colleagues on the committee for directing Congress' attention to the issues in Lebanon. I couldn't agree with you more that this is a compelling moment, one of urgency and seriousness for the people of Lebanon and for the national interests of the United States.

I think this hearing is timely also because it will help us to help you and help me to get the message out to the people of Lebanon and to the supporters of freedom there of where America's interest lies and where our support will go.

Congressman Ackerman, let me also thank you for including others from outside the committee into this discussion, into this dialogue today.

Mr. Boustany, I thank you for your interest in our work.

Let me just preface what I am about to say in my testimony with a remark about our business as representatives of the United States overseas. As you all know, because I think most of you have visited Lebanon, it is one of the American Embassies in my area of responsibility that faces very intense security challenges.

There are others—Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Algeria, just to mention some—and, Congressman Ackerman, you were just in Jerusalem these last few days. You know travel in the Palestinian territories is difficult for us as well.

I mention this because everybody who serves an Embassy in Beirut is a volunteer. We do not have to ask people to go to Lebanon. They volunteer for that service. I also mention it because in recent days I think there has been a lot of public attention to whether members of the American Foreign Service are prepared to do these jobs overseas.

We are. We don't need to be told to do them. The demands of the staff in Iraq are exigent, but they will be met. They are being met as we speak, and they are being met by people who are prepared to stand up and do it.

As I mentioned, thank you for directing your attention to the subject of Lebanon. I would like to cover as best as I can in my summary some of the issues you have raised, and then we can discuss it in the Q&As.

On the issue of elections, this has been an ongoing saga in Lebanese history, but especially important since 2004 when the international community passed Security Council Resolution 1559 and demanded in that text free and fair elections. These have yet to occur. The tenure of President Lahoud is shortly to run out, after having been extra-constitutionally extended in the first place.

Since November of last year there has been a concerted effort to paralyze the Government of Lebanon, led by Prime Minister Siniora, to undermine Lebanon's economy and to inflame sectarians' intentions. This began with the resignation of six members of the Lebanese cabinet, including all five of its Shia ministers, and this led the pro Syrian opposition in Lebanon to charge that the current government, that of Prime Minister Siniora, was illegitimate.

There have been efforts to block Lebanon's Parliament from meeting, and there has, I am sorry to say, been a regrettable, tragic sequence of systematic assassinations of personalities, politicians, public figures. The one consistent trend in those targeted killings has been that the views of those who have been attacked have been pro Lebanon, pro freedom and anti Syria.

Lebanon has been struggling for years to emerge from civil war. To continue to heal the wounds of that dark period in Lebanon's history, they need a President who is committed to defending their security and sovereignty. Such a person doesn't need to be against anyone, but should be for Lebanon.

Successful Presidential elections are a priority of the United States. Our position is that we will not endorse specific candidates—that is not our game—but we expect that Lebanon should elect a new President who is not beholden to outside powers or to terrorist groups and who will uphold Security Council Resolutions 1559 and 1701.

President Lahoud, Hezbollah, Lebanon's pro Syrian opposition and, behind them, the Syrian Government are trying to block democratic elections. Opposition members of Parliament might even boycott the elections, though we still have to see if they will present themselves for a vote next week. It could be even that President Lahoud might refuse to step down when his term ends at midnight on the 23rd or even that subsequent to that a second government might emerge in Beirut.

The international community agrees that Lebanon needs to have a strong, credible President who has the broadest possible support. We recognize that democracies, including Lebanon's, have often elected Presidents with an absolute majority of votes rather than the two-thirds that is demanded by the opposition. There have been instances in Lebanon's history where that was the case.

We have united the international community in publicly calling for free, fair and on-time Presidential elections held according to the constitution and without intimidation and foreign influence. Our diplomatic work on this has been extensive.

As recently as this week you see evidence of that in the discussion between President Bush and President Sarkozy about Lebanon and about the election. I believe that a close partnership with our friends in France is important in this regard.

We are also working with others outside and inside the region. Last week on the 3rd in Istanbul, together with the Conference of Neighbors of Iraq, Secretary Rice met with several of her colleagues to discuss Lebanon specifically. This meeting included the foreign ministers of France, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Jordan and Egypt, as well as the Secretary General of the Arab League.

Following the meeting there was a very strong statement issued which supported the elections and condemned efforts to influence them or undermine them. Mr. Chairman, this statement was publicly released, of course. Not only that; the foreign ministers who were gathered there intended it to be presented directly to the Syrian Government.

The Syrian foreign minister was trying to catch his airplane so he was not available to receive it in Istanbul, but it was delivered by the Government of France in Damascus directly to the Syrian Government so that the message would be very clear what is meant by foreign interference.

At the end of June President Bush approved a ban against travel to the United States of any persons who are responsible for policies and actions that threaten Lebanon's sovereignty and democracy. In August, an executive order issued by the President authorized Treasury to block the property of persons responsible for undermining the sovereignty of Lebanon as democratic processes and institution. The designation of the first three individuals under this authority was accomplished just a couple of days ago.

The Maronite Patriarch of Lebanon, who as you all know has a prominent role in galvanizing the Christian community in support of elections, has described a boycott of any electoral session as a boycott of the nation.

Mr. Chairman, I know your voice in particular has been powerful and important in signaling the attitude of this House about the situation in Lebanon. We would ask Congress to continue to reaffirm the civic duty of all Lebanon parliamentarians to vote in electoral sessions.

The United States has provided, with your support, significant economic, military and diplomatic assistance to help security, freedom and independence in Lebanon and to support Lebanon's citizens and Government as they work to recover from the war of last summer, as well as this summer's battle against terrorists in the refuge camp in Tripoli, Lebanon.

Together with our European allies and other regional partners, there has been a substantial amount of assistance provided to Lebanon. The Lebanese economy though faces enormous challenges, of course, because of the war in 2006, the summer of 2006, but also by the continuing political stalemate there.

I think as everyone knows, Lebanon is a preferred tourist spot in the region, but that industry, which employs a lot of Lebanese, has suffered grievously for two summers in a row.

The political crisis does impede our ability to deliver assistance, but not totally, and we dispersed most of the $230 million that President Bush initially pledged to help Lebanon's recovery and have begun to disperse the more than $700 million in fiscal year 2007 supplemental assistance.

I would describe our resource situation, Mr. Chairman, right now as pretty good. That is, if you compare what we have done since the summer of 2006 to what came before, since August 2006 we have pledged, gathered and begun to disperse nearly $1 billion in American assistance; really, truly an extraordinary level for Lebanon given its size and given the history of our assistance relationship. By comparison, before fiscal year 2005 average annual levels were in the neighborhood of $50 million a year.

One of you mentioned the establishment of the Tribunal, as well as the investigative proceedings to look at the political assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri. The Tribunal and the investigation are really important in the culture of impunity of political murder in this society and to demonstrate that violence won't be tolerated.

We have made progress in the establishment of the Tribunal itself. The Government of the Netherlands has agreed to host the Special Tribunal. International donors are now pledging money toward the Tribunal's budget because the U.N. has an appeal to fund its first year of operation and wants to get pledges for subsequent out years.

The United States has contributed, sir, to that already with an initial $5 million. We have asked some of our friends internationally and in the region to do so as well, and I am very confident that we will see the financial support that is necessary forthcoming.

Meanwhile, the investigative committee itself continues its work under the leadership of the chief investigator, Mr. Brammertz. He is building cases for potential prosecution by the Tribunal, and of course, like any prosecutor, he has been commendably discreet. He has reported to the Security Council that he has uncovered important evidence, and he has stated that he is nearing the end of this phase of his work.

Unfortunately for Lebanon, this summer it faced a new and unexpected threat. In May, a terrorist organized called Fatah al-Islam attacked Lebanese security forces in the area of Tripoli outside the Nahr el-Bared refugee camp. This touched off a battle that lasted 3 months. Quite a number of Lebanese army soldiers were killed and wounded, as were many civilians. The refugee camp in the fighting was nearly destroyed, and nearly 30,000 refugees were displaced to a nearby area.

In September, after a long, difficult and courageous fight, the Government of Lebanon declared Fatah al-Islam defeated. We share that judgment. The Lebanese army fought with valor and intensity, and the sacrifice of their soldiers was not in vain.

This is an important event because it shows the threat, but it also shows a new level of response. Since the late 1960s, the Lebanese army has not entered Palestinian camps in Lebanon, so this is an important change, and I think it justifies—it is partial justification for the considerable support that we provided to the Leb-

anese army, support that we provided even during this crisis with over 40 plane loads of emergency military assistance.

Mr. Berman asked for a status report on Security Council Resolution 1701 and in particular on securing Lebanon and its border. This is a problem that remains serious. Weapons do continue to flow across that border from Syria into Lebanon.

The resolution asks Lebanon to secure its border, and it imposed a legally binding obligation on all states to prevent weapons smuggling into Lebanon. In the most recent report from the Secretary General on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1701, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon noted that he had received a body of reporting from a number of governments detailing serious breaches in the arms embargo.

I mention that because sometimes there is the impression not here, but elsewhere internationally, that these are accusations and accusations alone coming from one country in the region and the United States. That is not true. The information comes from a number of sources according to the U.N.'s testimony itself. Prime Minister Siniora has also reported multiple instances of transfers of weaponry across that frontier.

We have asked U.N. member states to help and to act to defend the border and enforce the arms embargo. The Government of Lebanon has deployed an extraordinary number of troops to help prevent this. Germany has begun an important pilot program to provide equipment and training to the border security force to help implement this embargo.

These steps, while important and helpful, have yet to diminish the flow of weapons across the border, and we would like to see a much more robust international presence to assist in monitoring the border. Some aspects of our assistance will be devoted to help the Lebanese army and security forces in that mission.

The reality is that these weapons are going mostly to one illegal armed group, Hezbollah. We believe that such groups should be disarmed and disbanded. If they wish to pursue politics that is of course fine. We may not agree with their principles and how they go about doing it, but doing it armed is not acceptable.

We note the deep hypocrisy of the claim from the Hezbollah that it is defending Lebanon even as the Lebanese continue to struggle to recover from the senseless war that Hezbollah itself provoked in the summer of 2006. Ultimately the Lebanese army and internal security forces bear the responsibility to assert themselves in Lebanon. I believe they are doing so. I believe their work in the south in particular is historically important. As I mentioned, going into the camps is important.

Looking ahead, and I am confident we will discuss this in the questions and answers, there is this still looming political crisis in the country; most importantly, but not exclusively, the Presidential election itself. This is a moment of truth for Lebanon. We will not exhaust any means to support those who want to have a decent, fair, open election according to their constitution. This cannot be a threat to anyone. It helps the Lebanese. It is not directed against any country in the region. It is for the people of Lebanon themselves.

We want to see and welcome a new Lebanese President who will represent the country of Lebanon much more ably than President Lahoud's regrettable tenure. I think the Lebanese will settle for nothing less.

This support I don't think from the United States is questioned by any Lebanese. I think they look at what Congress does in this regard and are cheered by what they see. I believe they do count on the administration as well. We have had a number of Lebanese politicians visit in recent weeks, and they have heard it directly from the President and Secretary of State and from myself that our backing is non-negotiable.

I think, Mr. Chairman, our interest is clear. Our willingness to act is also good. Our dedication and success in marshaling international support is demonstrated, and the focus within the U.S. Government on the issue is there.

Again, thank you very much for calling this hearing. I hope to be able to contribute further to the discussion in the questions and answers.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Welch follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE C. DAVID WELCH, ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and other distinguished Members of the Committee for inviting me here today. I welcome the opportunity to discuss recent developments in Lebanon, the current political crisis, and U.S. policy to support a strong, sovereign and democratic Lebanon. President Bush and Secretary Rice have repeatedly underscored our commitment to Lebanon, and we are working with the international community to ensure free, fair, and constitutional Lebanese presidential elections, further the implementation of relevant UN Security Council Resolutions, strengthen the institutions and democratic processes of the Lebanese state, and in so doing, foil the efforts of Syria, Iran, and their Lebanese proxies and partners to destabilize a troubled nation and friend to the United States.

In 2004, the international community rallied behind a Lebanon struggling to free itself from Syrian domination and demanded, on behalf of all Lebanese, free and fair presidential elections via UN Security Council resolution 1559 (September 2, 2004). Instead, the tenure of President Emile Lahoud was extra-constitutionally extended under threat from the Syrian regime. Lahoud's actions during his tenure have severely undermined the credibility and influence of the Lebanese presidency. It is time for Lebanon to restore that institution by electing a president who will defend Lebanese sovereignty against enemies foreign and domestic and return a sense of pride and participation to Lebanon's Christian community and all its citizens.

Successful Lebanese presidential elections are a key priority of the United States. We will not endorse specific candidates, but we expect that Lebanon's next president will not be beholden to outside powers or terrorist groups and will uphold UN Security Council resolutions 1559, 1701 and 1757. Backed by the Syrian regime, President Lahoud, Hizballah, and Lebanon's pro-Syrian opposition are trying to block democratic elections. We are concerned that opposition MPs might seek to prevent an election, that President Lahoud might refuse to step down when his terms end at midnight on November 23rd, that further MP's might be assassinated or otherwise intimidated from casting a free vote, or that the pro-Syrian opposition would seek to form a second, illegitimate government. It is worth briefly recounting the chronology of their efforts to paralyze the Government of Lebanon, erode Lebanon's economy, and inflame sectarian tensions: In November 2006, the Hizballah-led opposition engineered the resignation of six cabinet members, including all five Shia Ministers, and charged that the government of Prime Minister Siniora was thereby illegitimate and unconstitutional. Lebanon's parliament did not open once during its spring 2007 session. Electoral sessions, originally scheduled to begin September 25, 2007, have failed to convene thus far due to boycotts by Hizballah and its allies. On November 21, 2006, assassins gunned down Minister of Industry Pierre Gemayel. A massive Hizballah-led opposition rally in Beirut on December 1, 2006 inaugurated a sit-in that continues today, an example of the opposition's continued intimidation and obstruction of the workings of the Lebanese state. On January 23,

Hizballah and its allies tried to bring down the Siniora government through violent demonstrations that prevented freedom of movement and resulted in deaths and injuries. On February 13, 2007 bus bombings in Ain Alaq near Beirut killed three people the day before the commemoration of Rafiq Hariri's assassination, deepening the sense of fear that Syria, Iran, and their Lebanese cohorts hope will prevent the Lebanese people from asserting their political and economic independence. On June 13, March 14 parliamentarian Walid Eido was assassinated, and on September 19, March 14 parliamentarian Antoine Ghanem was assassinated.

The pro-Syrian opposition's campaign of destabilization has also endangered all Lebanese by interfering with the Government's implementation of UN Security Council resolutions. In violation of resolution 1701, Iran and Syria continue to provide weapons and support to Hizballah, and fighters and weapons continue to be smuggled across Lebanon's porous borders to other terrorist organizations such as Fatah al-Islam. Recent months have also seen worrying developments in southern Lebanon, where we are pleased to see more than 13,000 UNIFIL peacekeepers patrolling Hizballah's former stronghold alongside the Lebanese Armed Forces. On June 18, 2007, militants launched rockets into northern Israel from inside the UNIFIL zone, causing no casualties. On June 24, 2007, a roadside bomb attack killed six UNIFIL peacekeepers, and on July 16, 2007, yet another roadside bomb damaged a UN vehicle near a Lebanese army checkpoint.

To begin to heal these wounds, Lebanon needs a strong, independent president committed to the defense of Lebanon's sovereignty and citizenry. To that end, we have joined with the international community in calling for free, fair, and on-time presidential elections held according to Lebanon's constitution. UN Security Council Resolution 1559, issued in 2004, called for free and fair presidential elections held without foreign interference; these have yet to occur. We have taken concrete steps to deter further disruption of Lebanon's electoral processes by issuing a travel ban and designating four Syrian and pro-Syrian Lebanese individuals under Presidential Executive Orders authorizing economic sanctions against those taking actions to undermine Lebanon's democratic processes and institutions and contributing to Syria's problematic behavior. We hope that the Syrian Government and Lebanon's pro-Syrian opposition understand that any interference in the peaceful and constitutional conduct of Lebanese elections will have very serious consequences.

Noting that the Maronite Patriarch of Lebanon has described a boycott of any electoral session as a boycott of the nation, we ask Congress to join the Administration in emphasizing the civic duty of all Lebanese parliamentarians to vote in electoral sessions. No one should use the threat of boycott to deprive Lebanon of a new president or to deprive Lebanese Christians of their highest political office. We applaud the recent House resolutions, as well as the Senate resolution, noting Congress's strong support for free and fair presidential elections in Lebanon.

The international community agrees that Lebanon deserves a strong, credible president who has the broadest possible support. At the same time, we recognize that democracies, including Lebanon's, have often elected presidents with an absolute majority of votes. Previously, Lebanese Presidents Sarkis and Franjieh won Lebanon's elections with the barest absolute majority of votes. We believe that any President elected in accordance with the Lebanese constitution and dedicated to Lebanese sovereignty would deserve the international community's immediate recognition and support.

In addition to our support for free, fair, and constitutional elections, we have continued our support to Lebanon's citizens and legitimate government as they work to recover from the devastation of the 2006 Hizballah-instigated conflict and this summer's battle against Fatah al-Islam in the Nahr el-Bared refugee camp. The United States has provided significant amounts of economic, military, and diplomatic assistance to support the security, freedom, and independence of Lebanon. America's assistance is intended to help all of Lebanon's confessional groups build a vibrant and sovereign democracy. While we have made significant progress since the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 1701 in August 2006, there is still much to be done.

The United States, European allies, and regional partners continue to support the Government of Lebanon with substantial amounts of economic assistance. We have disbursed most of the $230 million initially pledged by President Bush to aid Lebanon's recovery and have begun disbursing the more than $770 million in recently approved supplemental assistance. Much of the $940 million in pledges from the August 2006 humanitarian and reconstruction donors' conference hosted by Sweden and some of the $7.6 billion generated by the January 2006 Paris conference aimed at fiscal stabilization and long-term economic reform have also been disbursed.

However, Lebanon's economy, already reeling from the summer war, has been further disrupted by the continuing political stalemate. The Hizballah-led sit-in in

downtown Beirut continues to disrupt business in the city's busiest commercial district.

The Government of Lebanon is beginning to implement the economic reform plan presented at the Paris donors' conference. The reform program includes difficult reforms such as budget cuts, tax increases, and privatization of the telecom sector and other key industries. The plan also contains structural reforms aimed at increasing accountability and transparency, including the adoption of a fiscal accountability law; adoption of a new procurement code in line with international standards, and the establishment of an integrated debt management unit at the Ministry of Finance to improve coordination, debt reporting and transparency. To encourage implementation of this reform plan, we have linked $250 million of our grant assistance to support Lebanon in servicing its sovereign debt to benchmarks in Lebanon's economic reform plan. We have authorized the release of two tranches, totaling $75 million, in conjunction with the Government of Lebanon's signing of an Emergency Post-Conflict Assistance (EPCA) program with the International Monetary Fund—Lebanon's first formal program with the IMF—and the government's submission of a budget proposal in line with its reform plan and the EPCA. We are working with the Government of Lebanon and the World Bank to use this $75 million to directly service World Bank debt on behalf of Lebanon. We hope Lebanon's pro-Syrian opposition understands that an election marred by political violence or foreign interference will undermine the international community's ability to help Lebanon's economy prosper. Economic stagnation would have a disproportionate impact on Lebanon's poorer communities, particularly those in southern Lebanon.

U.S. funding has been provided in conjunction with $50 million in project assistance to help strengthen legislative and judicial processes and municipal government operations, support civil society participation, and improve primary and secondary schools.

This year, we have also committed $15.5 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), which is providing housing, health, education and other assistance to those affected by the months of fighting between Fatah al-Islam terrorists and the Lebanese military in Nahr el-Bared. This assistance will aid thousands of Palestinian refugees displaced from the refugee camp, Lebanese and Palestinian host families, and residents of nearby villages damaged by the fighting. At a donors' conference in Beirut on September 10, Prime Minister Siniora reiterated his government's commitment to working with the United Nations, the World Bank, and the international community to rebuild the camp and surrounding areas. We are also doing our part in helping to address the needs of Lebanese citizens in the vicinity of Nahr el-Bared who were affected by the fighting.

As Lebanon has taken steps towards economic recovery, important strides have also been made to end the culture of impunity for political violence that has plagued its people and politicians for so long. The Syrian regime, Hizballah, and pro-Syrian opposition in Lebanon have resisted establishment of a Special Tribunal for Lebanon to bring to justice those responsible for the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri on February 14, 2005, and many others in a murderous campaign that sought to silence the defenders of Lebanese independence and democracy. Pro-Syrian ministers in the Lebanese cabinet resigned in November 2006, on a pretext rather than approve an agreement between Lebanon and the UN to establish the Tribunal, precipitating the current political crisis. Pro-Syrian Lebanese president Emile Lahoud abused the office of the presidency to block approval of the agreement, and Speaker of the Parliament Nabih Berri refused to open Parliament's doors, depriving the legislative majority of its right to approve the tribunal.

Despite these efforts to disrupt the pursuit of justice for Lebanon and all Lebanese, the United Nations Security Council adopted UN Security Council resolution 1757 on May 30, 2007, after Prime Minister Siniora and a majority of Lebanese parliament members expressed their desire to see the Tribunal established by UN action if necessary in a petition to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. The provisions of the UN-Lebanese agreement to establish the Tribunal entered into effect on June 10, 2007.

The Tribunal will be Lebanese in character, with prosecutions under Lebanese law, but with international elements to ensure impartiality and increase security for judges and witnesses, including both international and Lebanese judges and prosecutors and a Tribunal seat outside of Lebanon.

The Government of the Netherlands has agreed to host the Special Tribunal, and international donors are preparing pledges towards the Tribunal's budget; the United States has already made an initial contribution of $5 million. Meanwhile, the work of the UN's Independent International Investigation Commission (UNIIIC) continues under the leadership of Belgian Chief Investigator Serge Brammertz. In building his cases for potential prosecution by the Special Tribunal, Brammertz has

been commendably discrete about his investigation. He has reported to the Security Council that he has uncovered important evidence and is nearing the end of his work.

By demonstrating that violence will not be tolerated as a means to political ends in Lebanon, and that the international community's commitment to Lebanese sovereignty in the face of unrelenting foreign interference is non-negotiable, the Special Tribunal will help return a sense of security to Lebanon and deter future political assassinations.

However, even as we work to stay the murderous hand of Lebanon's enemies, the nation has been forced to confront new threats. On May 19, 2007 the Fatah al-Islam terrorist organization attacked Lebanese security forces near the Nahr el-Bared refugee camp outside of Tripoli, Lebanon, touching off a three-month battle that killed more than 150 Lebanese soldiers and dozens of civilians, and resulted in the near-complete destruction of the refugee camp and displacement of more than 30,000 refugees. The Lebanese Armed Forces demonstrated unparalleled courage and resolve in their fight against Fatah al-Islam, despite facing severe shortages of ammunition and equipment. Furthermore, the military's performance in Nahr el-Bared silenced detractors who worried that units would fragment in combat or that commanders would bow to pressure from Hizballah, whose Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah sought to discourage the LAF from going into the camps by calling entry into the camp a "red line." We are proud to have played a role in Lebanon's victory over Fatah al-Islam by shipping more than 40 planeloads of emergency military assistance to help the Lebanese army sustain its operations until a decisive victory was achieved. On September 2, 2007, the Government of Lebanon declared Fatah al-Islam defeated. We commend the Lebanese army's victory and honor the killed and wounded soldiers whose sacrifice helped to achieve it.

Even as the brave Lebanese soldiers responsible for this victory are returning to their homes and barracks for much needed recuperation, other security issues remain unaddressed. For example, weapons, primarily from Iran and Syria, continue to flow across the border from Syria into Lebanon. UNSCR 1701 called upon the Government of Lebanon to secure its borders and imposed a legally binding obligation on all states to prevent weapons smuggling into Lebanon. In his most recent report to the Security Council on the status of implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1701, Secretary General Ban noted a body of reporting from multiple international governments detailing serious breaches of the arms embargo. Prime Minister Siniora has himself presented multiple reports to the United Nations detailing transfers of weaponry, including long-range rockets, from Syria across the border.

We have called on UN member states to act aggressively in enforcing the arms embargo. The Government of Lebanon has deployed thousands of troops to the border to prevent weapons smuggling, and Germany has begun a pilot program to provide equipment and training to border security force, but these steps, while notable, have not significantly diminished the flow of weapons across the border from Syria. We hope to see a more robust international presence to assist in monitoring the border.

These weapons flows directly threaten the sovereignty and security of the Lebanese state by strengthening illegal militant and terrorist organizations such as Hizballah and the Palestinian Liberation Organization-General Command (PFLP–GC). We continue to join the international community in calling for the full disarmament and disbanding of these groups in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions 1559, 1701, and recently adopted 1773, which renewed UNIFIL's mandate. We again note the hypocrisy of Hizballah's claim to defend Lebanon even as the nation struggles to recover from the death and destruction caused by the group's unilateral, unprovoked, and illegal military actions of last summer.

Ultimately, a sovereign Lebanese state, strong security forces, and continued progress to implement UN Security Council resolutions 1559 and 1701 are the best defense against Lebanon's internal armed groups, political violence, and foreign interference. To this end, we continue to encourage the Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces to play more assertive roles in Lebanon, and are providing significant amounts of security assistance to ensure they have the training and equipment to do so including commitments of over $320 million in the last 12 months. We are funding a $60 million program to train and equip Lebanon's Internal Security Forces that will allow them to take over police functions traditionally carried out by the military. We have also massively increased our assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces. In the aftermath of the summer war, and with the support of the Congress, we increased our security assistance from just under $1 million in FY05 to $40 million in FY06 and over $250 million in FY07 to bolster the capabilities of the Lebanese Armed Forces. This assistance has already funded spare parts

for helicopters, vehicles including Humvees to help the LAF patrol the south and the border, small arms and light weapons, small and large caliber ammunition, communications equipment, and training for LAF officers. The effects of our assistance on both the military's morale and combat effectiveness were evident in the fight against Fatah al-Islam. We hope to see a newly empowered Lebanese military more assertively defending the sovereignty and security of Lebanon.

As you can see, challenges in Lebanon are manifold. At present, the Cedar Revolution as well as UN Security Council resolutions 1559 and 1701 are at stake. The international community must redouble its efforts to support Lebanon's legitimate government, its pro-sovereignty March 14 majority, and those Lebanese who share our desire for a strong, sovereign Lebanese state. In the meantime, we look forward to welcoming a new Lebanese president who will strengthen Lebanon's sovereignty, security, and democracy. We are confident that if given the choice, the Lebanese people will settle for nothing less.

U.S. and international support for an independent and democratic Lebanon is strong and non-negotiable. There are few nations in the world where the perils to sovereignty and democracy are as starkly contrasted with a burning desire for freedom and justice. Even in this time of turmoil, Lebanon remains a place of great hope.

Thank you for your time. I would be pleased to address your questions.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary.

I would like to read a portion of a letter that Mr. Pence and I received, and without objection I will put it in the record in its full text. It comes from six prominent members of Lebanon's ruling majority party in the Parliament, and it reads:

> "Tonight you can return to your families and loved ones, but we cannot. In our rooms the curtains are drawn for fear of the sniper's bullet. When we signed up for grassroots democracy our names were added to a list of those marked for death, yet we do not seek your sympathy. We simply seek your support in assuring that the Lebanese can ultimately share in the simple, but precious, values that you dearly cherish and we are still struggling to achieve."

So it reads in part.

[The information referred to follows:]

Wednesday, November 7, 2007

The Honorable Gary Ackerman
Chairman, Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Pence
Ranking Republican, Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
B-360 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Ackerman and Ranking Republican Pence:

The 2005 Cedar Revolution, the spontaneous reaction to the terrible assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri, 998 days ago, is in danger of becoming a historical footnote. Our gains, so dear-achieved with the sweat and blood of those Lebanese brave enough to say "enough" to foreign domination, are being slowly eroded by Iran and Syria, who are determined to snuff out the new democratic ideal.

If they are successful, Lebanon, the only bastion of democracy in the Arab world, will cease to exist and the consequences for a region, where you are fighting to fight back the tide of religious and radical extremism, will be catastrophic.

In the last 15 months, the Hezbollah-led opposition has dragged us into a tragic and needless war and laid siege to the seat of government. Meanwhile, the Lebanese parliament, the seat of democratic expression, has been outrageously hijacked by so called patriots who treat the idea of democracy with contempt. MPs have not convened in over a year. This is a bare-faced attempt by Syria, acting through its Lebanese proxies, to thwart the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolutions on Lebanon, especially those pertaining to the Lebanese-Israeli border and the international tribunal to try those charged with the Hariri murder.

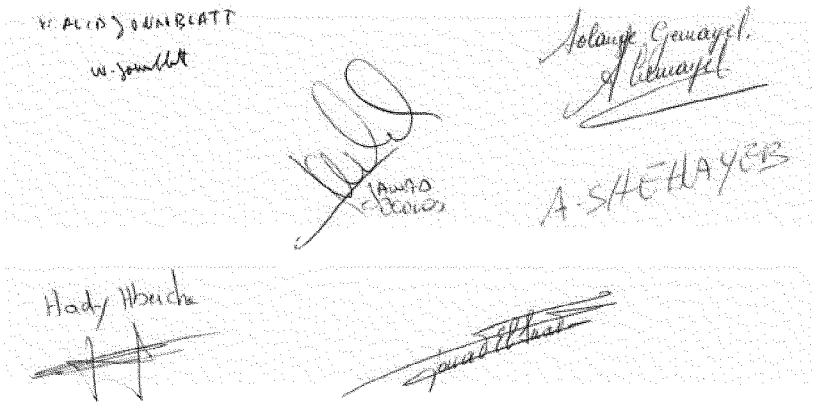
This laying siege to the very heart of Lebanese political life has most recently manifested itself in an attempt to derail the elections of the next Lebanese president and whittle away at the parliamentary majority by the systematic assassination of MPs from the governing majority parliamentary bloc. Six of our fellow legislators have been murdered in broad daylight, the last being our colleague Antoine Ghanem on September 19, and it is from our enforced imprisonment in a Beirut hotel (to avoid our number dwindling even further), that we draft and send this letter to the democratic representatives of the free world.

Should what is left of our precious majority remain, we pledge to elect a president who will put Lebanon before all else and who will work to ensure that our institutions function within the parameters of the Lebanese constitution and that resolutions relating to international law are

implemented. Only then will we be able to declare a new Lebanon, a nation of coexistence, tolerance, and civilization, one that will be an example to others in the Middle East.

The people of Lebanon remember your unfaltering commitment in sustaining the momentum of the Cedar Revolution and today we ask you to consider this: tonight, you can return to your families and loved ones, but we cannot. In our rooms, the curtains are drawn for fear of the sniper's bullet. When we signed up for grass-roots democracy our names were added to a list of those marked for death. Yet we don't seek your sympathy. We merely seek your support in ensuring that the Lebanese can ultimately share in the simple but precious values that you dearly cherish and we are still struggling to achieve.

Sincerely yours,



Mr. ACKERMAN. What support are we giving them that is anything meaningful and tangible?

The terrorists are sending them snipers. I know U.S. moral support is very important. Can something not be actually done besides sending them cards that say greetings and solicitations from your supporters and admirers in the United States?

At the end of your statement, Mr. Secretary, you just said that the United States has indicated that it is willing to act. What actions are we willing to take?

Mr. WELCH. Mr. Chairman, my surmise is the people who wrote you may be included among those who are sequestered now in the Phoenician Hotel in West Beirut where a number of parliamentarians, for fear of the threats against them because they represent the March 14 majority, have gone for safety.

The Government of Lebanon still operates from the Grand Surai where Prime Minister Siniora to this day is standing up and doing his job for his people.

In both these cases, these places are protected by Lebanese security, by the Lebanese army and by the internal security forces. Those are organizations that we assist practically with equipment and other support. We also have a very good dialogue with the leadership of these organizations, including the commander of the command.

Mr. Chairman, in return for American assistance our expectation is of course that these security organizations will defend the sovereignty, security, unity and freedom of Lebanon. That is our expectation of them, so we are not practically leaving these gentlemen to their own resources.

In addition to that, as I mentioned, I don't think our political support could be any more clear. We want Lebanon's parliamentarians to be able to do their job—indeed, we want them to do their job—so that they can have an election, as we said, on time and in accordance with the constitution.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Secretary, your suspicion is correct. They are so protected in the place and manner in which you describe, but it seems to me that we are playing defense, and you can't score if you are only playing defense.

I know it is difficult, and maybe it is not even prudent, to announce what we are willing to do. Perhaps this is not the proper venue for such a discussion, but I would think that something has to be actually done other than just defense.

Syria is a major concern, which is to say President Assad's priority is the preservation of his dictatorial regime and the continuation of Alawite rule over Syria. Like any mafia figure, he sees the Special Tribunal for Lebanon as a threat to his regime since the crimes the Tribunal is reviewing are almost certainly his.

Has President Bush ever said explicitly, definitively and in public that the United States will never sacrifice the Special Tribunal to satisfy Damascus?

Further, are we pushing for the Special Tribunal to include all assassinations since Rafiq Hariri's within its purview? It seems more clear and more than clear that the pattern of assassinations looks a lot like mob style killings to prevent the fair trial.

Mr. WELCH. The governmental crisis that started in November 2006 with the withdrawal of several ministers from the cabinet had as one of its purposes to freeze the Government of Lebanon in asking for international support to establish the Special Tribunal.

As you know, there is a Security Council resolution that establishes the investigation, but there wasn't a similar action at that time to establish the Tribunal, which would conduct any prosecution resulting from the investigation.

It is typically expected of a country whose government is able to function that if it wants to have international support it should ask for it. The Security Council normally does not assume that sovereign right for other countries. But Lebanon was unable to make that request because its cabinet could not meet and its President would not approve the request, even though a majority of the Lebanese Parliament sent a letter to the Security Council, the Secretary General, asking for the Tribunal.

When it became very clear that all efforts had been exhausted to get a decision from the government and its institutions on this matter, Prime Minister Siniora was forced to refer the question to the Secretary General of the Security Council for action.

In the American vernacular then, Mr. Chairman, it was game over as far as any doubt as to whether the United States would establish a Special Tribunal because then it became our responsibility in the Security Council to obtain a resolution, which we did.

That establishes the Tribunal and makes it an element of international law that it should go forward.

It will not be compromised by the administration. There is absolutely no question in my mind about that. There may be a lingering desire on the part of some whom might be affected by these proceedings, and I don't dismiss that that could include the regime in Syria, but I don't know to be honest because I don't know the results of the investigation.

There may be a desire on their part to continue to hamper the work of the Tribunal. They will not succeed in that matter.

Mr. ACKERMAN. In your statement you provide a good overview of the recent surge in United States assistance to Lebanon, a surge that I do support, and I would note that it was approved by Congress without any substantial objections being voiced. While the Lebanese political leaders with whom I have met are deeply gratified for the assistance, what they say they did most of all for the United States is stand up to Syria.

Our current policy with regard to Syria seems mostly to entail determined refusal to either deal, threaten or punish. To my knowledge, the murders of six Lebanese parliamentarians have prompted absolutely no tangible consequences for Damascus.

Given that pattern, why should Syria believe that it will not in fact be allowed to murder its way back to domination?

Mr. WELCH. On the question of assistance, I think—I believe—the political spectrum in Lebanon is indeed grateful for the extraordinary assistance that the United States has afforded, and it really is dramatically high, higher than it used to be.

Though of course everyone always wants more, I think it is important to recognize the contribution of American taxpayers there. We are also trying to direct a significant amount of that assistance to those areas of Lebanon where it can compete with that of others, in particular southern Lebanon, and because of the fighting in Tripoli we also made an extraordinary contribution to the emergency appeal from UNRA about the camps there.

I mention that because I honestly do believe it is important not to minimize the value and impact of that assistance. Of course, it isn't enough merely to point fingers and issue accusations about who might be responsible for, among other things, the political murders.

The real problem in Lebanon is the inability of the political system there to come to grips with how to determine its future, and one significant reason for that is that people won't leave them alone to do the job that they need to do themselves by themselves.

In particular, the interference from Damascus, despite the withdrawal of uniformed personnel, continues to this day. This is an old think mentality in the regime of Syria that believes that Lebanon is a vassal state. It is a curious situation where Lebanon and Syria don't even have diplomatic relations.

I honestly can't think of any other two countries in the Arab League that don't have diplomatic relations with one another, and they haven't even demarcated their common border. Lebanon only has two land borders, Israel and Syria. One would think that the Syrian Government would wake up and see that having a normal

relationship includes recognizing your neighbor exists, having an Embassy there and having a border you both agree on.

We have sanctioned Syrian individuals for their interference in Lebanon, and we are prepared to do more as the evidence becomes clear that that should be done. What is I think very, very important is that we have marshaled international support for this approach.

Mr. Chairman, you referred to a more enduring international conversation, perhaps a contact group on the subject of Lebanon. We have had these conversations all along throughout this crisis going back to 2004 with our friends in the region, and I think it is dramatic and important when they come out and agree with us on a statement that says in common what they think should happen here. As you know, some of these governments are not normally ones that come out in public and say things that are as strong as that.

Syria is deeply isolated from the remainder of the Arab world. It is I think an object of both derision and pain to Syria's fellow Arabs that its strongest relationship is with a non Arab state, Iran, whose interference in the region is abhorred by most of our Arab friends.

We intend to continue to galvanize and direct this international support and to isolate Syria until it addresses this, among other, concerns that we have with its behavior.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Pence?

Mr. PENCE. Thank you, Chairman, and I want to thank Ambassador Welch again. I apologize for having to duck out to introduce a bill on the Floor.

I am going to yield the balance of my time to a colleague that ably filled in in my absence, Mr. Fortenberry, but let me ask you at the outset.

Mr. Ambassador, during the 1990s previous administrations were less outspoken regarding Syria's domination of Lebanon's internal politics. I have a particularly keen interest here because, as we have discussed publicly and privately before, Lebanon remains I think the only remaining major Christian population in the region.

And so I am just wondering what events in the region have impacted the Bush administration's change of course in Lebanon? What is different now that has brought the administration to greater engagement than was true in the last decade?

Secondly, I wanted to know what the United States military assistance to the Lebanese armed forces is being used for and the degree to which it is used we are ensuring that terrorist organizations don't end up unintentionally benefiting from our bilateral cooperation?

If you could speak to both of those things, and then I am going to yield to my colleague from Nebraska.

Mr. WELCH. The history of Lebanon in the last three or four decades is a pretty troubled one, particularly during the civil war period. If I might point to a couple of transition points?

One is the period that essentially brought to a close the most dangerous and violent part of the civil war. One could date that to about the time of the Taif agreement in the late 1980s/early 1990s.

I am not saying all the fighting stopped, but there clearly was a transition point then.

This was an agreement negotiated in Saudi Arabia with Arab support, and it gave some recognition to Syria's role in helping to stabilize the Lebanese civil conflict. The years passed, and gradually Lebanon began to rebuild itself. There was a sense of hope and expectation about the future, and at the same time, to be perfectly candid, the Lebanese felt that they didn't really need the Syrians in the way they needed them in the past, and they began to wear out their welcome.

For a variety of reasons internal tensions began to escalate, and they peaked in a very awful incident, the murder of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. I was in Cairo working as the American Ambassador at the time, and I remember that day vividly. Here is a gentleman who was a real patriot, a great believer in his country, a philanthropist known all over the world. His murder shocked everyone in the region and internationally.

You know, there are occasionally tipping points in history. It seems to me that was one. After that there was absolutely no support for a continuing Syrian presence in Lebanon. Of course, who may have perpetrated that murder is still yet to be revealed, but there is an enormous amount of suspicion about whose hand might have been behind that.

In that moment I think the Lebanese just decided that they are fed up with this. They don't want to see any more Syrians on their soil. That doesn't mean they can't have a relationship with Syria. As I said, they have a common border, a lot of history together, a great deal of social and other interaction.

The Lebanese would like to have a friendly relationship with Syria, but they are not going to tolerate any more of the kind of interference they had in the past. We of course took a look some time ago at Syria's presence and saw it as harmful. I don't know if you can say that that was especially the property of this administration, but certainly these events became very dramatic during the course of the Bush administration.

Previous administrations have also looked askance at what Syria was doing there, but there comes a moment when you want to put it all together and say we are going to change this. That is a product of the determination of the Bush administration.

In my testimony I believe I made it clear that it is not merely that we want it to be so. The Lebanese want it to be so. So does the majority of the Near East region, and it is for that reason that Syria is so politically isolated today.

I mean, I think the most damaging thing to Syria's future is that they have absolutely no support from those who one would think would be their natural friends, their own Arab neighbors. That is something that they will have to wrestle with and that I think has real consequences for their country.

We have tried to make it clear that they have alternatives. If they would cease their interference in Lebanon, if they would take measures to do what any normal state would do and prevent terrorist infiltration into Iraq, if they would quit harboring terrorists who were trying to damage the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians, then it is possible the international community

might look differently at Damascus, but because they have failed to make those decisions they will have to enjoy the consequences.

Mr. PENCE. Let me yield.

Mr. WELCH. I didn't answer your question about military assistance, sir. I can provide you some data separately, but you mentioned one thing about being sure that there were controls on the end use of any weapons and technology that we provide.

Lebanon doesn't have a very big army. That is a bit of a problem right now actually. We have provided assistance historically, including lethal assistance to the Lebanese army. In my memory, there is no case of any diversion of that technology.

That doesn't mean we aren't protecting for the future. We are, sir. Anything that we provide is for the army and for the army alone, and we check to make sure that that is the case. We have had no problems in their use of our assistance.

Mr. PENCE. Thank you for addressing both questions. I was not going to press you on the second.

Mr. Chairman, could I yield a few more minutes to Mr. Fortenberry, or would you like to press on?

Mr. ACKERMAN. Inasmuch as the time has expired, the Secretary has fully answered and given us a great historic lesson of the history, which was professorial, which we do appreciate, we will just break the order and recognize Mr. Fortenberry on his own 5 minutes.

Mr. PENCE. Understood, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ACKERMAN. If that is okay.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. It is okay with me.

Mr. PENCE. I will yield to the chair, and I look forward to your recognizing Mr. Fortenberry now.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Fortenberry?

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate you holding this hearing. Thank you, Ambassador Welch, for appearing today.

You said this is a moment of truth for Lebanon. I agree. I am not sure that as an international community we understand how pivotal this moment is as well for the future of the entire region.

I am on the House Democracy Assistance Commission. We reach out to partner countries, willing partners around the world who are looking for technical assistance from us as to how they can continue their march toward civil reform and representative types of government.

Lebanon has been a very eager partner, and in that regard we visited earlier in the year. It was interesting again the dialogue and one-on-one with parliamentarians and the strong sense of national identity that they express, the pride, pride of history, pride of the sense of the government as they have developed it with multiple confessions having equitable representation according to population.

One of the ironies though was in entering their parliamentary body, which was partly funded by our dollars, there is a layer of dust along the dais in that building. I think that says quite a bit.

If I could summarize what you have categorized as our form of assistance, and you can comment as to whether or not there is anything missing from my understanding and any other recommenda-

tions following up on the chairman's comments that you may have about what more we could do that would be helpful.

But I also want you to unpack one of the diplomatic initiatives that you alluded to that float out of the Neighbors meeting, the Neighbors Conference in Turkey that was centered upon trying to achieve a more collective security or develop a more collective security understanding for the entire Middle East, and yet you seem to say that took a tangential turn with other foreign ministers delivering a message to Syria to not interfere with the upcoming elections in Lebanon.

I think it would be helpful to know who was engaged in that because I think it says a lot about who in the Arab world and other participating countries has this keen understanding of how pivotal Lebanon's stability is to the stability of the rest of the region.

The assistance that I heard you categorize is basically our strong support for the Tribunal, our military, humanitarian and political assistance with, of course, our moral support, diplomatic assistance as well as the ongoing encouragement of the isolation of Syria. Is there anything there that we have missed or that we could continue to pursue more aggressively?

Again, please unpack the developments that occurred from the Neighbors meeting in Turkey.

Mr. WELCH. Thank you, Mr. Fortenberry. Let me start with the second question first. Very interesting who stepped forward and was willing to do so publicly.

Again, this included the foreign minister of France, as I mentioned earlier. France and the United States have a very strong partnership, and along with those European countries that are the principal contributors to the United Nations force in South Lebanon, this is the core of the international support. France historically has a strong association with Lebanon, so it is very key to have them pursuing a common line and for us to associate ourselves with them.

What was very interesting was who was willing to step forward from the Arab world. Importantly, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. If you think of who for the responsible countries in the Middle East represents the epicenter of political strength and credibility, Saudi Arabia and Egypt shape that for Arab opinion, both public opinion and official opinion. Jordan and the United Arab Emirates were also there.

Now, Mr. Fortenberry, this is not merely showing up for a meeting in Istanbul. These are the same countries who are willing to contribute extraordinary resources and military assistance during the recent fighting against this terrorist group in Tripoli. The United States did not pay for most of the emergency assistance that was shipped there. Others did.

France also contributed. I think that is both matching words with actions, and the fact that they are willing to say, you know, we would like to hand this statement to the Syrians directly is really, as political gestures go, enormously important.

What was asked for? It was very straightforward. It was to ask for a new President of Lebanon who would, and I am reading from the statement itself, represent an independent and sovereign Lebanon and uphold relevant international resolutions. The inter-

national community is united in support of a free and fair Lebanese election according to the constitution. Interference or intimidation is not acceptable.

Of course, if you are handing that to a representative of a government, even though the government is not necessarily named, it could not be more clear who you are talking about. It is I think vital to have these voices so that this is a regional issue.

On assistance, of course we have devoted a great deal to providing security assistance, but that isn't the only element. There is an economic support fund component as well of approximately $250 million of our grant money that will help their economic reform plan, but it is benchmarked. They do certain things, and these resources are provided. That is the traditional way of offering our assistance in these cases.

You asked if there was any of this that was devoted to helping the political process. Yes, there is. I can provide you further detail in writing on that. My notes here suggest that around $50 million is to help the legislative judicial processes there, municipal government operations, civil society participation and education.

We also support, and Congress has been keenly interested in this over the years, American educational institutions in Lebanon. There are some very prominent ones there.

I think given the circumstances in Lebanon, we are quite proud of the fact that this assistance is well managed. As I mentioned to Mr. Pence, particularly the security assistance is thoroughly accounted for.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Before turning to Mr. Berman, who will be next, the chair would like to indicate that we are expecting a vote on the Peru Trade Agreement within the next 10 minutes.

Because of the Secretary's schedule and knowing other members want to ask questions, I would suggest that wherever we are at that point when the bells do go off if we could finish that thought and response, vote and then come back—because it is only one vote—as quickly as we can so that any remaining questions might be asked utilizing the full time of the Secretary before the rule on defense appropriations comes up, which would be the next item.

Mr. Berman?

Mr. BERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador, you testified basically that notwithstanding the efforts of the Lebanese army, this German pilot program, they have not significantly diminished the flow of weapons across the border from Syria. Your conclusion is confirmed by the U.S. Special Envoy, Terje Roed-Larsen. The President of Lebanon has called on the Arab League and the United Nations to help deal with this issue.

Why isn't UNIFIL being deployed to the Lebanese army? Originally in part it was because the President of Lebanon didn't want that to happen, I believe. Is that still the case, given his own recent statements? Are there other problems with that?

If that deployment were made would it work? If that deployment isn't going to be made is there anything other than hope that things will change that can deter that, and are recent reports of Hezbollah maneuvers in southern Lebanon, reports from earlier this week, accurate?

I guess the final question is: Is it appropriate to conclude that Hezbollah's rocket capability now is greater than it was at the beginning of the war in the summer of 2006 both in numbers and in range?

Mr. WELCH. The area of UNIFIL's current deployment was decided at the request of the Lebanese Government, and it is basically the same area of operations it has historically had since UNIFIL was established. To change that would require the Government of Lebanon and the United Nations to agree.

For the purposes of ending the conflict when the resolution was passed in August 2006, this was the deployment that was decided. It is conceivable—possible—that the range of operations might be extended on the ground or in the air.

The Lebanese Government has for now decided that what it will try and do is exercise this authority itself. It has some support. There is a German border assistance mission in particular that has operated in the northern part of the border and is seeking to extend its operations, and Lebanon has requested certain other international support so that it could do the job better along the border.

There are one or two other alternatives that are being examined, which I prefer not to go into in the open session because they are sort of ideas that are being explored by some of the European partners to look at better securing the border.

I think it would be very hard to get a Government of Lebanon request now, given the fact that they can't have decisions passed out of their cabinet in the way they used to, but that doesn't mean the Government of Lebanon isn't trying and trying to improve the situation.

As I mentioned earlier, this is a really difficult challenge. The border is porous and difficult to monitor in some places, but it is possible I think to more aggressively move to deal with it, and we need to explore whether some of these alternatives might work.

We are also taking a look at some of the requests made to us for military assistance which would be particularly useful on this mission. Again, we haven't decided on some of those because there are certain releasability questions that we have to tackle, but we are addressing them in a positive spirit.

I will skip to your third question because it relates to the reinforcement. Has the capability of Hezbollah, particularly in the rocket missile area, grown since the summer of 2006?

I think our appraisal is that it remains very, very dangerous, and even though they have moved, they do not have military positions in the area of UNIFIL operations any longer, the range of some of the weapons they do still have available to them exceeds the area of operations of UNIFIL. I mean, essentially you could fire some of them from the perimeters of southern Beirut and be able to strike Israel.

Whether that capability is greater or not, I think in open testimony I prefer not to answer that because it gets into some of the details. Suffice it to say that the fact that they have been able to reinforce because of the porosity of the border and what they do have in their possession remains very dangerous.

Did they conduct any maneuvers? Not to our knowledge. Not to the knowledge of UNIFIL. I think that is yet another one of the

Hezbollahi leadership's statements like rebuilding all the destruction that they caused in 2006, which isn't actually true.

Mr. ACKERMAN. The committee will recess until after this vote. I encourage members to vote as quickly as they can and come directly back here so that we can finish up with the Secretary.

The subcommittee stands in recess.

[Recess.]

Mr. ACKERMAN. The subcommittee will come to order.

The chair will now recognize Mr. Costa.

Mr. COSTA. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the time and the effort that you and the ranking member and others have spent.

Ambassador Welch, it is clearly I think on all of our minds how we try to do everything we possibly can to ensure that a stable, democratic Lebanon is able to succeed in the difficult challenges it faces. I thought you did a good job this morning in outlining what those challenges were.

I want to follow up on a couple of questions that some of my colleagues had raised and get a little more explanation.

As we look at the build up of arms following the efforts with Hezbollah over a year ago and we look at the rebuilding of those arms in southern Lebanon, you talked at great length about the porous borders.

Have we been able to determine in fact where those arms have come from, those rockets? I mean, clearly it seems to be either from in my view Iran, which of course we have no relationships with, or the Chinese.

Have we talked about the Chinese, who are selling weapons in the open market, about their own obligations in ensuring that those weapons that they are selling don't wind up in the hands of terrorists?

Mr. WELCH. Mr. Costa, it is going to be hard for me to give a really good answer to your question in an open session like this.

We believe with respect to the small arms that come through sometimes it is very hard to determine the origin. There is a flourishing small arms market, and the manufacture of certain of these weapons has now spread to a number of countries so it is often hard to determine where they come from.

With respect to the longer range, crew served weapons, the rockets and that sort of thing——

Mr. COSTA. Right.

Mr. WELCH [continuing]. I think we have a very, very strong indicator that some of those are Iranian in manufacture. Whether other countries have supplied them to Iran or not is frequently hard to determine because the Iranians have an arms industry of their own.

There are a number of ways to discern. There are several bodies of evidence that point to why I reach that conclusion, and I am not really able to discuss that in open session.

Mr. COSTA. Well, hopefully we can get some additional information in a closed session.

Mr. WELCH. I would be happy to do so.

Mr. COSTA. Let me pursue two other areas that I wanted to question you on.

Clearly you spoke about the impact of the UNIFIL troops and the changing of their operational practices in terms of the lower profile. You also talked about the Germans assisting with a patrol in southern Lebanon.

I mean, some of us think that when you look at what has transformed over the last 18 months or 2 years that Hezbollah has in fact on its own been able to undo all of the achievements that we had hoped would be realized by the U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701. What would be your assessment of where we are today?

Mr. WELCH. Sir, I guess with respect I would not share that assessment. I believe that this resolution has been effective in assuring security in the areas that UNIFIL covers.

There are capable troops in UNIFIL. It is at an historic high in terms of the number of those deployed. There are quality military organizations there. The French, Spanish, Italians, Germans all represent and have capable military units. Their operations are solid. There is not a discernable Hezbollahi armed presence in the UNIFIL areas of operation any more. This presents a significant military obstacle for them to overcome.

The second element that is completely different than August 2006 is the Lebanese army is deployed in southern Lebanon for the first time since the 1960s, and it has over 10,000 troops down there. A combination of these two things provides I think for a completely different security environment in southern Lebanon.

Mr. COSTA. The totality of the troop strength of the Lebanese army today is?

Mr. WELCH. Rather than completely wing it, I would rather not give you an exact number. My impression is it is around 40,000. As I mentioned earlier, this is not a very large army.

Mr. COSTA. No. I understand that, and we would note the size.

My final question I guess is as I said at the outset I think we are all very concerned as we look at what tools we have out there to try to assist in the stabilization of this Siniora government, this democratic effort, the elections that you spoke of.

Is there anything that you haven't explained yet in your testimony this morning that can be done with regards to the community of nations to provide additional support to the Beirut Government to ensure that stabilization, to ensure that democratic government in light of Syria and Hezbollah and the problems with Iran?

What more I guess in terms of ourselves, NATO and the European Union can be done with regards to money, weapons and political support that we should be attempting to work together on a collaborative effort that has not been done yet at this time?

Mr. WELCH. The political element of this is fundamental. This is essentially a political struggle in Lebanon, and the divide between the majority and the opposition is a political divide.

On both sides are Lebanese, and I believe they need to see that the international community supports three things. First, an election as I described in accordance with the constitution and on time for a figure who can genuinely represent the country of Lebanon.

Number two, after the election they form a new cabinet as they would normally do after an election there and that, number three, that cabinet pursued responsible programs and policies. For us that

means that it supports the U.N. resolutions, including the one you mentioned earlier, as well as the international Tribunal.

Those are the elements of the political way forward in Lebanon. That is what we have called for, and we believe that there is very good support internationally and regionally for that.

I believe, sir, and it is one of the reasons that this hearing is important to me, that this is a message that has to go out every single day, and it must not abate or flag before the Lebanese election. People are watching this perhaps in the region a lot more closely than in our own country, but we need to send that signal strongly and constantly.

That is why I think that this hearing today is especially important because I know people in the region and in Lebanon particularly will be watching.

Mr. COSTA. Mr. Chairman, I said that was the last question, but his response reminded me of a book that I read a number of years ago, Freedman's book, *From Beirut to Jerusalem*.

I am reminded of his description of the 1980s when he was in Beirut and the multitude of factions that existed then among the Lebanese and to some extent obviously still exist today. I am wondering if you could describe for us the level of maturity and sophistication in which those groups work together today that seemingly they were unable to work together back in the 1980s.

Mr. WELCH. That is a very good question because in a way part of the current vulnerability of Lebanon lies in the history of division during that period.

There is a really important difference. Actually two. In 1982, about the time that Tom Freedman was a *New York Times* correspondent in Beirut—and, by the way, Ryan Crocker, our current Ambassador to Iraq, was the head of the political section there.

Mr. COSTA. Right.

Mr. WELCH. I was the Lebanese desk officer. Like it or not, you are dealing with the same constellation of individuals in the press and in government.

Mr. COSTA. That actually gives me reassurance.

Mr. WELCH. Thank you. Today the only armed militia in Lebanon is Hezbollah. In 1982, you had a bunch of militias. I think the Lebanese do not want to return to that day when to protect themselves, regrettably against each other, they were forced to arm.

Today the Christian militias are disarmed. Drew's militia is disarmed. One part of the Shiite community is disarmed, but one big part is not. That is both a danger and a positive signal. The danger is that of course one party wants to use power by arms to impose itself politically. The opportunity is that most Lebanese disagree. They would like to see a future in which the monopoly of force lies in the hands of their legitimate government. That is what we want to see too.

Yes, some of the same politicians are there, leaders of their communities, but that is not unique to Lebanon, certainly in the area or even outside it. There is a new generation of Lebanese. I think we saw those people pour into the streets in the spring of 2005. They didn't represent any single community. They represented all the communities. That is the hope for the future there.

I think Lebanon too to this day, as it has in the post Colonial period in the Middle East, represents a beacon to the area. Too often that beacon has been clouded by violence, but still many people in the area look to Lebanon with affection and respect. They want to see a better future.

Mr. COSTA. The so-called Paris of the Middle East.

Mr. WELCH. Exactly.

Mr. COSTA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this hearing, and thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your indulgence.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you for your participation.

Mr. Secretary, with the exception of the sanctions announced last week, why have no sanctions been placed or applied on the Assad regime's key figures under the terms of the President's announced policy back at the beginning of August?

Likewise, why hasn't General Aoun, who is Damascus' newest toady, been subject to sanctions? I know it is not because we are afraid they are going to sue us.

Mr. WELCH. I am sorry. What was the last point, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. ACKERMAN. Why hasn't General Aoun been subjected to sanctions?

Mr. WELCH. Well, that he and some of his supporters have not been does not remove the possibility that they would be.

We have a set of rules that we can apply, including to those who might try to shake the democratic foundations of Lebanon. The President is willing to use those if he feels it is appropriate to do so.

I would just simply repeat that because they haven't been used in certain cases does not mean that they would not be.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Were the sanctions that were announced last week intended to signal that there is more to come?

Mr. WELCH. We had information on the individuals of concern and the cases of those Lebanese who were sanctioned. These are people whose behavior and actions threaten the stability and security of Lebanon.

In the case of Syrian individuals—and there is a list from previous actions as well—we are able to determine with sufficient evidence that these folks present a risk, and therefore they will be called to account for any relationship they have with the United States.

Mr. ACKERMAN. There are thousands of Europeans who are wearing blue helmets in Lebanon, and yet there are no United States troops in UNIFIL. Have we found that our own interest in confronting the Syrians and Iranians is essentially held hostage to the safety of the U.N. peacekeepers?

Europe's refusal to list Hezbollah as a terrorist organization is widely understood to be a result of fears within the EU that telling the truth about Hezbollah would render UNIFIL's mission untenable.

Is that our view as well, and who is tying down who in south Lebanon?

Mr. WELCH. We believe that the European contributors to UNIFIL are doing a good job, and we support them in their mission.

I believe that they are serious both about their mission and about their responsibilities politically toward the country of Lebanon. A good example of that is France. France has troops in UNIFIL, and it takes a very strong position on the political issues involving Lebanon.

As you know, Mr. Chairman, the United States historically has, generally speaking, not participated with formed units in U.N. peacekeeping operations. We have typically put our own units under mandate, but not U.N. command. We might have deployed some uniformed personnel in certain limited capacities to other operations, but those tend to be exceptions to the rule.

I would also say that in Lebanon we have a particular history because of our previous deployments, and rather than attract more difficulties to Lebanon and considering that we felt that there was a very good alternative, this was not a mission that we were prepared to undertake.

We are not afraid though. I want to be clear that in anything I say I don't wish to signal that. As you know, of course, we have substantial troops deployed elsewhere in the region, including in international peacekeeping, for example, in the Sinai and in Iraq, and that is despite a serious threat presented to those operations from places including those you mentioned.

[Pause.]

Mr. ACKERMAN. We are just checking with Mr. Pence, who was called away for a moment.

[Pause.]

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Pence?

Mr. PENCE. Thanks, Chairman. I just had a couple of additional questions for the Ambassador, and then I will let us all go to lunch.

I am particularly interested in what is about to happen in Annapolis and the whole question of the resolution or an impending resolution between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. I have concerns about that. I have expressed those to you before.

In this vein, I would ask in the event that Syria and Israel resume these negotiations—and that may be part of the totality of what comes out of Annapolis or it may not; you can clarify—how do you think the United States could balance its goals of pursuing regional peace while still protecting Lebanon's sovereignty from Syrian encroachment?

That would be one question, and the other question, Mr. Ambassador, would be about the whole border dispute issue. I mean, in the opinion of some Syria still has troops in what some define as Lebanon.

I would like to get your sense of the determination of the border and what United States policy is and our position is with regard to have Syrian troops left Lebanon or are they in fact still in what may be disputed portions of the geography of that country?

You can take either one of those in the order you prefer.

Mr. WELCH. Sir, the United States under this administration is pursuing the broadening of peace between Israel and its neighbors, particularly with the Palestinians, on its merits. We don't intend to link that to any other policy or trade it off against any other.

The inverse is also true; that is, we would not make a tradeoff of Lebanon's interests for the sake of what some might view as propitiating Syria's indirectly, for example, at Annapolis.

We haven't issued any invitations to Annapolis, but, as the President has indicated and as Secretary Rice has testified, when we do we would likely invite the Arab Follow-Up Committee, which is a group of countries that includes Lebanon and Syria.

I don't know what each might do when and if they are invited. We will see. I can assure you, sir, we are not trading off these policies one against the other.

Our assessment is that there are no uniformed Syrian troops still in Lebanon. I believe Syria maintains an intelligence presence there. It is not all that difficult for them to do that.

I think what is more dangerous and insidious right now is that there are certain groups that are wholly owned subsidiaries of Damascus that are military in character that do operate there in the Palestinian camps primarily.

The PFLP–GC General Command headed by a gentleman named Ahmed Jibril has camps that straddle the border. They are armed in what passes for uniforms, Mr. Pence. As I said, I think they are wholly owned subsidiaries of Damascus. Mr. Jibril, in fact, I believe is a former colonel in the Syrian army. The Lebanese want these organizations out of there. Those are the other armed militias present in the country. They should be disarmed and removed.

The Syrians have refused so far to demarcate the Syria-Lebanon border. You know, as I said earlier, it is kind of odd that two neighboring Arab states don't have diplomatic relations and don't understand what their common border is. That is sort of unique in the Arab League.

There is a requirement in the U.N. Security Council resolutions for them to do that. The Lebanese Government is disposed to do that and ready to do so. The Syrian Government has not answered.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Well, it appears that all timelines and deadlines are converging at the same point. Appropriately, we will be able to get you out of here as promised in 5 minutes, and that time will be yielded to Mr. Engel.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to especially thank you for holding this important hearing.

Ambassador, welcome. I attended a briefing this morning and was told that there have been negotiations between opposition leader General Aoun and Prime Minister Hariri—we were told—that these negotiations were pretty much on track.

If they were successful they might bring about an end to the deadlock now holding up this election of the President. We were told that the only thing holding it up was American opposition. Is that true?

Mr. WELCH. We support any conversations, dialogue and negotiations among responsible players in Lebanon to find a way to have an election on time and according to their constitution.

I know that Mr. Hariri has indeed met with General Aoun. I don't know what it is they talked about, Mr. Engel. Our own view is that Mr. Aoun is a particularly problematic player in this situation now because he has a political alliance with Hezbollah, and his views toward Syria are ambiguous at best.

That said, he may be looking at changing some of those relationships and may have so indicated to others there. I honestly don't know.

Earlier, sir, I said that it is not the position of the United States to look with favor on any particular candidate for the presidency, and Mr. Aoun considers himself a candidate. We look for somebody who can take this job with seriousness and with respect for Lebanon's independence, sovereignty and future.

We think the only way to do that is for the Lebanese to agree among themselves, allow the selection to proceed and allow the democratic majority to decide who will be the next President.

Mr. ENGEL. So you are saying that to your knowledge there has not been an agreement agreed to by all parties, all Lebanese, and that we are behind the scenes giving them a hard time because we don't like the agreement?

Mr. WELCH. No, sir. The United States has a position of principle about the election, about the formation of a new government, about what its program ought to be.

I was in Paris not so long ago where I did see Mr. Hariri. General Aoun was visiting there at the same time. I did not see him there. I am regularly in touch with a number of the political players in Lebanon, and I think I would know about any such deal were it arrived at.

Again, I don't know specifically, but it strikes me that there is no deal with him now.

Mr. ENGEL. Okay. Let me see if I can get in two quick questions under the wire.

As you know, I authored the Syria Accountability in Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act. When will the administration impose a full range of sanctions on Syria that are available under that law?

I know we have imposed some, but it is my frustration that we can impose more. Syria is a bad player in Lebanon, continues to be a bad player in Lebanon, and we haven't imposed the rest of the sanctions.

Mr. WELCH. Well, Mr. Engel, the fact that we have not done it does not indicate that we wouldn't do it. We are measuring Syrian behavior and using what we think is the right response.

That said, we do realize there is some head room in what the President can decide to do, and we will see what happens.

Mr. ENGEL. The last question is obviously it is 2 years now since the March 14 Cedar Revolution, almost 4 years. We are supporting the Siniora government and hoping that they can consolidate democracy, but we see Hezbollah growing. Al-Qaeda's presence is growing.

Unless you have said this already, and if you have I apologize. Is it correct that Hezbollah has gotten stronger in the last year and the al-Qaeda presence has grown in Lebanon in the last year?

If it is so, how should we measure the success of our policy in Lebanon? How does our policy get us to the disarmament of Hezbollah?

Mr. WELCH. Some might have said, Mr. Engel, that with the challenges facing the Siniora government it should long ago have fallen.

I believe that these people who decided in the face of enormous pressure to continue to do their work and exercise their responsibilities is a testament to their strength and their courage and reflects where the center of Lebanese society is. It rejects violence. It rejects the imposition from outside and dictates about Lebanon's future.

There is probably a political crisis in Lebanon because Hezbollah has acted against the interests of the country and is looking for a way now to reverse this trend toward one where the majority enjoys greater responsibility, where it is able to deliver on the will of the people.

Yes, there was something that looked like al-Qaeda in the camp at Nahr el-Bared in Tripoli, Lebanon, but again that was an extraordinary, unexpected and very real danger, but I think the Lebanese acted very responsibly to deal with it. Their army defeated these terrorists in Nahr el-Bared. It wasn't an easy job. They lost 168 soldiers in the attempt and many injured, but they didn't quit. Their enemy suffered far greater losses and was in the end beaten.

I think at the end of the day, I mean, we are all sobered by the realities in Lebanon and the continuing political crisis and difficulties there, but let us give these people some credit for standing up for their rights and staying strong in the face of these threats.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you.

I know we have a time constraint, Mr. Chairman, so I will end now. I thank you.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Secretary, thank you very much for appearing here. We know how packed your schedule is and your travel schedule. You have been a great help to the deliberations of this subcommittee. We wish you Godspeed as you continue your work with the expertise and energy that you bring to it.

The committee stands adjourned.

Mr. WELCH. Thank you, sir, and thank you to your colleagues.

[Whereupon, at 11:50 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

# APPENDIX

## MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD

### PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE SHEILA JACKSON LEE, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF TEXAS

The situation in Lebanon is of paramount important to the United States, to our national security, to our values, and to the protection of democracy. I would like to thank my colleague, Chairman Ackerman, for convening today's important hearing on the current and looming situation in Lebanon. I would also like to thank our distinguished witness, the Honorable C. David Welch, Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs at the Department of State. I look forward for your informative testimony.

Lebanon is a country with a rich history. Recent years have seen a Lebanon determined to achieve democracy, thriving for freedom against the greatest of odds. In the historic elections of 2005, an unprecedented anti-Syrian majority was brought to power and has struggled to break the hold of an entrenched Syrian and Iranian backed Hezbollah. This group of officials, also known as the March 14 coalition, has continued to promote democracy and to challenge extremism, despite the constant threat to their lives.

These threats are not without warrant, as seen by the tragic assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. The last two years have seen a total of four Lebanese parliamentarians killed in bomb attacks. However, Lebanon has the potential to be a great ally to the United States in our war on terror, should its democratic leaders remain steadfast in their convictions and Hezbollah ties destroyed.

Today, Lebanon's pro-Western democracy is in peril. Following what they perceived as a victory in the summer of 2006 war with Israel, an emboldened Hezbollah now poses a greater threat than ever. The governments of the controversial regimes in Syria and Iran have reportedly provided money, arms, and support to the terrorist group within Lebanon. Though these claims are nearly impossible to quantify, most experts, including the Government Accountability Office and the United Nations, believe that the governments of Iran and Syria are working to ensure the rearmament of Hezbollah.

A myriad of governments and international organizations have cited and provided evidentiary support of the existence of a Hezbollah-Syria-Iran connection. The threat posed by this collaboration cannot be overestimated. In March 2007, the government of Israel presented the United Nations Security Council and foreign governments with evidence and pictures of trucks crossing from Syria into Lebanon and unloading weapons. Hezbollah has made no effort to mask its intentions, but rather is actively informing the world of its antagonism and its increased rearmament. Hezbollah leader Shayk Hassan Nasrallah stated, "We are not lying to the world. We say: We have weapons. You bet we have weapons." A further investigation of the issue by the United Nations led the U.N. assessment team to conclude, "The present state of border security was insufficient to prevent smuggling, in particular the smuggling of arms, to any significant extent."

The most recent initiative taken by Hezbollah has been a series of strikes arranged by the militant group, beginning in January 2007, when a general strike, called by Hezbollah, paralyzed much of Beirut. Following demonstrations attended by up to 100,000 people, violence broke out between the extremist al-Qaeda inspired group and the Lebanese army in the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr al Bared, leading to the destruction of the camp and the displacement of thousands of Palestinian refugees. It is almost unfathomable to imagine refugees becoming further displaced from a refugee camp, but this is the situation as it stands in Lebanon today.

This hearing could not come about at a more appropriate time, as the Lebanese government now reaches a crossroads democratic crossroads. With the term of Emile

Lahoud, the current pro-Syrian President, set to expire on November 25, elections appear imminent. Article 62 of the Lebanese Constitution obligates the 128-member parliament to hold a presidential election or the prime minister and cabinet are mandated to assume the executive powers of the presidency. The stage is set for a massive conflict between the anti-Syrian and pro-Syrian political forces within the country. The United States must work to help those who value and strive to maintain democracy within Lebanon.

The war on terror is not just fought on the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan; it is a battle for the hearts and minds of people. It is a war that can only be won through democracy and diplomacy. We need a democratic Lebanon as an ally in our war on terror. In 2007 alone, the United States is estimated to have spent over $769.5 million in supplemental assistance to Lebanon. We cannot allow our financial and political investments in Lebanon to be squandered. We cannot allow Hezbollah to succeed in stifling the democratic expression of a Lebanese people lusting for democracy.

I look forward to the discourse I hope will be produced in today's important hearing. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back the balance of my time.