

THE FUTURE OF LEBANON

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NEAR EASTERN AND
SOUTH ASIAN AFFAIRS
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
UNITED STATES SENATE
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CONTENTS

	Page
Barakat, Colonel Charbel, South Lebanon Army; coordinator of the Civilian Committees, South Lebanon Refugees in Israel	18
Prepared statement	21
Lebanese Information Center, prepared statement submitted for the record	31
Pipes, Dr. Daniel, director, Middle East Forum; editor, Middle East Quar- terly, Philadelphia, PA	10
Prepared statement	13
Walker, Hon. Edward S., Jr., Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, Department of State, Washington, DC	2
Prepared statement	4

THE FUTURE OF LEBANON

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 14, 2000

U.S. SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NEAR EASTERN
AND SOUTH ASIAN AFFAIRS,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:18 a.m., in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Sam Brownback (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Senator Brownback.

Senator BROWNBACk. The hearing will come to order.

Thank you all for joining us today. Secretary Walker, welcome. Glad to have you back again.

I would like to say that with my crystal ball, I was able to predict a timely hearing and exciting time in the Middle East. Unfortunately, we are just lucky to have you here at the very moment the succession was taking place in the last bastion of the old Middle East and of Syria.

Although this is a hearing about Lebanon, the death of Hafiz al-Asad makes it all the more important that we hold this hearing today. We cannot speak about the future of Lebanon without discussing Syria's continuing occupation.

Recent weeks have seen the Israeli withdrawal from Southern Lebanon in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 425. I expected to see the administration put strong, serious pressure on Syria to remove its 30,000 troops from Lebanon as well. I am disappointed to see that that has not occurred.

I hope you can enlighten me on the administration's efforts to put pressure on Syria to remove those troops from Lebanon. It is time that this administration looks at the reality of what has been going on in Lebanon for decades.

Syria has turned Lebanon into a satellite state, with a puppet government so demoralized that its leaders will not even appeal for their own independence. Syria and its allies in Tehran manipulate the Lebanese people with weapons and with threats. They pit Christians against Sunni, Sunni against Shiite. They sponsor and finance terrorist groups that attack Israel and others, operating like parasites on Lebanese soil. And that all continues to take place.

There is no reason the United States should be subjugating our national principles again and again in the desperate hope for a page in the history books. We do need to stand up for democracy for the people of Lebanon and for the people of Syria; for an end

to occupation for Lebanon; and above all, we need to stand for the disarmament of terrorist groups like Hizbollah, who do nothing more than exploit the people of Lebanon for the benefit of extremists in Damascus and in Tehran.

With all that is going on, our administration witness has a quite difficult job, and a difficult time as well. I am happy to welcome you here, Assistant Secretary of State Edward Walker. It is a pleasure to have you come before the subcommittee.

It almost always seems like we are talking about very difficult circumstances. It is a difficult part of the world. We look forward to your testimony.

And we also have two additional witnesses, private witnesses: Dr. Daniel Pipes, director of the Middle East Forum, and Colonel Charbel Barakat of the South Lebanon Army who will also be testifying later on.

Secretary Walker, thank you for joining us, and I look forward to your testimony and our questions and exchange.

STATEMENT OF HON. EDWARD S. WALKER, JR., ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Secretary WALKER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And I agree this is a very timely time to consider our policy toward Lebanon and Syria, and toward the region as a whole.

But, actually while difficulties arise from events that have taken place, there are also opportunities that arise in such occurrences, and we look forward to efforts to try to exploit those opportunities in the future.

I am very pleased to appear before you. After 22 years of occupation, during which both Israel and Lebanon suffered many casualties and endured constant disruptions of civilian life, Israeli forces have withdrawn from Lebanon.

The United Nations expects to formally confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon, in accordance with U.N. Security Council Resolution 425 this week, and we expect the Security Council will expeditiously issue a Presidential statement endorsing the withdrawal.

The withdrawal and its aftermath have been relatively peaceful. Apart from some sporadic looting and some stone-throwing by Lebanese youths at the border, South Lebanon has remained calm. It will take an active effort from all of the players to ensure that calm prevails.

Hizbollah fighters are in close proximity with Israeli forces on the border. This arrangement is clearly not desirable now or in the future, and it is critical, but they are not the—across the Israel/Lebanon border.

We do not envision that the death of Syrian President Asad will adversely affect the implementation of 425 or the calm that now exists in the south, at least in the short-term.

Security Council Resolution 425 outlines three tasks for UNIFIL: To confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces; to restore international peace and security in the south; and to assist the Government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority to the

area. With the withdrawal virtually complete, the focus now is on the second and third tasks.

UNIFIL is currently in the process of deploying using its present level of forces augmented by several battalions drawn primarily from current contributors. UNIFIL units are actively patrolling the Lebanon/Israel border area along with military observers from the U.N. Troops Supervisory Organization. UNIFIL will continue to occupy key points to help maintain stability.

UNIFIL is working to establish a joint operations center with the Government of Lebanon that will coordinate the smooth deployment of Lebanese forces. Clearly, Lebanese leadership and UNIFIL must work together to ensure that security returns to the south.

We, the United Nations, the French, and indeed many Lebanese, have specifically called on Lebanon to deploy its Armed Forces in areas vacated by the Israelis. We are pleased by the government's recent announcement that it will deploy more than 1,000 security and army officers to the south.

We in the international community believe a strong military presence, Lebanese military presence, is crucial to the government's re-establishment of its sovereignty and order.

Lebanon needs to return its effective authority in the area to fulfill its responsibilities under Security Council Resolution 425. Secretary Albright has been in direct contact with Lebanese President Lahoud and Secretary General Annan to stress this point.

The Lebanese Government's ability to consolidate peace and security in South Lebanon will depend in large part on its success in developing the infrastructure of the area. Economic assistance will help Lebanon rebuild after two decades of conflict. We believe the United States and the international community should support this effort which will benefit the region. We will need to work with Congress as we look at ways to be helpful.

As Resolution 425 moves forward, we will continue to press ahead with our bilateral agenda with the Government of Lebanon: Comprehensive regional peace; stronger business and commercial ties; and greater cooperation on counter-terrorism and law enforcement issues.

In the meantime, we continue to support the resumption of negotiations on both the Syrian and Lebanese tracks. This effort remains a priority of our foreign policy of the Middle East. Peace is the best vehicle for change in Syria and in Lebanon. We also believe that the Lebanese people, through their own democratic process, can make important decisions about their future relationship with Syria.

The Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon is a momentous development in the Middle East and a very positive one. The border between Lebanon and Israel is quiet for now. We must continue to exert every effort to ensure that it remains so, first by supporting the U.N.'s efforts to implement Resolution 425 in a peaceful and orderly manner; second, by garnering international support to assist in reconstructing the south; and third, by keeping the door open for a comprehensive peace settlement between Israel and Syria and between Israel and Lebanon. That, ultimately, is our best chance for achieving lasting regional peace and stability.

Mr. Chairman, I will be pleased to take your questions.

Senator BROWNBACK. Thank you, Secretary Walker.
[The prepared statement of Secretary Walker follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. EDWARD S. WALKER, JR.

Mr. Chairman: I am pleased to appear before you today to discuss U.S. policy toward Lebanon following the Israeli withdrawal, a key foreign policy issue.

After 22 years of occupation, during which both Israel and Lebanon suffered losses and endured constant disruptions of civilian life, Israeli forces have withdrawn from Lebanon. Prime Minister Barak pledged during his election campaign to withdraw Israeli troops before July 7, 2000, and he has carried out that pledge. The U.N. expects to formally confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon, in accordance with UNSCR 425, this week.

The withdrawal and its immediate aftermath leading up to U.N. verification this week have been much more peaceful than many anticipated. Our greatest concern was that there would be cross-border attacks that would trigger a dangerous escalation of violence affecting civilians on both sides. This has not been the case. Apart from some sporadic looting that took place immediately following the withdrawal, and some stone-throwing by Lebanese youths at the border, south Lebanon has remained calm.

There are several reasons why calm has prevailed thus far. First, there was strong international consensus behind Israel's decision to implement UNSCR 425, including within the Arab world. U.N. Special Envoy Larsen traveled to the region twice for extensive consultations with Lebanon, Syria, and Israel. Larsen and his technical team have worked assiduously to identify a line, based on the best possible cartographic and historical data, for the purposes of confirming the Israeli withdrawal. Larsen has done a tremendous job grappling with some very difficult issues, and we have urged the international community to support his and the U.N.'s efforts.

Second, both the Syrians and Hizballah have not disrupted the U.N.'s efforts to implement 425. Third, the Israelis made it very clear that they would retaliate forcefully in the event of cross-border attacks, and fourth, the Government of Lebanon dispatched more than 1,000 police and gendarmes and set up checkpoints throughout the south to provide security at the village level.

We do not believe that the death of Syrian President Asad will adversely affect or delay the implementation of Resolution 425 or upset the calm in south Lebanon, at least in the short-term.

There is no guarantee, however, that calm will prevail in the future. It will take an active effort from a variety of players to ensure that it does. Hizballah fighters are in close proximity with Israeli forces on the border. This arrangement is clearly not desirable now or in the future.

UNIFIL deployment into areas vacated by the Israeli's will be a key part of ensuring that calm prevails and that the Lebanese Government is able to re-establish its authority there. UNSCR 425 outlines three tasks for UNIFIL: to confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces, to restore international peace and security in the south, and to assist the Government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority to the area. With the withdrawal nearing completion the focus now is on the second and third tasks.

Once the U.N. confirms the withdrawal of Israeli forces in accordance with Resolution 425, UNIFIL can begin to deploy in earnest. UNIFIL has already established a limited presence in the mission area through active reconnaissance and mobile patrols, and some units are patrolling the border along with military observers from the United Nations Truce Supervisory Organization (UNTSO).

UNIFIL has approximately 4,600 troops deployed in a 1,000 square kilometer area in south Lebanon and is organized into six national battalions from Fiji, Finland, Ghana, India, Ireland, and Nepal. France, Italy, and Poland also provide personnel to assist UNIFIL headquarters operations. As UNIFIL meets its responsibilities under 425, the force may expand to 5,500 troops, to be drawn primarily from existing UNIFIL contributors.

Clearly, UNIFIL must work closely with the Government of Lebanon to implement its responsibilities. UNIFIL will continue to occupy key points to help maintain stability. These tasks require active coordination with the Lebanese army. UNIFIL is working to establish a joint operations center with the LAF that will ensure the smooth deployment of GOL forces.

In spite of its expanded presence in the south thus far, the Government of Lebanon will need to do more to re-establish its effective authority there. Secretary Albright has stressed this point with Lebanese President Lahoud and Secretary-General Annan, and we will continue to do so. The recent announcement by the

Government of Lebanon that it would deploy a strike force to the south consisting of 1,000 security and army personnel is a positive step.

The Lebanese Government's ability to consolidate peace and security in south Lebanon will depend in large part on its success in developing the infrastructure of the area and creating jobs for young men who heretofore have carried arms. Economic assistance will be critical in helping Lebanon rebuild after two decades of conflict. We believe the international community should support this effort, which will benefit the region as a whole. We will work with Congress as we look at ways to be helpful.

As Resolution 425 moves forward, we will continue to press ahead with our bilateral agenda with the Government of Lebanon: comprehensive regional peace, stronger business and commercial ties, and greater cooperation on counter-terrorism and law enforcement issues. In pursuing these goals, we hope to promote greater democratization as a means of giving the Lebanese a stronger role in managing their own affairs.

In the meantime, we continue to support the resumption of negotiations on both the Syria and Lebanon tracks. This effort remains a priority of our foreign policy in the Middle East. Peace is the best vehicle for change in Syria and Lebanon. We also believe that the Lebanese people, through their own democratic process, can make important decisions about their future relationship with Syria.

The Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon is a momentous development in the Middle East and a very positive one. The border between Lebanon and Israeli is now quiet. We must continue to exert every effort to ensure that it remains so, first by supporting the U.N.'s efforts to implement Resolution 425 in a peaceful and orderly manner, second by garnering international support to assist in reconstructing the south, and finally by keeping the door open for a comprehensive peace settlement between Israel and Syria and between Israel and Lebanon. That, ultimately, is our best chance for achieving lasting regional peace and stability.

Senator BROWNBAC. The United States granted military equipment to the Lebanese Armed Forces [LAF], with the understanding that the LAF would secure Southern Lebanon after Israeli withdrawal. Now, you noted some promise in the future of moving 1,000 soldiers into that region. However, what happened right after the Israeli pullout, Hizbollah fighters filled the vacuum.

Will military sales to Lebanon cease if the Lebanese Armed Forces do not secure the south?

Secretary WALKER. Mr. Chairman, I think that the key here is to get the Lebanese Armed Forces to move south in greater numbers. Both U.N. Security Council Resolutions in the past have called for the Lebanese Army to move to the border, and to secure it.

The Secretary has been pressing the Lebanese, along with other members of the international community, particularly the French, to move the army south. We think it is a good first step to have those strike forces established which have those elements of the army in it.

The Lebanese Security Forces and the army combined should be able to do a reasonable job of filling the vacuum, but it is not enough. We are going to continue to press to do so, so that, indeed, organizations like Hizbollah will not be able to fill this vacuum.

And I might add that it is also important that the reconstruction efforts take place under the auspices of the Lebanese Government, so that it can gain the support and the loyalty of the people of the south, and the economic improvement of their conditions as well.

Senator BROWNBAC. Well, Secretary, this is not a surprise, that the Israelis were pulling out of South Lebanon. It was announced. It was stated that they were going to do it, "This is going to happen."

Why did not the Lebanese Armed Forces move in immediately or have the plans to move into the region? Was the administration pressing them to move into the region immediately after the Israeli withdrawal?

Secretary WALKER. Yes, we were, and we have made that very clear. I think that, first, there were some doubts in the minds of both the Lebanese and the Syrians as to whether there was sincerity on the part of the Israelis. We never had any doubt of that. We knew the minute that Prime Minister Barak made the pledge in his election campaign, that he was serious about it and he would go forward with it.

It took some time for that message to sink in in Lebanon. We have been pressing the Lebanese Army to prepare for this eventuality. They, for their own internal political reasons and for the reasons of their relationship with Syria which you know very well about, had had doubts about moving an army in in full measure. We think those doubts have been resolved now, and we expect that they will fill that vacuum.

Senator BROWNBAC. Why so late? I mean, is this not going to be much more difficult to do at this point in time rather than earlier, right after the Israelis pulled out?

Secretary WALKER. No question about it, Mr. Chairman. Our preference would have been to have contact re-employment in effect, with the UNIFIL actively engaged as well.

But the process came a bit earlier than was expected for the actual withdrawal. It was not announced in advance precisely. We knew that it would take place before July 7, but we did not know precisely when. Contact withdrawal was not possible.

I think that the situation in the south, however, still lends itself to full Lebanese Government control and authority in the south, and that is our objective.

Senator BROWNBAC. Will the U.S. Government stop sales of military equipment to Lebanese Armed Forces if they do not fully deploy and secure the south?

Secretary WALKER. Mr. Chairman, I am not sure precisely what is in the works on the military side of assistance with the Lebanese. We have a program of economic support. I do know that the Lebanese Army has improved immensely in the last 3 to 5 years in its ability to enforce its authority in the region.

And assuming that we are able to encourage the army to move south, and to the extent that the internal security forces are able to provide the security, I hope and it is our expectation that this issue will not arise. But I want to stress that it is not just a question of the army.

There are Lebanese Security Forces which have the precise mission of providing internal security in Lebanon. Those forces are also important in providing for government authority, as well as the movement. And almost as important, is the movement of the various ministries to the south, and the various authorities of Lebanon to the south to provide the services that the Lebanese people should have the right to expect.

Senator BROWNBAC. Well, I agree that Lebanon has the right to expect it. I think there is a real difference between us talking and saying, look, you guys ought to be doing this. The Lebanese Armed

Forces should be securing the south, and us saying, if you do not take these steps aggressively, we are going to have to take steps to press this issue with you.

Secretary WALKER. No question, Mr. Chairman, we will press the issue. But at this point, we have no reason to believe that the Lebanese Government will build a vacuum in the south.

Senator BROWNBACK. I would look at it from the other side. I don't have much confidence that they will, given that the Hizbollah has taken a position in the south. It seems like that they missed their grand opportunity to do the right thing, and what should make me believe now that they will back up and do it when it is more difficult?

Secretary WALKER. Mr. Chairman, I will make it very clear. You and I have the same concern. We think it is a very dangerous position to have the Hizbollah cheek-by-jowl against the border with the Israelis. We think it is very important that the Hizbollah not be in such a position now or in the future.

Our efforts will be to engage the Lebanese Government in changing that situation, and ultimately in disarming all the factions that are in the area that act as an infringement on Lebanese sovereignty and on the government's authority in the region. Those are our objectives, and we share your deep, deep concern in this matter.

Senator BROWNBACK. I hope as well if Hizbollah strikes across the border at the Israelis, that the administration—as I have stated on the floor, if Israel should see fit to respond as it needs to to protect its sovereignty, to protect its security, I would hope the administration would have a similar position.

Secretary WALKER. The administration has the precise exact position, Mr. Chairman.

Senator BROWNBACK. Well, I am just concerned that this is not a development going forward the way that either of us would have hoped. I think we need to put stronger messages with your words, saying, "These actions, these consequences will follow if the Lebanese Armed Forces do not deploy in the region," because they are going to have difficulty in turn in dealing with Hizbollah, a great deal of difficulty.

And without pressure from us, from outside, of real consequences, I do not know what truly causes them then to act to overcome those significant domestic pressures that they are going to have, and significant pressures from the Syrians that they have.

I am curious to note, turning to the events of the day—in the future of Syria, the administration's position of whether they support the ascendancy of the second dictatorship of Asad into Syria, what the administration's view would be there.

Secretary WALKER. Mr. Chairman, we are not going to take a position on who should run Syria. That is up to the Syrian people to pursue.

However, I can assure you that we do take a position on the policies of Syria, and whether they are constructive or not constructive. And it is our hope that a new leadership in Syria would recognize that terrorism is not in Syria's long-term interest, that its closed economy is not in Syria's long-term interest, and that the peace process is in Syria's long-term interests.

And those, in addition to the questions of human rights, would be the issues that we would have on the forefront of our discussions with the new leadership once it comes into authority.

Senator BROWNBAC. When will those communications take place? I would presume after some period of time.

Secretary WALKER. The constitution, as you know, is amended in Syria to lower the age of the leadership to 34.

Senator BROWNBAC. I noted earlier, they did that with quite dispatch.

Secretary WALKER. Yes, I understand that. That is very efficient, Mr. Chairman. I think I prefer our system, though.

Senator BROWNBAC. Well, I think I do, too. It has a few more safeguards and a few—

Secretary WALKER. Yes. But I understand that the parliament will be meeting on July 25, and at that time, they would be in a position to nominate a new President. There would then be a referendum among the people to give authority to that decision, and at that point, the new leader, whomever that might be—I think we have a pretty good suspicion—would take over.

And at that point, we would be in a position to engage in a dialog with a principle emphasis on the subjects I mentioned.

Senator BROWNBAC. And what would the administration be stating to the new leadership in Syria about Lebanon? What would be your position? And how will you intend to press this with the Syrians? What leverage will you intend to use with the Syrians?

Secretary WALKER. Well, our position has been staked out for a long time on this question, and it goes quite far back in history. We call for the strict respect of the sovereignty, the territorial integrity, the unity, the political independence of Lebanon under the sole and exclusive authority of the Government of Lebanon. And we continue to press for a resolution for the problem of Lebanon.

We would urge the Syrians to respect that call, the call that, I might add, was agreed to in the Taif Accords which were put into effect, and have never been completely applied to the situation in Lebanon. And obviously, it was a complicating factor to have during the period when the Israeli occupation took place in southern elements of Lebanon. That is no longer an impediment. So we would like to see the Taif Accords pursued and fulfilled in all of their aspects.

Senator BROWNBAC. What leverage will you use against the Syrians to try to implement them pulling out and not supporting Hizbollah within Lebanon?

Secretary WALKER. Mr. Chairman, there are two forms of leverage. One is positive, and one is negative. We have already negative leverages in force with sanctions. We have options of increasing those sanctions if necessary.

But we like to hope that there will be a change in the attitude and approach of the leadership of Syria toward issues such as terrorism, particularly; and that they will engage constructively in the peace process, recognizing they have national interests; and that indeed, there will be a modification in attitude toward Lebanon.

Now, it is also a Lebanon issue, the question of Lebanese and Syrian forces. The Syrians have 30,000 troops in there and scattered around in a few other places. Regarding the Lebanese, up till

now, the government has said it is not timely for these troops to leave because of the internal security situation.

With the Israeli departure, we expect that the situation will be more conducive to the departure of those troops, that the Lebanese Government will be able to exert its authority in the south and will control more of its own country. And this should give it the authority and capability to move forward with the request that the Syrian forces leave.

Senator BROWNBAC. I guess, Mr. Secretary, if you look at the overall situation, and for years there has been a huge, if you would consider it that way, a logjam in Lebanon with the pieces stuck in place. And the Israelis pulled out in quite a strong move that did take place, new leadership in Syria, it would certainly appear to be a moment here that things could radically change for the better.

It might not, but it would seem that this would be one of those moments where you apply the maximum leverage that you can, both positive and negative, to press this on through to change the dynamic that is occurring, that has been in place in Lebanon for some period of time, and that this would not be a moment to be timid about "We are going to use this sort of leverage or that sort of force."

Secretary WALKER. Mr. Chairman, I agree with you on this. I think there are opportunities, serious opportunities, for some change, both in the nature of the approach that Syria has taken toward the world and toward its own internal problems and toward the question of security and stability and independence of Lebanon.

I might point out, for example, that the Syrian economy is in desperate need of change. That change will depend on an opening to the outside world. That opening will depend on Syria adopting a different attitude toward questions such as terrorism.

At this point, the Syrian gross national product is about \$900 per capita. In Lebanon, it is \$4,000 per capita. There is a desperate need for change. We can help in that change. We can make a positive contribution, but it is going to depend on other elements of the Syrian behavior. So as I say, there are both positive and negative levers that are available.

Senator BROWNBAC. Has Israel requested any increased military assistance from the United States to compensate for the loss of its buffer zone in Lebanon?

Secretary WALKER. Within the existing foreign military funds that have been available to Israel, we have designated \$50 million to assist them in removing and changing some of the locations. This is within existing FMF funds. No additional funds have been requested.

What they have requested is that there be a Corps of Engineers contract, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers contract let with the \$50 million. The Corps will then put contracts up for bid. Both Israeli and American companies will be eligible to bid on those contracts. And that would be an element of assistance to the Israelis, but there is no additional money.

Senator BROWNBAC. This may be a speculation, but if Syria were offering agreement that would solidify Syrian control over Lebanon in return for some sort of peace with Israel, what would the administration's position be? Would they oppose this?

Secretary WALKER. Mr. Chairman, we actually think the opposite is the case. We believe that in the situation of peace agreements between Syria and Israel, and Lebanon and Israel, there is the real opportunity for obtaining the full territorial independence and integrity of Lebanon.

We see that as part of the solution, not part of the problem. But our position is very clear. We are not in the business of selling Lebanese sovereignty to anybody for any purpose.

Senator BROWNBAC. So, the administration would oppose.

Secretary WALKER. Absolutely.

Senator BROWNBAC. Thank you. Thank you very much, Secretary Walker, for a timely presentation and discussion, and responding to my questions. A lot of people use the technique of, well, OK, I will answer your question over a 3- or 4-minute time period, so the questioning does not go very fast. I appreciate your willingness to respond directly and quickly.

And I hope you will press this as you stated here with all speed, and ability, and all leverage that you have because it does strike me as a real moment that we have to really change the dynamic. Best to you.

Secretary WALKER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate your comments.

Senator BROWNBAC. Thank you.

The second panel will be Dr. Daniel Pipes, editor of the Middle East Quarterly, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. And the second presentation will be Colonel Charbel Barakat of the South Lebanon Army, Lebanon.

Dr. Pipes, welcome back to the committee. We are delighted to have you here again on such a timely issue as the future of Lebanon when we see the circumstances changing around us. All of us appreciate your insights and your thoughts, and I appreciate your coming here to share those with the committee today.

STATEMENT OF DR. DANIEL PIPES, DIRECTOR OF THE MIDDLE EAST FORUM; EDITOR, MIDDLE EAST QUARTERLY, PHILADELPHIA, PA

Dr. PIPES. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. I am delighted to have this opportunity to discuss Lebanon with you.

My focus will be on the aspect of this subject that I know best, namely the Syrian occupation of Lebanon. I shall explain the reason for the occupation, the implications, the dramatic developments in the last month, and then provide an overview of U.S. policy and give a couple of policy recommendations—all in 5 minutes, I hope.

First, with the collapse of the Soviet bloc, Lebanon has the unhappy distinction today of being the only satellite state in the world. The origins of the situation go back to 1920 when the French Government carved out a greater Lebanon that met with considerable opposition in Syria. That opposition finally could manifest itself in 1975 when the war broke out in Lebanon, and the Syrians had between 1975 and 1990, an opportunity to take over that country, which they did do.

It somewhat resembles the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait that followed in 1990, but the Iraqi occupation was very fast, very brutal, very obvious. The Syrian occupation was slow, careful, and subtle.

The Syrian Government displays many levers of power in Lebanon. It has troops, intelligence agents, and a significant number of Syrian nationals living in that country.

Control of Lebanon brings the Syrian Government many benefits. As you can imagine, and as you yourself pointed out and also Secretary Walker pointed out, Lebanon has a much higher per capita income than Syria. There are economic opportunities. There is drug trafficking. The lively press that existed in Lebanon has been closed down. It is a place where the Syrian Government can tangle with its adversary Israel without the stakes being too high. It is a place for terrorist proxies to work out of.

Curiously, the Syrian occupation of Lebanon is by its own lights, illegal, for the Syrian Government has on three occasions concurred with decisions that required them to leave Lebanon, and yet it is still there.

The occupation has taken a toll on Lebanon. What had been the most open of the Arabic-speaking countries, boasting decentralized power, real democracy, rule of law, unimpeded movement in a Hong Kong-style free market, independent schools, and an unfettered press has turned into something like a minor version of the totalitarian state of Syria, with a more powerful central government, increasing lack of the rule of law, less and less freedom of movement, imposed school curricula, and a declining economy.

The Lebanese population has responded with very negative attitudes toward this Syrian occupation. All of our data suggests that across the board, all the communities of Lebanon, despite the many other differences, agree on the undesirability of continued Syrian occupation. However, because of the strong-arm of the Syrian occupiers, they have, in general, not been able to express these views, although from time to time there has been an eruption of violence against the occupiers.

The timeliness of our discussion today is due to the two major changes that took place within the last few weeks: First, the Israeli pullback from Southern Lebanon, and second, the death of President Hafiz al-Asad on Saturday, just 4 days ago.

But even before these developments took place, they have been in the making. As you noted earlier, Senator, the Israelis already announced a year ago they would be leaving, and the President of Syria's health has been declining for some time.

Accordingly, there has been movement in Lebanon that preceded the last few weeks. Perhaps the opening salvo of this was on March 23 of this year when a prominent editorialist and journalist in Lebanon wrote, an open letter to the son of the Syrian President, in which he said, "We do not want you here."

There have also been some acts of violence against Syrians in Lebanon. There have been some protests, street protests, which led to labor unions and university students taking to the street. The Syrian troops abandoned some of the more obvious checkpoints and other deployments and moved back, and became a little more subtle. Some of the leading religious figures of the country spoke out, both Christian and Muslim.

So it has been already even before the last few days, a process in movement. I predict that there will be a hot summer in Lebanon, and far more important than that, I anticipate a day when

Lebanon will again be a free country without the Syrian yoke on it, and a sovereign government will rule.

The international responses have been interesting. The Clinton administration has never specifically called for Syrian troops to withdraw from the country of Lebanon. It has instead contented itself with a vague appeal for "all foreign forces" to leave the country.

This has been the case even most recently. Perhaps the most dramatic conversation was just a week ago when Secretary Albright met with the Syrian Foreign Minister in Cairo. According to press reports, she did not raise the issue of Syria's occupation of Lebanon. In public, she actually praised it: "Syria has played a constructive role as far as Lebanon is concerned. We hope that they will continue to do so." The best she could do was to avoid mentioning the Syrian troops by name, and instead resort to the tired old formulation that "all foreign forces must depart."

The Syrian authorities, not surprisingly, responded to this weak advisory by saying they had every right to be there. They were invited in by the Lebanese Government, and they do not need the blessing of the United States.

In contrast with this record of collusion that the administration has compounded, Congress has been forthright and repeated in its condemnation. In 1993, 1995, 1997, over and over, the Congress has been one of the few major voices to condemn the Syrian occupation.

It has also been good to see that, of late, other organizations have spoken up: human rights groups, major media, and the United States, and I might add that my own organization just last week published a study group report calling for the end of Syrian occupation. I am pleased to note that Chairman Helms was a signatory to that report. It is available to anyone in this room after the hearing.

The U.S. Government faces a fundamental choice vis-a-vis Lebanon: To accept or contest the Syrian domination there. Operationally, that means either working with the constituted government or ignoring it. I think there is, in the end, no choice. We must stand in solidarity with the oppressed against the oppressors, as we have done so many times around the world.

Beyond the moral position, this stance is also very important, practically speaking. The people who would take action against the Syrians are much emboldened when they feel they have the U.S. Government's support.

Finally, I urge you, the Congress, to do all that you can do to condemn and repulse the Syrian occupiers. Toward this end, you can take several steps.

First, you can use your bully pulpit and simply say, "All Syrian forces must leave Lebanon." Second, you can pressure the executive branch to show some spine as you have done in the past. Third, you can close the national interest loopholes that permit the executive branch to waive various regulations, which it has done frequently. Fourth, you can take initiatives such as funding a Radio Free Lebanon.

And finally, so long as the Syrian occupation continues, do not fund the Government of Lebanon including its Armed Forces, be-

cause that money—money is fungible, and it in the end supports the Syrian occupation. You should appropriate funds only to credible private organizations and institutions.

Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.

Senator BROWNBACK. Thank you very much, Dr. Pipes. As usual, that was a good, quick, clear analysis, and clear policy recommendations are always very helpful to have.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Pipes follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DR. DANIEL PIPES

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, for this opportunity to discuss Lebanon. My focus will be on the aspect of this subject that I know best, namely the Syrian occupation of that country. I shall explain the reason for the occupation, its implications, and the dramatic impact of two recent developments (the Israeli force withdrawal and the death of Syria's President Hafiz al-Asad). I will conclude with an overview of past U.S. policy and some policy recommendations.

THE SYRIAN OCCUPATION

With the collapse of the Soviet bloc, Lebanon has the unhappy distinction of being the world's only remaining satellite state. Its government boasts the trappings of sovereignty—a flag, an independence day, a constitution, membership in the United Nations—but little or none of its substance. In fact, all the country's major decisions are made in Damascus, Syria.

The origins of this situation go back to the beginning of the century now ending. In 1920, when the French government carved modern Lebanon out of Syria, this met with considerable opposition in Syria, where Lebanon was seen as provinces of Syria. That opposition persisted through the next two generations. Only with the outbreak of Lebanon's civil war in 1975, however, did the Syrian authorities find an opportunity to act on their intention to get Lebanon back. Their takeover of the country occurred step by step, climaxing in 1990 with the domination of some 90 percent of the country.

Though achieved with far greater subtlety and skill, Hafiz al-Asad's takeover of Lebanon closely resembled Saddam Husayn's occupation of Kuwait. In both cases, the dictator of a powerful totalitarian state exploited an old irredentist claim to justify the subjugation of a small, free, and Western-oriented neighbor. The major difference is one of finesse: in contrast to Saddam's crude and brutal invasion, Asad prepared the way by sponsoring a range of Lebanese dissident groups, had himself invited in by bona fide Lebanese leaders, and then over a fifteen-year period gradually incorporated portions of the country.

Asad disposed of many levers of power in Lebanon. An estimated 40,000 Syrian troops and uncounted political and intelligence agents maintained a formidable presence throughout the country, plus hundreds of thousands of Syrians moved there.

Control of Lebanon brought Asad many benefits. It marked a significant step toward bringing all of "Greater Syria" under Damascus's direct control, one of his long-term aims. It permitted him to stamp out the press criticism and political intrigue that once came out of Beirut. Lebanon provided his officials with an annual income from drug trafficking estimated in the hundreds of millions of dollars, maybe more. It provided employment for as many as a million Syrian workers and offered a protected market for Syrian products. It gave Asad control of a second voice in Arab councils and the peace process. It presented a way for him to tangle with Israel without endangering his regime; the two sides have tacitly agreed to reserve total war for the Golan Heights and engage in lesser skirmishes in Lebanon. More ominously, control of Lebanon also provided a convenient venue for housing terrorist proxies by keeping them under Syrian control but outside of direct Syrian responsibility.

Curiously, by the Syrian government's own lights, its occupation of Lebanon is illegal. Damascus has on three occasions concurred with decisions made by other bodies that Syrian troops should leave Lebanon. It first agreed to withdraw the troops in October 1976 as part of the Riyadh-Cairo accords.¹ In September 1982, it signed

¹Specifically, Damascus agreed to "the withdrawal of armed elements to the places they occupied before April 13, 1975, and to remove all armed manifestations." For the text of the document in English, see Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, Committee on Foreign Af-

Continued

the Fez Declaration that committed it to “start negotiations” with the Lebanese government about “an end to the mission of the Arab deterrent forces in Lebanon [i.e., the Syria troops].”² Finally, in October 1989, Asad accepted an agreement hammered out by the Lebanese parliament (the Taif Accord); Christians supported a revision of the Lebanese government structure and in return he said that Syrian troops, within two years of some conditions being met, would be redeployed from their positions in Beirut to the Bekaa Valley.³ Those conditions were all fulfilled in September 1990; but September 1992 came and went without any change. Theodor Hanf, a leading German scholar of Lebanon, dubs this a “blatant violation” of the Taif Agreement.⁴

IMPLICATIONS FOR LEBANON

Occupation has had many consequences for Lebanon. Until 1975, it was the most open of all the Arabic-speaking countries, boasting decentralized power, real democracy, rule of law, unimpeded movement, a Hong Kong-style free market, independent schools, and an unfettered press.

Under Syrian control, however, the central government in Beirut has gained in authority, rendering recent parliaments, according to Hanf, “the least representative in Lebanese history.”⁵ Syrian operatives function almost entirely outside the rule of law (for example, they routinely make arrests without warrants) leading Human Rights Watch to conclude that “the record of violations in Syrian-controlled Lebanon has been worse than in Syria.”⁶ Freedom of movement ended when Syrians decided who comes into the country and who goes out. Asad’s regime has sought to impose Syrian-style standards on the school curricula, including the requirement that Arabic and Islam be taught. It brought the free-wheeling Lebanese economy more in line with that of statist Syria and created organic links between the two countries (for example, in the electricity grid and in roads), sometimes with an eye to their permanent connection (why else was Lebanon forced to convert its power stations from petroleum to liquefied natural gas, which happens to be imported from Syria?). Cheap Syrian goods are dumped in Lebanon. As for the press, Human Rights Watch states that it “has been forced to toe a Syrian-drawn line, leave Syrian-controlled Lebanon, or cease functioning.”⁷

Perhaps most significant for the long-range future, the Asad regime has opened the doors for Syrians to move to Lebanon, seek work there, settle there, and sometimes bring other family members to join them there. With time, this emigration may profoundly alter Lebanon’s population by increasing the proportion of peasants and Muslims. Such changes have the additional virtue, from the Damascene point of view, of making the Christian population, and especially the Maronites who are the heart of independent Lebanon, feel less welcome in their own homeland. (Nasrallah Sfeir, the Maronite patriarch, has accused the Syrians of attempting precisely this.) Lebanese Christians already have a century’s legacy of emigration; continued Syrianization of their country makes them prone to leave their ancestral home in ever-increasing numbers. Should they do so, Damascus will have cleared the major obstacle to its permanent colonization of Lebanon.

So subservient are Lebanese politicians to their suzerain in Damascus, they routinely visit the Syrian capital before making any major decision or even to resolve problems among themselves. On some occasions, the prime minister surrounded himself with most of his cabinet to travel the very 70 miles to Damascus.⁸ Speaking candidly, former president Ilyas al-Hirawi once confessed his shame at this pattern of behavior: “We now disagree on the appointment of a doorman and go to Damascus to submit the problem to the brothers [there].”⁹ Prime Minister Salim al-Huss sees no end date to the Syria’s occupation but states that it will last “as long as the government sees their presence necessary.”¹⁰ As a former Lebanese diplomat

airs, U.S. House of Representatives, *The Search for Peace in the Middle East: Documents and Statements, 1967-79* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979), pp. 336-37.

²For the text of the declaration in English, see John Norton Moore, ed., *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, vol. 4, *The Difficult Search for Peace (1975-1988)*, part 2, pp. 1154-56.

³For the text of the accord in English, see Dilip Hiro, *Lebanon Fire and Embers: A History of the Lebanese Civil War* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1993), pp. 231-40.

⁴Theodor Hanf, *Coexistence in Wartime Lebanon: Decline of a State and Rise of a Nation*, trans. from German by John Richardson (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993), p. 636.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 632.

⁶Human Rights Watch, *World Report 1991*, p. 604.

⁷Human Rights Watch, *World Report 1991*, p. 605.567

⁸For example, 11 of the 16 ministers joined Salim al-Huss in October 1999 as a sign of respect when he went to sign accords on farm produce and tourism with Hafiz al-Asad.

⁹*Ad-Diyar* (Beirut), 3 December 1994.

¹⁰United Press International, 6 September 1999.

puts it, "Everyone knows that Syria controls everything in Lebanon, totally."¹¹ Or, as Uri Sagie, then head of Israeli military intelligence, put it, "Lebanon's dependence on Syria is absolute."¹²

Not surprisingly, the overwhelming majority of Lebanon's population—and not just the Christians among them—rejects the Syrian occupation. Survey research among Lebanese Sunnis in 1989-90 showed that a mere 3 percent of them favored union with Syria.¹³ Anecdotal evidence confirms this. As one Lebanese put it a few years ago, "Syria is at the top of the hate list in Lebanon today, much more so than Israel. Israel is perceived of only as a military threat while Syria threatens Lebanon's very existence."¹⁴

Lebanese opinion might overwhelmingly reject the occupation but it could do or say little; discussion of this issue within the country is taboo, so "most outright opposition is confined to Lebanese abroad, unsigned Internet postings and quiet conversations."¹⁵ Here is an Associated Press report from mid-1997:

In private, Lebanese complain about Syria's hold on their country and their lack of real independence. . . . But few are publicly demanding that Syria immediately pull out its forces. Part of it is fear of offending their stronger neighbor, known as "sisterly Syria" in the Arabic tradition. "Big brotherly" Syria would be more accurate.¹⁶

Nonetheless, Lebanese opinion would spontaneously erupt on occasion. In the summer of 1997, the Syrian and Lebanese soccer all-star teams played a semi-final game in Lebanon. In the course of the game, fans got into fights after the Syrians resident in Lebanon chanted, "In spirit and blood we will redeem you Hafiz [al-Asad]." Lebanese fans responded by calling on the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon. As tensions rose, the two sides began fighting until dispersed by the worried authorities.¹⁷ Students were arrested in Beirut in March 1999 for distributing leaflets that called for an end to the Syrian occupation. Leaders sometimes spoke their mind: "All this talk about Syria's presence in Lebanon being a safeguard against Israeli aggression is a lot of trash," asserted Dory Chamoun, leader of a small Maronite party. "We don't need Syria here to help us."¹⁸

Such outspokenness notwithstanding, year after year the Syrian occupation of Lebanon persisted, almost without change. The situation was about as completely static as one can find in the contemporary world.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Suddenly, in recent weeks, two major changes have taken place. Together, these challenge the occupation as nothing has at least since 1984.

First, the abrupt Israeli pullback from south Lebanon changed the political landscape. The Syrians have since 1978 deflected criticism of their own occupation by pointing to the need to counter the Israeli security belt in the south. No matter how flimsy this justification, it did serve them well. Lebanese politicians, for example, endlessly repeated the mantra that Syrian troops must stay so long as Israel's occupation continued. When that later occupation ended in the early morning of 24 May 2000, so did the catch-all rationale for the Syrian armed presence. United Nations Resolution 520, which calls for the "withdrawal of all non-Lebanese forces from Lebanon," these days refers only to Syrian forces.

Second, Asad's declining health was apparent for months and ended with his death on June 10. His gradual fade from the scene heartened those in Lebanon wanting to escape Syrian control. They saw his passing as the start of a struggle for power in Damascus that would reduce Syrian force projection, thereby giving the Lebanese more room to maneuver. They sensed that, absent his sure and ruthless hand, that control would likely be much reduced, and possibly even ended. Asad's death gave heart to all those in Lebanon who wish to see their country out from under the Damascene thumb.

These two changes encouraged Lebanese patriots to speak out and demonstrate against the Syrian occupation. The opening salvo was on 23 March 2000, when

¹¹ *Los Angeles Times*, 15 February 1997.

¹² *Davar*, 5 September 1994.

¹³ Hilal Khashan, "The Lebanese State: Lebanese Unity and the Sunni Muslim Position," *International Sociology* 7 (1992): 93. In contrast, 86 percent favored a unitary state, 10 percent a federal state, and 1 percent chose partition of the country. The survey had 500 respondents.

¹⁴ *Ha'aretz*, 19 June 1995.

¹⁵ *Baltimore Sun*, 10 February 2000.

¹⁶ Associated Press, 29 July 1997.

¹⁷ *Al-Mashhad As-Siyasi*, 9 August 1997.

¹⁸ Inter Press Service, 8 October 1998.

Jibrán Tuéni, chairman of the board and managing director of *An-Nahar* newspaper, wrote “An Open Letter to Dr. Bashshar Asad” in which he frankly informed the heir-apparent in Syria that “many Lebanese are neither at ease with the Syrian policy in Lebanon, nor the Syrian ‘presence’ in Lebanon” and then boldly declared, “We are not a Syrian province.” This unheard-of candor was quickly followed by a series of acts of resistance. In April, unknown assailants three times in three weeks threw sticks of dynamite at a compound housing 1,500 Syrian workers in southern Lebanon, an attack later claimed by a group calling itself Citizens for a Free and Independent Lebanon.

In mid-April, small groups of protesters associated with former prime minister Michel Aoun boldly marched in front of the Justice Ministry one day and in front of the national museum and university the next, chanting anti-Syrian slogans such as “Syria get out of here.”¹⁹ On the third day, about one thousand demonstrators gathered at the Lebanese University and shouted out “The Israeli army out, the Syrian army out and Lebanon first.”²⁰ Labor unions then followed with more demonstrations. Within ten days of these events, Syrian troops became less visible, re-deploying from a dozen high-profile checkpoints—though of course government spokesmen denied any connection to the demonstrations.²¹ This appears to be the first-ever retreat by Syrian forces within Lebanon.

Various religious figures spoke their minds. The Maronite Patriarch, Cardinal Nasrallah Butros Sfeir, stated that if Lebanon “wants to control its future and for the Lebanese to regain their liberty, the Syrian troops must leave.”²² More surprisingly, Archbishop Elias Audi of the usually docile Eastern Greek Orthodox Church spoke up on behalf of the student protestors to his congregation in a Palm Sunday sermon. Human rights groups in Lebanon got on the case. Even the Muhammad Mahdi Shams ad-Din, chairman of Lebanon’s Supreme Islamic Shi’i Council, complained publicly that Lebanon has “no judicial branch in the full meaning of the word, enjoying full independence, immune from all other branches, and exercising autonomy.”²³

Again pushing the outer limits of the possible, just two days before Hafiz al-Asad’s death, Jibrán Tuéni wrote a scathing and sarcastic attack in his newspaper repudiating the logic the Syrian foreign minister used “to defend the presence of Syrian forces in Lebanon.”²⁴

Looking forward, I predict a hot summer in Lebanon; beyond that, I can anticipate the day when Lebanon will free itself of the Syrian yoke and again be a sovereign country.

U.S. RESPONSES

Thanks to the Syrian dictator’s cleverness, nearly the entire world acquiesced in his seizure of Lebanon—including our own Executive Branch. The White House and State Department during the Clinton years have never specifically called for Syria to withdraw, contenting themselves with a vague appeal on “all foreign forces” to leave the country.

Though perfectly aware of it (as implied by the oft-repeated statement that the U.S. government “remains dedicated to the goal of a fully sovereign and independent Lebanon, free of all foreign forces and able once more to take its rightful place among the nations of the world”), they prefer not to confront it.²⁵ Their reasoning is simple: seeing Lebanon almost exclusively in the context of Arab-Israeli negotiations, where it represents just an irritant, they do their best to pay it no attention. As a State Department official frankly explained to me some years ago, “we constantly urge complete implementation of the Taif Accord [i.e., a withdrawal of Syrian troops] but it’s not a bilateral priority. We’ve not condemned this [non-imple-

¹⁹ Reuters, 17 April 2000.

²⁰ Agence France-Presse, 19 April 2000.

²¹ For the fullest account in English of these demonstrations, see Gary C. Gambill, “Special Report: Lebanon’s Intifada,” *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, April 2000, at <http://www.meib.org>, from which some of the following information derives.

²² *La Croix*, 6 June 2000.

²³ Speech to the Committee for Good Governance in Lebanon (CGGL), 12 May 2000.

²⁴ *AnNahar*, 8 June 2000.

²⁵ One example of this relates to a June 25, 1997, hearing of the House Committee on International Relations on the topic of “U.S. Policy Toward Lebanon.” The committee had invited Michel Aoun, a particular nemesis of the Syrian authorities, to testify; as late as the day of the hearing itself, he was expected to appear. The State Department’s refusal to provide him with a visa, however, preventing him from entering the country. This unusual step—perhaps the only time the Executive branch prevented a foreign witness from testifying before Congress—was apparently intended to placate sensibilities in Damascus.

mentation] very loudly because it needs to be resolved in the context of a comprehensive peace settlement.”²⁶

Worse, at times the Clinton Administration has endorsed the Syrian occupation: a report in December 1999 indicated that it “appealed to prominent Lebanese politicians and opinion-makers to allow Syrian troops to remain in Lebanon” after Israel pulls its troops out from the south.²⁷ Likewise, a Beirut daily reported that “U.S. Ambassador David Satterfield diplomatically ‘warned’ these personalities not to count on an Israeli request for a Syrian withdrawal.”²⁸

The turmoil of recent weeks finds the Clinton Administration responding meekly. After the Israeli troop withdrawal, Martin Indyk, our ambassador to Israel, blandly called the Israeli troop withdrawal “a golden opportunity for the government of Lebanon to extend its authority down here to the border.”²⁹ During a meeting in Cairo with Syria’s foreign minister, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright did not raise the issue of Syria’s occupation of Lebanon; in public, she praised it: “Syria has played a constructive role as far as Lebanon is concerned. We hope that they will continue to do so.” The best she could do was avoid mentioning the Syrian troops by name and instead resort to the tired old formulation that “all foreign forces should depart.”³⁰

Syria’s authorities, not surprisingly, responded to this weak advisory by insisting on their right to stay put. Faruq ash-Shar’a, the Syrian foreign minister, explained: “with all due respect, it is not in the interest of Ms. Albright to raise this issue. We are in Lebanon at the request of the Lebanese government and people and not with the blessing of the United States.”³¹

In contrast to the administration’s record of collusion with the Syrian occupation, even encouragement of it, Congress has forthrightly and repeatedly condemned it: you voted unanimously in July 1993 to consider “the Government of Syria in violation of the Taif agreement.”³² In June 1995, a second, similar resolution (Sec. 2712) passed the House. In June 1997, Rep. Eliot Engel’s Amendment to H.R. 1986 concerning “Sanctions against Syria,”³³ passed (by a vote of 410 to 15).

It is also encouraging to see that of late other voices have spoken up on behalf of the repressed Lebanese. Human rights groups have condemned the Syrian presence, as have major media. For example, the Boston Globe noted in an editorial that “the freedom of Lebanon will require not only Israel’s retreat from southern Lebanon but also a subsequent withdrawal of the 40,000 troops of Syria’s occupation force.”³⁴ The *Los Angeles Times* concurred: “One foreign army of occupation has left Lebanon. Now it’s time for the second to do the same.”³⁵ My own organization, the Middle East Forum, has just published a study group report calling for an end to the Syrian occupation;³⁶ I am pleased to report that Chairman Helms is a signatory of that report.

POLICY CHOICES

The U.S. government faces a fundamental choice vis-a-vis Lebanon: accept or contest Syrian domination there. Operationally, this translates into either working with or ignoring the puppet government of Lebanon.

Work with the government: Recognize Emile Lahud as a real president and Salim al-Huss as a real prime minister, accept the 1998 municipal elections as legitimate, and acquiesce to rules established by the Syrian regime. Such a policy has the advantage of winning favor in Damascus and just possibly encouraging it to sign a peace treaty with Israel. But it disheartens natural allies of the United States in Lebanon and abroad; and it signals the world that while a blatant invasion such as Saddam’s into Kuwait is not acceptable, a subtle one such as Asad’s into Lebanon is tolerable.

²⁶Telephone interview with Elizabeth Hopkins, desk officer for Syria, 10 November 1994.

²⁷Middle East Newline, 26 December 1999.

²⁸*Al-Mustaqbal*, 22 December 1999. The Israelis, it bears note, apparently have not once raised the subject of ending the Syrian occupation of Lebanon in the course of their nearly decade-long negotiations with Damascus.

²⁹*Ha’aretz*, 31 May 2000.

³⁰Reuters and Associated Press, 7 June 2000.

³¹Lebanon Foundation for Peace, 7 June 2000.

³²U.S. Congress Concurrent Resolution 28, 1 July 1993.

³³Unless the government of Syria eliminates “its dangerous and destabilizing policies,” the resolution urges the president to apply to Syria the same sanctions as those already in force against Iran and Libya since 1996.

³⁴8 March 2000.

³⁵1 June 2000.

³⁶Daniel Pipes and Ziad Abdelnour, co-chairs, *Ending Syria’s Occupation of Lebanon: The U.S. Role* (Philadelphia: Middle East Forum, 2000).

Ignore the government: The alternative is to denounce the Syrian occupation and ignore the governmental pseudo-structure in Beirut. This has the advantage of sticking with our friends and our principles; and of having bet on the winning side when the Lebanese do regain control of their country. It raises the danger of the U.S. government throwing its weight behind a force that today is on the losing side.

To my mind, there is really no choice: our government must stand in solidarity with the oppressed and against the oppressors. Just as we supported Estonians and Czechs through their decades of Soviet domination, even when the prospect of their independence seemed impossibly remote, so we must stand by the Lebanese people in their hour of need. Nor is this only a matter of principle: Baltic leaders all agree on the importance of the U.S. government refusing to accept the Soviet occupation of their countries. Lebanese patriots one day will similarly thank us for standing with their people even as they faced the seemingly invincible might of the Syrian sword.

There is also a practical reason for taking this step: as Gary Gambill (of the *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*) notes, American support is vital if the Lebanese are to challenge their Syrian overlords. "Whenever it appears that U.S. appeasement of Syria is waning, Lebanese civil society rises to the occasion to challenge Syrian hegemony. On the other hand, when the U.S. shows lack of resolve vis-a-vis Syria, the Lebanese refrain from open expressions of dissent."³⁷ We are not just bystanders but, willy-nilly, we are actors in an important drama: public disapproval of the Syrian occupation will inspire Lebanese impatience and thereby help end it.

Accordingly, I urge you to do all within your power to condemn and repulse the Syrian occupiers. Toward this end, Congress can take several steps.

First, you can use your bully pulpit by sending a direct message to the tyrants in Damascus. Prior congressional resolutions, I can assure you, were much noted in Damascus. My favorite would be a six-word statement: All Syrian forces must leave Lebanon.

Second, you can pressure the Executive branch to show some spine. In 1994, for example, Congress had a critical role in assuring that functionaries did not take Syria off the terrorism and narcotics lists.

Third, Congress can close the "national interest" loopholes that permit the Executive branch to waive regulations, and which it seems to do disproportionately for Damascus. For example, you can extend to Syria the sanctions in the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (which prohibits any investment of over \$20 million a year in the petrochemicals sectors).

Fourth, you can take initiatives such as funding a Radio Free Lebanon.

Finally, so long as the Syrian occupation continues, turn away appeals for money for Lebanon that would go to the Syrian-controlled government (this includes the army) and appropriate funds only to credible private organizations and institutions.

³⁷ Private communication, 9 June 2000.

Senator BROWNBACK. Colonel, welcome back to the committee. We are happy to have you here as well a second time, and look forward to your testimony.

STATEMENT OF COLONEL CHARBEL BARAKAT, SOUTH LEBANON ARMY; COORDINATOR OF THE CIVILIAN COMMITTEES, SOUTH LEBANON REFUGEES IN ISRAEL

Colonel BARAKAT. Thank you. Honorable Senator, I want to thank you for inviting me as a witness today, and I want to thank you also for the statement you have made on May 24 about us, Lebanon. I have prepared a written statement which I would like to insert in the record. I will then make shorter remarks that will reflect the written testimony.

Senator BROWNBACK. We will accept your written statement into the record.

Colonel BARAKAT Thank you.

I, Colonel Charbel Barakat from Ain Ebel in South Lebanon, appear before your subcommittee for the second time in 3 years to address the dramatic developments which have taken place in my country as a result of the Israeli withdrawal of May 23, 2000.

On June 7, 1997, I appeared before this subcommittee to raise the issue of persecution of the southern Lebanese by Hizbollah, and the pro-Syrian regime. During that hearing, I warned against the dangerous consequences of what would happen to our community after Israeli withdrawal, if a solution is not found.

Let me just note that as a result of that testimony back in 1997, the regime in Beirut punished me by depriving me from my past wages and pensions which I had a right to as an officer of the Lebanese Army. That was the personal price I had to pay for testifying to the Senate.

And today, as I come back to you as an exile, I do not know what will be my fate in the future if I testify to the truth.

Many among the South Lebanese people went to exile after May 22, and they are refugees into Israel. Most of them remain in their villages and towns facing oppression which is slowly but surely developing into a systematic persecution.

Over the past few months, in the media and in diplomatic circles, we wrongly described—this media and the diplomatic circles have wrongly described the history of South Lebanon. And I want to say that, first of all, the South Lebanese Army and our community were not the mercenaries of Israel, but allied to Israel.

We are not traitors, but the defenders of a free Lebanon. We were not—we are the natives. The Syrian Army is a foreign occupation. We were the freedom fighters, and Hizbollah are the terrorists.

Yet we, the Lebanese people, were crucified, and Hizbollah became the hero, and Syria a stabilizing power. Our land was occupied by pro-Iranian and pro-Syrian, and they called it liberation. Liberation from whom? Liberation from the Lebanese communities who worked 23 years defending their rights? But worse than the physical tragedy, was assassination of the truth.

Mr. Senator, uprooting us from our land is a crime against us, but hiding the truth is a crime against you, and against humanity.

I do not want to tell you more about the history of the South Lebanese area and South Lebanese Army because I am short of time, but I will focus on some points.

From 1976 to 1982, we were isolated and bombarded. No country in the world assisted us, not even the United Nation's forces which were sent to monitor the Israeli withdrawal according to the U.N. Resolution 425.

When Israel moved into Lebanon in 1982, we finally were able to travel to our capital and communicate with the rest of our country. Unfortunately, peace between Israel and Lebanon was assassinated. With the killing of President Ashir-Shunited, the killing of the U.S. Marines, and the massacre of the Christians in 1983–1984, and the consolation of the 17th of May agreement between Lebanon and Israel.

In 1990, Syria invaded East Beirut. It was based on what they had called the Taif Agreement. This Taif Agreement, you have to know, and everybody has to know, that was—it never invited us as South Lebanese to be part of the Taif Agreement.

While Syria invaded Lebanon, invaded East Beirut in 1990, and imposed the new regime, many Lebanese who opposed Syria including Prime Minister Sharonne, were forced into exile, and a new

national reconciliation government was illegally formed. The government was supposed to end the war in Lebanon, and include all Lebanese, but we, the southern Lebanese were not invited.

Moreover, that same reconciliation regime disbanded another major Christian party who opposed Syria, the Lebanese Forces, jailed its leader, and persecuted its followers as of 1994. Hizbollah became the only group allowed to keep its weapons.

Since then, our community became the only enclave escaping the Syrian occupation and Hizbollah power. The war was being waged against us by the way of terrorism, killing, and kidnaping, under the slogan of fighting Israel.

We fought for our land and our people, but we were fighting for the free world, as well. We were taking the—it is those who in the end are destroying Israel, and who belong to the same school as those who planted the bomb in the skies of Lockerbie and in Europe, and in Buenos Aires, and Dhahran, Dar es Salaam, and Nairobi.

Our people in South Lebanon, Christian, Shiite, and Druse, the South Lebanon Army and the civilians decided to stay and resist, but there were few survivors.

We asked the United Nations to talk with us, to mediate with Beirut, to send its troops to protect our enclave. We asked for us less than what they gave for Muslims of Kosovar. They turned a blind eye on our people. Whereas, you can avoid—pressure Israel to dismantle the SLA, washing the U.N. hands from our blood.

Mr. Senator, the SLA did not collapse. It was dismantled as a part of a political deal.

On May 22 about 8,000 civilians, mostly children, fled into Israel. Those Lebanese citizens will not return into Hizbollah terrorism. Inside our villages, human rights groups have documented mass arrests, harassment, burning of houses, looting, destruction of socio-economic infrastructure, cutting off the world's supplies, alienation of national shrines, and psychologic terror. In some cases, abductions and killings occur.

More than 1,500 were arrested. Instead of an amnesty, though, in the national reconciliation process, they are tried for high treason and sentenced to years in prison. In addition to their terms, those Lebanese villagers will be barred from returning to their homes for another 15 years.

Now, Israel is inside its international borders. Hizbollah is in our villages. SLA controls all of Lebanon. Our community is under persecution. The Lebanese regime refuses to protect us, and the Palestinian army organizations are getting ready for a confrontation.

Mr. Senator, injustice was done to the people of Lebanon, and we, the last free enclave were sacrificed to satisfy Syria and accommodate Hizbollah. But despite the tragedy we have been through, we still believe that the American people want justice for all other nations, particularly the smallest and the weakest.

We strongly believe that the American people represented by the U.S. Congress will not accept that stability means the exodus of our community from its own land; that terrorists such as Hizbollah will be rewarded and our children will become refugees; that Kuwait should be freed from Saddam's army and Lebanon must remain occupied by Asad's army.

We strongly believe that the U.S. Government must reevaluate the development in our area and initiate a new policy based on human values and human rights.

Therefore, we strongly recommend the following: That the congressional delegation would form a fact-finding mission to the region, and meet with the refugees in Israel; that it will send representatives to investigate the situation inside our villages and towns in South Lebanon independent from Beirut's supervision; that the U.S. Congress will grant the exile population in Israel an emergency aid package to help them regather and cope with the difficult conditions; that the U.S. Government will use its influence with the various governments in the region to ensure the safe return of the refugees from South Lebanon to their homes, and to ensure a protected safe haven under U.N. auspices and the withdrawal of the Syrian Army from Lebanon; and that the U.N. will deny that area of Hizbollah, which must be disarmed as all other militias were; that the U.S. Government will use influence with the Lebanese regime to stop the persecution of the South Lebanese communities, issue an amnesty for all SLA members, release the political prisoners, repatriate the political exiles, and initiate a new and real reconciliation process in Lebanon; that the U.S. Government will use its influence to initiate the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, particularly that a new President is about to take over in Damascus; and at the end, that the U.S. Congress which has passed legislations in protection of religious minorities around the world over the past few years, will invite spiritual leaders, exiled politicians and those from the Lebanese Christian community to testify about the particular oppression this community has been under for over 10 years.

I thank you again for the opportunity you offered me to express my point of view and to present the views of the exiled population of South Lebanon.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Colonel Barakat follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF COLONEL CHARBEL BARAKAT

Honorable Senator Sam Brownback, dear members of the subcommittee:

I, Colonel Charbel Barakat from Ain Ebel in South Lebanon appear before your subcommittee for the second time in three years to address the dramatic developments which have taken place in my country as a result of the Israeli withdrawal of May 23, 2000.

On June 7, 1997 I appeared before this subcommittee to raise the issue of persecution of civilian populations in the southern Lebanese enclave which was then known as the "Security Zone"—during that hearing, I testified about the situation of the Christian communities in that enclave, warning of potential existing and future threats. I also warned against the dangerous consequences of a combination of a unilateral Israeli withdrawal, a non-intervention by the United Nations and the deployment of Hizbollah forces in that area: Consequences which would affect the security and freedom of the local population, particularly the Christians, as well as the future of peace between the two nations of Israel and Lebanon.

Let me just note that as a result of that testimony back in 1997, the regime in Beirut punished me by depriving me from my past wages and pensions I had right to. That was a personal price I had to pay for testifying to the U.S. Senate. A contribution to the cause of truth which testifies to the determination by the pro-Syrian regime in Lebanon to deny that same truth to the American people.

And today, three years later, I report to you the developments that took place as of May 22, 2000 in South Lebanon and have affected the future of thousands of civilians. Many among them went into an exodus across the borders into Israel, and

most of them remained in their villages and towns facing escalating oppression, which is slowly but surely developing into a systematic persecution.

In order to offer my insight and my live testimony, I will have to correct some of the misperceptions and facts about the South Lebanon enclave, the will of its population, the reality of its self-defense force, and its future aspirations. Then I will make a few suggestions and recommendation for the United States policy in that area.

I.—HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE SOUTH LEBANON ENCLAVE

Over the past few months and weeks, many in the media and in diplomatic circles have wrongly described the history of the South Lebanon enclave known as the “Security Zone”—and erroneously portrayed the South Lebanon Army (SLA). That portrayal of the local population and its self defense force has not only legitimized the assault on that area, but also the abandoning of its population by all those responsible for its security and future on both sides of the borders. In sum, the people of South Lebanon, who for 23 years, have defended their identity and rights within the confines of their enclave, were forced to either flee or submit to an authoritarian regime and a new occupation. But worse than the physical tragedy was the assassination of the truth, a fact which is increasing the chances of transforming the ongoing persecution into a change in and so threat to the ethnic makeup of that area.

A. *South Lebanese Defense Force 1976–1979*

In order to validate Hizbollah’s takeover of the southern enclave of Lebanon, it was said that the SLA was a proxy militia of Israel created to assist the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon. Not only the Hizbollah and the pro-Syrian regime in Beirut have stressed this equation, but also the United Nations.

However the facts contradict this theory. The SLA was organized by local Lebanese officers and soldiers of the Lebanese Army and a handful of armed civilians as of 1976 in order to defend their villages against the PLO and the various radical groups who attempted to dominate the area during the Lebanese civil war. Those mostly officers and civilians, with the knowledge of the Lebanese Government, then formed the Lebanese Defense Forces in South Lebanon, one of the multiple militias of the Lebanon war. Note that on August 14, 1976, Lebanese Army Commander General Hanna Said issued ordinance number 3860 ordering the Lebanese officers and soldiers in that enclave to form military units to defend that area from the PLO and other militias. Short of any ideological or regional agenda, their aim was simple: To defend their villages and towns until the Lebanese Army would come to their rescue. They were headed by Major Saad Haddad who was officially in contact with the Lebanese Ministry of Defense until 1979. The Lebanese Government, not yet under Syrian control, paid the salaries of this force until the 1980s. Since 1976, this free enclave was continuously under PLO and pro-Syrian assaults. All routes of communications to Beirut, and to the main hospitals and socio-economic centers were cut off. The civilian population, abandoned by the central government was in jeopardy. As of 1977, the local militia established contacts with the Israeli military across the border to insure medical and logistical support. Therefore, the SLA was initially launched as a native paramilitary force made up by Lebanese officers and local villagers, mostly Christians, to resist the takeover by foreign forces mainly Palestinians and Syrians.

B. *The Free Lebanon Army 1979–1985*

In 1978, the Christian enclaves were able to link up with each other as a result of the withdrawal of the PLO and allied forces in front of the Israeli Litani operation. During its withdrawal, the IDF remitted a number of ex-PLO positions to their Lebanese allies. In 1979, that local militia was named the “Free Lebanon Army.” The Lebanese State severed its relationship with its command. For another four years, the FLA operated as a local militia formed by native villagers and aiming at defending their area against PLO, pro-Syrian and Islamist militias. Such as did the Lebanese Forces and other militias in central and northern Lebanon, and such as did the Lebanese Army brigades during the Lebanese war, the FLA was struggling for the defense and the survival of its enclave. While dozens of other militias and Army units became the allies of Syria, Iran and the PLO, the FLA chose to become the ally of the State of Israel. From 1976 and until 1985, the South Lebanon enclave was not an extension of Israel’s military, although it acted as and believed in the alliance with the Jewish and democratic state. It faced forces such as the Hizbollah and Syrian Nationalists, which acted as allies of Syria.

C. The South Lebanon Army

During the Israeli invasion of June 1982, the FLA moved further north toward the areas evacuated by its opponents (Sidon), as did the Lebanese Forces and the Lebanese Army in the center of the country. In 1984, after the death of Major Haddad, General Antoine Lahad, a high ranking officer of the Lebanese Army was appointed at the suggestion of former President Camille Chamoun as commander of the FLA. At the request of the Israelis, the name of the militia was changed to South Lebanon Army (SLA) and it started receiving direct military training from the IDF. The future of that force was to be negotiated with the Lebanese government. When Israel withdrew southwards in 1985, the SLA made its own decision to remain in the Christian district of Jezzine. It made that decision in the aftermath of anti-Christian massacres, which took place after previous Israeli withdrawals from the Shuf, Iqlim al-Kharrub, and East Sidon districts (1983-1984). Here again, the deployment in the Jezzine district was a national decision made by the SLA command to protect the native population from massacres and not an Israeli decision.

As of 1995, the South Lebanon enclave was called the "Security Zone" by the Israelis. That area fell under a dual control. On the one hand, the IDF and SLA controlled a band of territory stretching from the Port of Nakura as far as the Syrian borders. In Jezzine, only the SLA was in control.

Therefore, it appears clearly from the historical background that the SLA and its predecessors the FLA and the LDF, were not other than (Christian-led) Lebanese organizations, which fought in the defense of their enclaves. Furthermore, the SLA-FLA were founded by on-duty Lebanese Army officers as of 1976, paid by the Lebanese government then, and their rank and file were local and native Lebanese citizens from the villages and towns of that area.

II.—THE POLITICAL RIGHTS OF THE SOUTH LEBANON ENCLAVE

At a time when the various militias and groups in Lebanon were invited to national political reconciliation and while Hizbollah was left armed after the end of the war in 1990, the pro-Syrian regime in Beirut continued to wage a war against the enclave under the slogan of "elimination of pro-Israeli militias." And while pro-Syrian and pro-Iranian organizations were armed and protected by the Beirut regime and by Syria, the SLA was considered as an enemy and was never invited to any negotiations with the government. Even those Christian forces, which were associated with the national reconciliation process known as the Taif Agreement, (such as the Lebanese Forces), were gradually eliminated from the political scene between 1991 and 1995.

It is important to note that neither the SLA nor the people of South Lebanon were invited to participate in the Taif agreement process in 1989, hence were never consulted as to the future of their country. Note also that neither the SLA nor the people of the enclave were ever invited to any form of dialogue or discussion of the future of their area with the Lebanese government or the United Nations.

Therefore, it is a fact that the communities of the southern enclave in Lebanon were never consulted as to their fears, demands or future aspirations. It is also a fact that while the pro-Syrian regime and its allies from Hizbollah engaged in a decade-long war against the SLA and the Christian population of South Lebanon, most Western Governments and the United Nations did not attempt to mediate in the conflict, and sided with the oppressive pro-Syrian regime in Beirut against the enclave.

In contrast with the populations of Kosovo, East Timor and the Palestinians, the population of the southern enclave was never given the opportunity to express their will and aspirations. For although in alliance with the State of Israel, the SLA had never been allowed or able to produce political representation and the various world governments refused to grant them that opportunity. When the Israeli unilateral withdrawal took place, those populations were at the mercy of Hizbollah and the pro-Syrian regime in Beirut.

III.—HOW DID THE ENCLAVE FALL?

The American people were allowed to hear two versions of the fall of South Lebanon. The first version is the one of Hizbollah and the pro-Syrian regime. According to their claim, they compelled the Israelis to pullout from the security zone by way of force. And because of Israel's withdrawal, the SLA had no choice but to collapse. According to the Western version, Israel decided to withdraw unilaterally but had to hasten its pull out because of a sudden collapse of the SLA. But according to the young men and women of the SLA and the people of that region, the enclave fell

because the local population was never given the right to express themselves or the right to defend themselves.

A. South Lebanon's Options

Last July, Israel's government decided to withdraw from our area even in the absence of state agreements or international arrangements. The unilateral withdrawal was a decision made by the Israeli government, which assumed sole responsibility for its decisions. However the fate of our enclave facing the threats by Hizbollah and the regime, as well as the future of this community were disregarded by all parties. To the Beirut regime and the radical Islamists, the southern enclave community was nothing but "agents and collaborators." To the Israeli government the SLA was a military force "hired" among locals to serve their security interests. To the Western world this community was made up of Lebanese citizens who had to be "returned" to their government irrespective of their fears.

No guarantees were negotiated by any party on behalf of the endangered community, Hizbollah threatened to butcher the "collaborators," the Lebanese Government issued 20,000 warrants for arrest, and the United Nations asked for the dismantlement of the SLA as a main condition for intervention after Israel's withdrawal. Israel stated it would extend political asylum to SLA personnel. It is dramatic to realize that no party offered to mediate between the local community and the regime in Beirut. Our population had two options: Either surrender to Hizbollah and the pro-Syrian regime or flee in an exodus into Israel.

B. South Lebanon's Real Decision

However, I am here today to inform the U.S. Congress and the world, that our community had decided to resist and remain on its own soil, while calling on the international community for assistance. In April, the SLA's commander, after consultation with his officers, declared his intention to remain after Israel's withdrawal. During the same month, the Civilian Committees which represent the people of the villages and towns, from Christian, Druse and Shiite backgrounds, also declared their intention to defend themselves while calling on the international community to help mediate.

During the month of May 2000 our people remitted a memorandum to the office of the United Nations in Nakura in south Lebanon offering suggestions to avoid bloodshed and exodus. During the same month delegations representing our community met with diplomats of the U.S., U.K., and French embassies in Israel and at the United Nations. And on May 18, our representatives met with the office of the Secretary General of the United Nations in New York. We warned against offering our villages and towns to Hizbollah and the pro-Syrian militias after Israel's withdrawal due to take place before July 7.

We offered to transform the SLA into a local municipal police to operate under U.N. auspices as are the cases in Kosovo and East Timor. We offered to establish a local municipal authority to be democratically elected and which would manage the daily lives of the citizens of that zone until a comprehensive solution could be reached with the several governments of the region. And we committed to transfer the area gradually to the Beirut authorities as progress was being made in alleviating the Syrian presence in the capital and in disarming Hizbollah, the two sources of our fears.

C. Rejection of Our Rights and Fears

Instead of taking our demands for protection on our land seriously, the United Nations declined to assist us, acting against all international law, and particularly in contradiction with Chapter seven of the Charter. The United States, U.K. and France dismissed our fears and insisted on guarantees, which were allegedly granted by the Beirut regime. The State of Israel only prepared for our potential exodus, ruling out our determination to remain on our land and defend ourselves. The Beirut pro-Syrian regime rejected national reconciliation with our people, rejected amnesty and committed to eliminate our political freedoms. Hizbollah's leaders made public statements about killings, even if the SLA were to flee into Israel and beyond.

D. The Last Days

Despite the abandonment by the international community and against all odds, our people decided to remain and fight for their land and rights while calling endlessly on the U.N. to deploy its units around our villages. On May 22, 2000, and as Israeli units were implementing their own withdrawal and the commander of the SLA was absent in France, the mostly Shiite sector of the security zone collapsed. It appeared that Shiite officers were told by the Israelis that they must leave before the borders closed. Even after the invasion of Hizbollah of this area, the mostly

Christian-Druse eastern enclave and the Christian western enclave, decided to defend themselves and protect their citizens after Israel's withdrawal.

On May 23, 2000, at 8 p.m., SLA officers in the western sector received orders from the Israelis to leave their posts as Hizbollah was advancing toward their villages. Thus, the SLA was imploded from the inside and was dismantled without any battle. The main reason why the SLA did not remain and fight was the fact that the border was closed behind its back. Without access to medical and logistical supplies, our people were condemned either to surrender to its enemy or flee across the border. Our community was not allowed to defend itself or to be protected by the U.N. on its own land. The only choices, which were left, were the exodus toward Israel's refugee camps or the exodus towards Beirut's jails.

IV.—CONSEQUENCES

A. Consequences of the Abandonment on our Community

As a result of the collapse of the enclave, major consequences pertaining to the security, freedom and future of an entire community unfolded.

(1) More than seven thousand civilians, including hundreds of SLA officers and soldiers fled through the Lebanese-Israeli borders into an exodus toward the unknown. Inside Israel they were joined by hundreds, maybe thousands of Southern Lebanese who were working in Israel. In our estimates, more than ten thousand residents of the enclave have fled either to Israel or to other destinations. To those refugees, who left their homes, belongings and properties behind, this is a cataclysmic dimension. Not only were they abandoned by the international community, but also they have no official cause recognized as such.

(2) More than 1,700 members of the SLA surrendered to the Lebanese authorities and to Hizbollah. Many of those who surrendered to Hizbollah haven't been identified yet. As for those who surrendered to the Beirut regime, they were sent to military courts, which are identifying them as "collaborators" and not as militiamen or as a resistance group which belonged to a war faction, as was the case with other groups in Lebanon. Lebanese human rights groups are criticizing the poor standards of human rights used by the Beirut authorities while dealing with these political prisoners.

(3) As for the civilians who remained in their villages, they were and are still submitted to all sorts of harassment, oppression, arbitrary arrests, and ultimately in some documented cases, to murder and physical harm. Lebanese and other human rights groups have reported clearly that systematic suppression and oppression are taking place in the Christian areas of the former security zone.

(4) Widespread looting and destruction of infrastructure, including water supplies, have been and are still reported. Many villages have witnessed the exodus of the majority of their residents.

By our standards, that is for a population of 100,000 people, the exodus of about 10,000, the arrest and military trial of 2,000, the issuing of warrants for the arrest of 20,000, and the ongoing persecution of our villages and towns are considered a catastrophe.

B. Consequences of the Abandonment to a Radical Force on our Area

As a result of the Israeli withdrawal and of the dismantling of the SLA, Hizbollah and pro-Syrian forces invaded the area and occupied it. The ex-enclave, which was free from radical forces and Syrian influence until last month, is now under their military occupation. This will have serious consequences aside from the humanitarian and national tragedies affecting our community.

(1) Hizbollah is a "radical militia with a long record of hostage taking, assassination of diplomats, killing of U.S. forces, bombings domestically and internationally, and above all the massacre of Christian civilians in Jezzine, Qolaia and the rest of the enclave over almost two decades. A group which is cited by the U.S. State Department as a terror organization. Its leadership has repeatedly and openly threatened killings and massacres of whomsoever would obstruct their agenda. Hizbollah has vowed to destroy Israel, in alliance with Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and has pledged to Islamize Lebanon, which would be at the expense of its Christian communities and other moderate Muslims. Offering the Southern area of Lebanon to Hizbollah is a grave mistake.

(2) For 23 years the borders between Lebanon and Israel were open, and economic, social, and educational, as well as other ties were established between our people and the people of Israel. As soon as the Israelis withdrew and the SLA was dismantled, and after the refugees crossed the border, both Israelis and Hizbollah shut down all gates. Instead of open borders, closed frontiers. Instead of exchange and trade, enmity and isolation. It is hard to believe that shutting down gates, and

closing borders will help peace in the region. Instead of seeing Lebanese workers crossing into northern Israel to their daily jobs, we see Hizbollah's partisans exploding their hate of the Jews and throwing rocks against Israeli soldiers and civilians. That is not a step forward toward peace.

(3) Furthermore, by dismantling the Lebanese-Israeli peaceful border and replacing it with Hizbollah's supporters, radical Palestinians are moving toward the area from the various camps in Lebanon, threatening to re-ignite the armed struggle against Israel. Let us note that the conflict started in Lebanon 25 years ago, when Palestinian militias attempted to occupy that border area in order to attack Israel. Surrendering this enclave to Hizbollah will bring back the most radical Palestinian forces and therefore will be responsible for a new conflict in the area.

V.—REACTIONS

A. *The Lebanese Government Reaction*

The Lebanese regime, which is under Syrian control, acts from pro-Syrian perspectives. Up until this present date it has not sent the regular army to replace Hizbollah and to disarm it. Our population is at the mercy of Hizbollah and of pro-Syrian militias. Under such circumstances, the refugees will not go back to their homes, and the local residents will remain under terror and repression from radical militias. Moreover, in the absence of regular troops, militias may perform mass abuse. The situation is extremely critical.

B. *The United Nations*

Despite our repetitive calls and memorandums to the United Nations to deploy in our areas, the organization's top offices and its envoys refused to acknowledge the existence of a "crisis." To U.N. envoy Teri Larsen, it is perfectly normal that Hizbollah occupies the area and terrorizes its population, and that the SLA was dismantled. It seems normal that about 10,000 residents including women, children and the elderly went into exile. The U.N. officials have acted against their mandate to preserve peace, protect civilian populations, and have breached international law by not assisting an endangered community. The U.N. has a force of about 6,000 soldiers in South Lebanon. It prefers using them in administrative missions such as painting yellow lines to mark the international border, instead of posting units within and around the areas at the mercy of a radical militia.

C. *Radical Forces*

Hizbollah and its pro-Syrian allies have pledged to punish all those who have "co-operated" with the Israelis, i.e., the majority of the population in that enclave. This was clearly illustrated by a speech of Hizbollah's leader who said his militia will "slaughter the SLA men and women in their beds." In addition to terrorizing them, Hizbollah forces are disrupting vital socio-economic infrastructure, such as water supplies, schools, and medical centers, under the pretext of dismantling what was built with the help of Israel. Hizbollah leaders have even called on their associates of Hamas and Islamic Jihad to assassinate members of the ex-SLA within Israel itself.

VI.—CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the above facts we cannot but conclude that the South Lebanon community, which was isolated because of a civil war and denied its political rights by the current pro-Syrian regime in Beirut, was punished for defending itself and for believing in popular and cultural peace across the border for the last quarter of a century.

This community was never heard, its aspirations never legitimized and its security and freedom never guaranteed. The international community did not listen to its fears prior to the Israeli withdrawal, and did not recognize its tragedy after it unfolded.

Moreover, the native SLA was demonized as "collaborators" and "mercenaries" while Hizbollah was upgraded and rewarded.

In sum our people in South Lebanon lives out a human tragedy today. Thousands of its youth, including young children, have gone into exile, the remaining residents live in fear and under oppression. Our socio-economic infrastructure is being dismantled. The Lebanese government and the United Nations have so far refused to protect our community inside our villages. And we fear that the worse has yet to occur.

Mr. Senator, Dear Members:

Practically the South Lebanon community moved from under one occupation to another. What was portrayed as "the liberation of South Lebanon from Israeli occu-

pation by resistance movements," was also the extension into South Lebanon's enclaves of pro-Syrian pro-Iranian forces. In sum we, the native population of South Lebanon, were not liberated, but forced to leave. Those who stayed behind are not free but under oppression. And worse, our cause as refugees and oppressed is not even recognized by the international community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of my testimony, and on behalf of the refugee population in Israel and abroad and the oppressed communities inside our area, I would like to suggest the following recommendations to the U.S. Congress:

(1) We urge the U.S. Congress in particular and the American government in general to investigate the fate of the population of South Lebanon after the Israeli withdrawal and the invasion by Hizbollah. We call on you to send representatives to inquire about their situation, to interview them, to listen to their concerns and to establish those facts personally. I urge the U.S. Senators and invite them to visit the refugee centers in Israel and to visit our villages in South Lebanon. That visit must be objective and neutral and not altered by local officials.

(2) We urge the U.S. Government to grant a special humanitarian aid to the refugees in Israel to enable them to be absorbed momentarily until conditions change in Lebanon, enabling them to return. That special aid must include funds for schools, social aid and creation of jobs.

(3) We urge the U.S. government formally to ask the United Nations to use its already existing units, the UNIFIL, to deploy within and around the towns and villages, which were targeted by Hizbollah and persecuted by pro-Syrian forces.

(4) We urge the U.S. Government to pressure the Lebanese regime to stop persecuting the South Lebanon community and to engage in a dialogue for national reconciliation. We ask the U.S. Government to intervene directly in that process, as it has done in several areas in the world.

(5) We urge the U.S. Government to assist the Lebanese people in general to free their country from Syrian occupation, which by all standards is responsible for most of the country's tragedies. We call on the U.S. Government to ask Syria to initiate its full withdrawal from all of Lebanon and to ensure that free and new elections occur in Lebanon, under U.N. sponsorship, which would help Lebanon's society express its will and aspirations.

(6) We particularly call on the U.S. Congress to hold hearings about the fate of the Lebanese Christians in particular, as an endangered community in the Middle East and assess ways and means to enable this community to survive as the international community did for the Bosnian Muslims, the Kosovar Muslims and the Palestinians. I urge you to call on this community's spiritual leaders, political exiles and intellectuals to testify about the oppression of their community.

I thank you again for the opportunity you offered me to express my point of view and represent the views of the refugee population from South Lebanon,

Senator BROWNBACK. Well, thank you, Colonel, for taking us up on this opportunity at a great personal sacrifice to yourself, financially at first, and in other ways that you are suffering as well. So I deeply appreciate your willingness to put yourself on the line in doing this and being here to share your thoughts. They are very good, thoughtful, concise, and specific of what we can do.

Dr. Pipes, let me start with some questions for you. What is your assessment of the future of Hizbollah at this point in time? Do you think they will recreate themselves into a political party? Do you think they will continue down that terrorist road? What is your view? What is Hizbollah moving toward and to do?

Dr. PIPES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hizbollah aspires to rule in Lebanon, either through violence or through the political process.

What began as a fairly marginal operation depending on the use of violence has grown over the past two decades to the point that it can rely less on violence and more on the political process.

Hizbollah has had considerable success in the political arena and has shown intelligent flexibility. For example, just in the last few

days since the occupation of South Lebanon, it has not engaged in out-and-out ethnic cleansing, but it has done something much more subtle, which is to ruin the infrastructure so that the people of South Lebanon have to leave.

This approach has served Hizbollah well. It is the victor now over the Israeli forces. It claims victory, though the Israelis dispute it. I agree with Hizbollah. It won; Israel lost. Its prestige has soared in the last month, and I believe that Hizbollah is going to become a yet greater force.

As that happens, its interests and those of the Syrian overlords will clash. There could be room at that point for others to maneuver. But until now, the Syrians and the Hizbollah movement have worked quite well together.

Senator BROWNBACK. So do you anticipate a clash between those two in the near term?

Dr. PIPES. I do, yes, Mr. Chairman, though I do not know about the near term. As the Hizbollah increases in force and in ambition, its interests could well be on a collision course with the Syrian occupying forces.

Senator BROWNBACK. What do we know about Bashshar Asad? What is his potential for turning Syria into a more democratic modern state?

Dr. PIPES. Before answering your question directly, it is worth noting that the developments in Syria are very unusual. What we have here is a revolutionary regime merged with a monarchy. That does not happen often. The only precedent I know of is North Korea. Romania was heading down that track, but it did not happen. In North Korea very interestingly, in just the last few days, we saw real flexibility resulting from this peculiar marriage of revolution and monarchy.

There is a fundamental illegitimacy to the process; a revolutionary regime is not supposed to use monarchical means. One simply does not know what the consequences will be, but I venture to suppose the chances are much greater for radical change.

Had it been another revolutionary apparatchik who has taken over in Damascus, things likely would have stayed on the same track. But Bashshar is a prince—someone from a different generation, a very different path to power, a different life experience—and I think the chances of change are therefore much greater.

Bashshar Asad is, as was noted earlier, 34 years old. Until just 6 years ago, he was a student in London studying eye surgery. Apparently, he decided he was not going into the family business, but with the death of his elder brother in January 1994, he was recruited into that business.

He has been a fast study. He has had military training and political training. He is apparently, from what we can tell, doing a rather good job. He was to be given an important position just a week after his father's death intervened.

Bashshar has taken several audacious steps, and nothing less is necessary, for he has been thrust into the maelstrom of Syrian political life. It is not something for the faint-hearted. Bashshar is a rookie; we do not know his capabilities.

Overall, I am hopeful that within the context of Syrian political life—which has long been totalitarian, brutalized, and impover-

ished—that the fresh face and fresh approach of Bashshar Asad could lead to good things.

If he fails to control the government, if the rivalries among the grandees of the old regime explode, it could also lead to dangers. There could be violence within Syria and even outside it.

So this is a dangerous time, but overall I am optimistic that things could go well.

Senator BROWNBACK. Because we did not have much chance that things were going to go well under the father, I mean that he ruled with such an iron hand for so long a period of time, you are basically betting on that the son is just of a different generation, and the mind set might be something more open minded toward growing Syria economically and less of the militaristic rule.

Dr. PIPES. Right. Under the father, one found a situation of stasis, ossification in the extreme. I mean, rarely in human affairs does one see a country that simply has stopped in the way Syria did in the last decade.

And that is due to the father's very narrow assessment of what his concerns were, which were to stay in power and to pass on that power as, in fact, he has quite well done so far in the last few days. Everything was seen through the prism of regime maintenance, staying in power. Nothing else mattered.

Senator BROWNBACK. Passing the estate onto the next generation.

Dr. PIPES. Exactly. Now that that seems to be happening, the next generation is not quite so focused on the same narrow scope of concerns. This is pure speculation—we only have wisps and rumors of information about Bashshar—but he appears more willing to take chances, to lessen the regime's grip on the country that his father needed.

Senator BROWNBACK. What should the administration—you listed a number of things that you thought were items that the Congress should take on. How would you rate what the administration has done to date given the twin aspects of the pullout in South Lebanon by the Israelis and the change in Syria, toward Lebanon?

Dr. PIPES. American policy for some years placed the Arab-Israeli peace process above all else. Everything outside this is a potential sacrifice. Anything perceived as impinging on that process, is to be pushed away.

I think that is a mistake. Resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict is obviously a very important and desirable goal. But it is not the only goal. We must keep an eye on such other problems as totalitarian role in Syria, the Syrian threats until a year and a half ago against Turkey, and the Syrian occupation of Lebanon. These are legitimate and important problems as well, and should not be shoved aside simply because they do not help the peace process.

Our Government has had a very special attitude toward the Syrian regime because of its negotiations with Israel. I mean, it is of a kind with its peers in Iraq, Libya, North Korea, and Cuba. It is a rogue regime; even U.S. Government documentation agrees with that.

But our Secretaries of State, even our President, have gone to Syria. They never go to Tripoli, Tehran, or Baghdad, but they go to Damascus fairly often because of the attempt to bring Damascus

into the process and encourage it to engage in diplomacy with Israel. I think that too is a mistake.

Totalitarian governments do not respond to cajoling and encouragement. They respond to worries and threats, as we saw in 1998 with Turkey. The Turks for 10 years cajoled the Syrians in an attempt to resolve their serious problem with Syrian sponsored terrorism. From 1987 to 1998, they cajoled, saying in effect, "Please, pretty please, pay attention to our problem and stop making trouble for us." It did not work.

And finally, in 1998, the Turks threatened the Syrians with retribution. They said, "If you do not stop this, you will be in big trouble." And you know what? Within 2 weeks, the problem was closed down. I think that is the way one deals with a regime like Hafiz al-Asad's.

One does not send the Secretary of State to the funeral of a totalitarian thug. We did not send her to Kim Il-Jong's funeral. She should not have gone to President Asad's funeral. This is not appropriate for us.

We should take a much tougher stand. We should indicate to the totalitarian rulers that we do not like what they are doing, and that engaging in negotiations with Israel is fine but does not push the other problems aside.

Now all that being said, the situation has changed in the last few days. There is a potential for more maneuvering and more subtlety today because of a new regime. But, I still worry about a mind set that places total priority on Arab-Israeli negotiations.

Senator BROWNBAC. Colonel, you heard Dr. Pipes talk about the type of persecution and pushing out of the citizenry taking place in South Lebanon by Hizbollah that is not the direct, if I am correctly stating Dr. Pipes, killing of a number of individuals but more destruction of infrastructure.

Is that your information and what you are receiving from your people on the ground in South Lebanon of the type of persecution, the type of destruction, of living conditions that is occurring?

Colonel BARAKAT. Yes. Last week, we received information that they had put some explosives, a bomb, in a pump, water pump between two villages, and they put some explosives around the water cisterns for the whole area. About 12 villages take their water from this big cistern.

It did not explode because there was—you know, we had some connections where the U.N. came and we had a talk with the journalists, the television people who came there and they could not blow it up.

But it is one of their plans to destroy such kinds of infrastructure. Also, they have threatened to blow up all the buildings which Israel had built before, such as schools and clubs and everything, to help the people to stay there.

As I say, it is a sign of the Israeli occupation, so they have to get rid of, and they want to blow it up. They did the same thing in Mahajreel, they blew up the place of the martyrs—we have a place to remember our martyrs—they blew it up. Those kind of things, they are doing.

Senator BROWNBAC. But they have not actually done that, confessed to blowing up these facilities; is that what you are stating?

Colonel BARAKAT. They blow up the bomb. They could not blow up the cistern.

Senator BROWNBAC. And the other buildings that have been threatened—

Colonel BARAKAT. The other buildings they threaten to blow up. As of now, they did not blow them up.

Senator BROWNBAC. I guess that what I hear both of you saying is that really now is a key time for the world community to focus on events taking place, particularly in South Lebanon because of the public pressure, that the Hizbollah will be watching kind of what their image is internationally at this point in time.

Would you agree with that, Dr. Pipes?

Dr. PIPES. I certainly would.

Senator BROWNBAC. Then I hope we can take note of that and that the Congress can call yet again for Syria to pull all of its occupying troops out of Lebanon. It has been a consistent position here, and it should be stated clearly and not one that we will walk away from because time has lapsed and memories are short, and we just do not continue to remember that here is a state that is being occupied by a foreign power, and that that should not continue. The United States should not abet that occurring.

Thank you both for joining us. Thank you all for attending the hearing. I think it is instructive and we are at a moment—but hopefully, better can occur from this point forward.

The hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:15 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

ADDITIONAL STATEMENT SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

PREPARED STATEMENT OF LEBANESE INFORMATION CENTER

This testimony is offered on behalf of the Lebanese Information Center (LIC), a nonprofit organization, which aspires to raise international awareness to the plight of the Lebanese people. The Lebanese Information Center (LIC), which established chapters nationwide with several hundred members, Americans of Lebanese Descent, enjoys a large support base and reflects the views of thousands of Lebanese worldwide. The LIC welcomes the chance to bring before the Committee on Foreign Relations the concerns of its members and to offer policy recommendations taking heed of the United States' interest in a peaceful democratic and sovereign Lebanon. The LIC is willing to provide all the factual studies the center produced thus far.

The state of affairs in Lebanon today is a matter of great concern to all Lebanese, in the country and abroad. Occupied, burdened with a drained economy, and transformed into a satellite state to a neighboring country Syria, Lebanon, the only democracy amongst the Arab Nations, is fading away. In this testimony, we will offer you an overview of the Syrian's hegemony over Lebanon and the ramifications of this dominance over its political, social, and economic lives. We will at the end offer policy recommendations that could serve the interest of both countries, Lebanon and the United States as well as serve the peace process initiative to ensure a lasting peace in the region.

Syrian troops started to infiltrate Lebanon since 1973 to support armed Palestinian factions. In 1976, Syria's presence in Lebanon was legitimized when it became part of the Arab Deterrent Force (ADF) established by the Arab League. After the collapse of the ADF and despite the numerous requests for its departure from Lebanon starting with the presidency of Elias Sarkis in late 1970's leading to the Taif Agreement in early 1990's, Syria managed to stay in Lebanon by installing a puppet government to legitimize its presence. The request for a Syrian withdrawal started with late President Elias Sarkis who sent a formal letter to the Arab League in June 1981 requesting the withdrawal of armed Syrian forces from Lebanon. Late President elect Bashir Al-Gemayel demanded the withdrawal of all foreign armed forces from Lebanon prior to his assassination in September 1982. In September

1983 former President Ameen Al-Gemayel sent a formal letter to Syrian President Hafiz Al-Assad requesting to withdraw Syrian troops from Lebanese territories. On March 14, 1989 General Michel Aoun, acting Prime Minister for the Transitional Government in late 1980's formally demanded a Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. The last attempt was with the Taif agreement, which dictated a redeployment of Syrian troops to the Bekaa Valley within two years as a prelude to a complete withdrawal from Lebanese territories. None of these requests were respected nor acknowledged and Syria remained as an occupied force in Lebanon. For 25 years, every aspect of Lebanon's political, economic and social lives has been altered due to Syrian occupation and Lebanon became a classical example of a satellite State in a world that came to respect freedom and value sovereignty.

HOW IS LEBANON FUNCTIONING AS A SHADOW STATE?

On a political level, Syria holds a firm grip on the Lebanese decision-making process thus hindering a true representation of Lebanon's National Interest. Its policy of manipulation is setting the ground for a perception that Lebanon would fall apart in the event that Syria withdraws and that civil war would resume. The Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al Sharaa made a statement a few days ago while on a diplomatic visit to Egypt stating that the presence of Syrian armed forces in Lebanon is to prevent a sectarian war that may erupt in the event of a Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. Such comments caused uproar in the Lebanese community and called to question President Emile Lahoud's declaration of a true coexistence and reconciliation initiative amongst the Lebanese.

Syria dominated the political process in Lebanon by implanting 35 thousand armed soldiers and several thousand intelligence personnel on three-quarters of Lebanese territories. They serve to spread fear amongst the residents and ensure the loyalty of those who chose to collaborate rather than to resist. Political opposition was disbanded, leaders were jailed, killed and exiled and a puppet government was installed to serve its interest and execute its agenda. The ramifications of this political situation constituted a direct violation to Lebanon's freedom provided by its constitution. Those violations varied from political authorities appointed by Syria, to fraudulent elections, to a Judiciary subjected to political pressures, to arbitrary arrests, human rights violations and abuses, to self imposed censorship on media and freedom of expression.

Another political ramification of the Syrian hegemony is present in the refusal of the Lebanese Government to deal with the armed Palestinian elements in the camps. According to UNRWA, there are 372,700 Palestinian refugees in the camps, which are the host of radical armed groups calling for the resumption of the military struggle for the liberation of Palestine. The Lebanese Government also refused to send the Lebanese Army to South of Lebanon after Israel withdrew allowing for armed militias to take control. Hizbollah took over along with other pro-Syrian militias that were supposed to have been disarmed in 1991 according to the Taif agreement such as Amal, Syrian Social Nationalist Party, The Progressive Socialist Party, the Lebanese Communist Party and others.

On the social level, Lebanon suffered from high emigration, displacement and demographic alteration. According to official statistics issued by the Deputy Chairman of the Board of Development and Construction Dr. Boutros Labaki, the number of Lebanese that permanently emigrated away from Lebanon between 1991 to 1997 (after the war ended) is 820,000. Also, quoting a study published by a Lebanese Newspaper, Al-Safir, 19,000 Lebanese emigrated every month in the recent year. Those numbers are extremely high given the fact that the population of Lebanese residents is three and a half million.

Despite the fact that many committees were formed to deal with the issue of the displaced in Lebanon, a solution to the problem was never in sight. Just recently, 7,500 southerners fled their villages after the Israel withdrawal for fear of retribution. Many left to Israel while others immigrated to various countries around the world.

Lebanon also witnessed a major demographic alteration for political reasons. In 1994, the government issued a decree (N-5247) allowing the naturalization of around 450,000 individuals. Of those, 27,000 were Palestinians and 12,000 were Arab gypsies. (Study prepared by Nemat Allah Abi Nasr.) This decree increased, in one round, the population of Lebanon by 10%. The newly naturalized had to pay the favor with their votes.

On the economic level, Lebanon is on the verge of collapsing. According to the Economic Release presented by Dr. Marwan Iskandar in 1999, the national debt at the end of 1998 reached \$18.3 billions of which 77% are in Lebanese pounds and 23% in foreign currency. The State's budget displays a record deficit of 59.3%. The

Lebanese economy also suffers from a freeze in domestic and foreign investment, high inflation, high unemployment rate and a record high of foreign labor, over a million Syrian workers in Lebanon are exempted from paying taxes and the regime has recently provided them with all the benefits of social security. According to Dr. Mohsen Salim, in his conference at The Holy Spirit University—Kaslik on 29/11/99, we can describe the Syrian workforce in Lebanon as “The Economic Implantation.”

WHAT CAN THE UNITED STATES DO TO HELP LEBANON?

Some American officials questioned how can the American Government ask the Syrians to leave Lebanon when the Lebanese Government calls for the Syrian presence in Lebanon. There is a truth to this claim but how can we rely on the statements of a puppet regime that is not elected by the people nor represent their will? Expecting the Lebanese Government to ask for a Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon is like expecting the Government of Babrak Karmal to ask the Soviet Union to withdraw from Afghanistan in late 1980's.

The United States has been a leading force in assuring the survival of democracies around the world. It held the torch of liberty and paid a heavy price to ensure that nations across continents are free. Lebanon, with its democratic institutions will face a dead end unless the United States takes the necessary measures to help:

- Implement the United Nations Resolution 520, which calls for the withdrawal of all foreign armed forces from Lebanon. The United States can exercise pressure on Syria through withholding economic aid and other means to force its retreat from Lebanon.
- Find an alternate solution for the Palestinian refugee problem in order for peace to rein in the region. Lebanon cannot absorb the large number of Palestinian refugees for demographic, economic and social reasons.
- Implement the provisions afforded by the Taif Accord pertaining to national Reconciliation. This process would be realized through maintaining free elections, providing for a healthy and democratic political life, and allowing political leaders to return to the political arena either from jail or from exile.

Lebanon deserves to be free, sovereign and independent in a world that has confirmed its commitment to such principles. Lebanon, an entity in this New World Order, expects nothing less but an equal chance.

