

**LEBANON REBORN? DEFINING NATIONAL
PRIORITIES AND PROSPECTS FOR DEMOCRATIC
RENEWAL IN THE WAKE OF MARCH 14, 2005**

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BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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THURSDAY, JULY 28, 2005

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:33 a.m. in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Henry J. Hyde (Chairman of the Committee) presiding.

Chairman HYDE. The Committee will come to order.

The purpose of today's hearing is to understand the nature of the United States' commitment and policy objectives in Lebanon. The hearing also seeks to identify indigenous national priorities that seek to strengthen Lebanon's unity and help transcend confessional boundaries that have historically led to deadlock and stalemate in the national decision-making process.

A glimpse of this unity was exemplified on March 14, 2005, when 1 million protesters filled Beirut's Martyr Square in an independence uprising. The protesters were united in denouncing the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, whose death launched a series of reactions that temporarily surpassed the country's sectarian boundaries. Media images of Lebanon's youth seeking the truth about their fallen leader and demanding that Syria leave were beamed into households across the world. A variety of cliché portrayals were given. Some called it the "Cedar Revolution" in honor of Lebanon's national cedar tree that adorns its flag. Others called it the "Gucci Revolution" in tribute to the Westernized depiction of the protesters. Nonetheless, no matter what it was called, what mattered most was that the Lebanese people were gathered in reverence for their country's sovereignty and independence.

Soon after, the Syrian regime withdrew its troops from Lebanon's borders, and Lebanon's political process began. Despite the inability to establish a representative electoral law, Lebanese overwhelmingly supported that Parliamentary election scheduled for May 2005 take place on time. Although not perfect, the elections were labeled as a "milestone on the road to change" by U.S. Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman. However, the political compromises that were made as a result of sectarian constraints in the weeks leading up to Parliamentary elections were seen as a contradiction of the spirit of the "independence uprising" and have contributed to a

growing disenchantment about the realization of the ideals established on March 14, 2005.

Lebanon today stands at a precipice. Faced with the chance to liberate itself from the yoke of Syrian oppression, Lebanon has the opportunity to transcend internal divisions and define a set of national priorities that will help guide the way toward Lebanon's rebirth.

The international community stands ready to assist Lebanon in this process. However, that will only be possible if Lebanon is able to articulate a united voice in support of development policies that will subsequently lead to its long-term security and stability. Lebanon has a wealth of resources to utilize in this endeavor. A strong civil society, a free press, and an educated youth are Lebanon's greatest assets. What remains to be answered is how the government will collaborate with these elements in crafting a set of national priorities.

I am encouraged by Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's statements to Secretary Rice regarding reform. I hope that the newly formed Lebanese Government realizes the benefits of a political process that seek to initiate institutional, political, judicial, and economic reforms. A government whose institutions do not reflect the merit and talent of their people cannot possibly liberate itself from human stagnation. Most of all, it cannot effectively govern the people it is meant to serve.

Through the U.S. Agency for International Development, the United States has worked with the Lebanese people to help implement a variety of projects to help support these objectives. However, the \$35 million a year that is spent by the United States through non-governmental organizations is a challenging task in light of the \$35-\$40 million a month reportedly spent by Hezbollah in the development sector. I look forward to hearing from the Administration about the U.S. Agency for International Development can further support Lebanon's capacity to advance reform and other requirements the Lebanese Government is expected to implement under international law.

The Lebanese are a resilient people and they have endured many struggles in their attempts to be free of all foreign forces. For too long, Lebanon's fate was reduced to the might and will of external forces in the region. Now is the time for the Lebanese to stop being followers of external ambitions and to be leaders of their own destiny. As Secretary Rice stated in her recent visit to Beirut, "Lebanese should make the decisions for the Lebanese."

A new page has been turned in Lebanon, and the moment for truth has really arrived. This time, however, it is the Lebanese who hold the key to unveiling this certainty. The Lebanese must be the ones to lead the way toward formulating a national agenda that empowers all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliations. What remains to be seen is whether the Lebanese have the courage to risk the comfort of stability secured by the traditional modes of power and enhance a spirit of cooperation that goes beyond sectarian or feudal leaderships.

Today, we are honored with the presence of two distinguished panels representing the Administration and regional experts. I look forward to hearing their views on how the United States can best

contribute to Lebanon's national development, independence, and sovereignty.

First, however, with pleasure, I yield to my friend and colleague, Ranking Democrat Member, Tom Lantos, for any opening remarks that he may wish to make. I will then ask the Chair and Ranking Democrat Member of the Middle East and Central Asia Subcommittee to extend their 1-minute opening remarks to 2 minutes. Mr. Lantos.

Mr. LANTOS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to commend you for holding this important hearing. Mr. Chairman, in the 6 months since Rafik Hariri was tragically assassinated, events in Lebanon have moved at a dizzying pace: First, there were mass anti-Syrian demonstrations and then Syrian soldiers withdrew. A new Parliament has arisen, and it is dominated by those who had opposed Syrian rule. But the job is only half done.

It is not yet clear to what extent the newly-elected Lebanese Government represents a departure from the past, or to what degree Syria still influences events, policies, and officials in Lebanon.

I expect that the witnesses at today's hearing will help clarify these issues. But it is obvious, Mr. Chairman, that the elephant in the Lebanese living room is Hezbollah. The new government deserves some time to consolidate its hold on power before it can tackle the Hezbollah problem effectively, but the Lebanese must know that the requirements imposed by UN Security Council Resolution 1559, which calls for the disbanding and disarming of all militias, cannot and will not be postponed for long.

This is the crux of the issue that we face, and I wish to repeat it, Mr. Chairman, because all the platitudes fade into insignificance until this item is absorbed fully.

It is a regrettable fact that 14 members of Hezbollah were elected to Lebanon's Parliament recently. Although Hezbollah has participated in previous Lebanese elections, the participation of militias in what are supposed to be free elections, remains an oxymoron.

Bullets and ballots will not be and can never be reconciled. But I must say, Mr. Chairman, that I am appalled by the new Lebanese Government's decision to appoint an active member of Hezbollah, a terrorist organization, as a Cabinet minister.

It is unacceptable that the Lebanese Government would enhance Hezbollah's status—and diminish its own—by including a terrorist organization in its Cabinet. I believe that Saad Hariri, son of the martyred prime minister, who was host to my wife and me earlier in Riyadh some time back, thinks that this is part of the process that will lead gradually to Hezbollah's disarmament.

I can only describe this to youthful naivete and inexperience. I, for one, do not expect this approach to succeed. Meanwhile, I hope that we will hear Ambassador Welch and Mr. Kunder today reaffirming that it is the policy of the United States Government to have absolutely no contact with members of Hezbollah, whatever offices they may hold.

Lebanon's issues with terrorism are not limited to disarming and disbanding Hezbollah, daunting as that problem is. Hezbollah projects its poison in many ways, including through its television station, al-Manar, which graphically incites hatred in a blood-cur-

dling fashion against all Americans—Christians and Jews—as well as against Israelis, and openly and sickeningly glorifies and advocates suicide terrorism.

Lebanon also plays host to the offices of several violent Palestinian terrorist groups—the very ones that we demand be expelled from Syria. Al-Qaeda affiliates such as the terrorist gang, Asbat al-Ansar, also find a home in Lebanon.

The Lebanese Government must also be held responsible for controlling its borders, particularly to the south and to the east. As long as Syria controlled Lebanon, the border between them was meaningless.

Now that Lebanon is reasserting its sovereignty, the Lebanese army must take firm and full control of that border and prevent the sinister flow of illegal arms to Hezbollah and other terrorists—whether these arms originate from Syria itself or from Iran.

And the army must bring an end once and for all to terrorist attacks against Israel initiated by Hezbollah or others. Mr. Chairman, there is absolutely no reason in the world why Lebanon's military cannot disarm Hezbollah, control the nation's borders, and assume a long-overdue and effective role in the fight against terrorism.

The Lebanese army has 70,000 increasingly well-trained and well-armed troops. Hezbollah, according to all experts, has a tiny fraction of that. Until now, Lebanon has been given a pass on all of these issues because it has been seen as the hapless victim of Syrian domination.

The time is long overdue for ending this absurd, intolerable, and dangerous situation. If the era of Syrian domination has truly ended, we must recognize Lebanon's own responsibility for ending this situation so that this nation of extraordinary, talented people can truly rejoin the civilized world.

In the State Department authorization bill, that the House overwhelmingly passed this past week, a measure that I offered declares that United States aid to Lebanon may be affected if Lebanon does not fulfill the terms of UN Security Council Resolution 1559.

It also requires the Secretary of State to report regularly on Lebanon's progress toward compliance with this resolution. Congress will be meticulously diligent about enforcing this provision.

Mr. Chairman, I want to assist the new Lebanon and so do all of my colleagues. We want to encourage the fledgling reassertion of sovereignty and independence in Lebanon, not threaten it with sanctions before it even gets off the starting block.

But at the same time the Lebanese Government must be on notice that the United States Government and this Congress will not tolerate support for or acquiescence in terrorism in any form.

Mr. Chairman, I first visited Lebanon in 1956. It was a free, open, and democratic society. I was delighted by the palpable spirit of tolerance and respect for cultural pluralism that suffused the atmosphere.

One of the magnificent memories of my lifetime was watching Shakespeare staged in twilight in the ancient, breathtakingly beautiful Temple of Baal in Baalbek. I was so enchanted, that sustained by the memory of that visit, when offered the post of President of

the American University in Beirut a few years later, I came very close to accepting it.

No one will be more pleased, or more ready to applaud than I, when Lebanon sees the full return of those days of tolerance and openness. And I hope that they will be upon us soon. Mr. Chairman, we look forward to hearing from all of our witnesses.

And I extend a special welcome to Ambassador Welch, who will be testifying for the first time before this Committee in his capacity as Assistant Secretary of State. We all look forward to working with you, Mr. Secretary, for a long time to come. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman HYDE. Thank you very much, Mr. Lantos. The Chair will entertain 1-minute opening statements by such Members as wish to make them, but the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Middle East Subcommittee will have 2 minutes to make an opening statement. So I recognize the Chairperson, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen of Florida.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity. This past June, the people of Lebanon said "no" to fear. They would not be silenced or intimidated as they rejected the corrupt government imposed on them by the Syrian regime.

The recent elections and the formation of a coalition government represent only the first step toward the full restoration of an independent democratic governance in Lebanon.

The current election, however, as conducted under a Syrian-inspired law, denies fair and equitable electoral treatment to all sectors of the Lebanese population. There were also reports of Syrian intelligence forces threatening voters, and engaging in mass naturalizations of Syrian nationals as Lebanese citizens in order to tilt the outcome of the elections toward a scenario favorable to Syria and its terrorist ally, Iran.

All of these are clear examples of foreign interference in Lebanon's political process, something that the UN Security Council Resolution 1559 admonished against. Due to such concerns, combined with persistent reports that Syrian intelligence and security personnel remained in Lebanon, and the unwillingness of Hezbollah to disarm, prompted various sectors of Lebanese society, as well as many Lebanese-Americans, to call for a postponement of the Lebanese elections.

I would like our esteemed witnesses to address some of these issues. For example, would you elaborate upon the reasoning behind the international community's push for the recent elections before all aspects of the Council's 1559 were implemented?

Chairman HYDE. The gentlelady's time has expired. Mr. Gary Ackerman of New York, the Ranking Democrat Member of the Middle East Subcommittee.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I want to thank you, Chairman Hyde, and Ranking Member Lantos, for organizing today's hearing on the future of Lebanon. Clearly, the events following the assassination of Rafik Hariri, a man who many of us knew well, has led to a sea change in Lebanese politics.

The Syrian army has withdrawn in the face of massive popular protests, with a little help from the international community. Elections have been held and a new government has formed.

But the armed solidarity that Lebanese showed in opposition to Syrian occupation, the underlying conflicts in Lebanese society, the conflicts that led to the 15 years of bloody civil war, remain.

The fact that Lebanon's Government remains based on concessionalism rather than an ideal of Lebanese nationhood virtually guarantees that individuals and political parties will continue to insist on roles in government consistent with the size of their communities rather than on the power of their ideas.

When I was in Lebanon last month, I met with Saad Hariri, and he spoke of changing the politics of Lebanon, and of doing away with the old electoral system that is rigged to produce a result that the Syrians wanted.

He acknowledged that such a change would likely cause his supporters some seats in Parliament, but argued that it was the price of progress. That, Mr. Chairman, is a vision of a new Lebanon, one that has moved beyond sectarian politics, and into the 21st century as a unified nation.

There are other significant problems to overcome as well. The disarmament of militias, including Hezbollah, as Congressman Lantos so rightly points out, continues to be an enormous challenge, as was having the Lebanese army actually assert control over all of Lebanon.

And finally Syrian intelligence continues to play a negative role in Lebanon by continuing to support both Hezbollah and the Palestinian militias. These problems will need Lebanese solutions, but they will also need international, and specifically United States, assistance and support. I thank you, Mr. Chairman, and look forward to hearing from today's witnesses.

Chairman HYDE. Thank you, Mr. Ackerman. I am informed that we shortchanged Ileana Ros-Lehtinen by 1 minute, and so if you wish, you may continue.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, because I just wanted to make sure that our witnesses address the articles that we have seen in so many papers. It says that Lebanon's prime minister defends Hezbollah's role, and our colleagues have spoken about it.

What are the Department of State's views on statements such as those said by the new prime minister? And he said in a British newspaper that he would be restoring ties with the Syrian regime, and that has been Lebanon's former occupier, and continues to interfere in Lebanon's internal affairs, and is classified by the United States as a state sponsor of terrorism.

How is the United States going to address the statements that he has made endorsing Hezbollah's terrorist acts? For example, he said that he considers it a "resistance" and a natural and honest expression of the Lebanese people's national rights to liberate their land and defend their honor against Israeli aggression and threats.

I know that there may be some in our Committee or in the chamber who want to defend Syria, and give Syria an opportunity and a forum. I am not one of them. I consider Syria a terrorist regime, and I am very concerned about this new prime minister's statements about Israeli aggression and threats. So I look forward to your testimony. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman HYDE. Thank you. Now we will entertain 1-minute opening statements from those who wish to make them. And, first, Mr. Rohrbacher.

Mr. ROHRBACHER. It is time for Hezbollah and its followers to give up this dream that there is going to be a world where Israel does not exist, and reach an accommodation with Israel. And just as Israel has recognized, it is time to try to reach an agreement with the Palestinians.

And nothing is going to bring peace to the region until that happens, and I hope that we can facilitate that type of compromise between these two players. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman HYDE. Thank you. Mr. Delahunt.

[No response.]

Chairman HYDE. Mr. Tancredo.

[No response.]

Chairman HYDE. Ms. Berkley.

Ms. BERKLEY. I thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a number of questions, but I think I would rather have the witnesses testify and hear what they have to say, and then ask my questions, if that is all right?

Chairman HYDE. It certainly is. Mr. Poe. Does Mr. Poe have a statement?

Mr. POE. No, I do not.

Chairman HYDE. Okay. Mr. Berman.

Mr. BERMAN. No statement.

Chairman HYDE. Thank you, Mr. Berman. Mr. Chabot.

Mr. CHABOT. In order to get to the witnesses more quickly, I will defer.

Chairman HYDE. Thank you. Mr. Smith of Washington.

Mr. SMITH. No statement at this time.

Chairman HYDE. All right. Thank you.

C. David Welch was sworn in as Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs on March 18 of this year. Prior to his appointment, Ambassador Welch served as the American Ambassador to the Arab Republic of Egypt from 2001 to 2005. A career foreign service officer, Ambassador Welch has served in key positions involved in the Middle East. He earned a Master's degree from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy.

Mr. James Kunder is Assistant Administrator for Asia and the Near East at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). From July 2002 to 2004, he served as Deputy Assistant Administrator for Asia and the Near East. Mr. Kunder has extensive government and private sector experience in assistance and international development. He holds a Master's degree in International Relations from Georgetown University.

The Chair will recognize Ambassador Welch first, and request that if you can encapsulate your remarks to about 5 minutes, we will have some wiggle room there. But your full statement will be incorporated into the record, and we will have more time for questions. Ambassador Welch.

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

Ambassador WELCH. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Members, as it is a pleasure to be before this Committee again, this time in a new capacity as the Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East.

I just returned from a trip last week that included Beirut as one of its stops, and where Secretary Rice met with some of Lebanon's leadership, including the new prime minister, and Mr. Saad Hariri, and Michel Aoun, who lead some of the largest blocs in Parliament.

We also met with the President of Lebanon, Mr. Emile Lahoud, and the Speaker of the Parliament, Nabih Berri. In your opening statements, Congressman, and Congressperson, you have recognized that the new government's policy platform is being debated in Lebanon today.

It includes a variety of government positions. Its plans for reform in our judgment is impressive. We think going about this reform in Lebanon is not going to be an easy process. But the United States and the international community would like to stand with the people of Lebanon as they continue to navigate their country toward being a more free, more prosperous, more secure, and more fully sovereign country.

As Secretary Rice said when she was in Beirut, you will not find a more supportive partner than the United States for what Lebanon is trying to achieve. This is a wonderful breakthrough for the Lebanese people to have control over their future.

I think that Congressman Lantos said that Lebanon has experienced a dramatic change in the past few months. Of course, this change was initiated by the tragic murder of Rafik Hariri and 19 other people, in one of the most brutal assassinations in a country that unfortunately has witnessed all to many such events.

As a consequence of that, and bearing in mind the support of the international community as expressed in Resolution 1559, the Lebanese spoke out in a way not seen in that region for a very long time. And what they asked is that Syria should end its domination of their country.

There were massive protests that demanded the withdrawal of Syrian troops. The international community added its voice to that of the Lebanese people, and confirmed the call to an end to Syrian interference that it had enshrined in a resolution to the Security Council some 6 months earlier.

Not long thereafter, President Asad of Syria announced an intent to withdraw from Lebanon, and on April 26th, he said that withdrawal was complete. We are now entering a new phase in Lebanon's critical development. The Parliamentary elections that were held between the end of May and the latter part of June, were judged to be free by UN and EU observers.

For the first time in nearly three decades, the Lebanese people voted without Syrian influence and elected a Parliament, with 61 new faces, that was dominated by the anti-Syrian opposition. And those elections gave the opposition led by Saad Hariri, the son of the late Rafik Hariri, an absolute majority of 72 seats out of the

128 in the Parliament, which led to the formation of this new government.

The leader of the Christian bloc, Mr. Michel Aoun, received 21 seats, and the Shia Hezbollah/Amal bloc captured 35 seats. Mr. Fouad Siniora, a former finance minister and a close political ally of the Hariri family, was selected as prime minister. And the President of Lebanon accepted this Cabinet list on July 19, and they are now presenting their platform for a decision by the Parliament. The new Cabinet of 24 members has a two-thirds majority of Prime Minister Siniora's supporters, allowing them to carry votes within it.

It includes allies of President Lahoud and members of Hezbollah/Amal. The Aoun block remained outside of government as, in Aoun's words, "a constructive opposition." There is a member of Hezbollah, who for the first time takes a seat as a member of the Cabinet, as the new minister of energy and water.

The United States has a longstanding policy with respect to this organization, and I would like to repeat it for the record. The U.S. Government officials are not going to meet with any member of Hezbollah, which is a designated foreign terrorist organization under U.S. law.

We do not believe that Hezbollah can be a legitimate political actor until it lays down its weapons and renounces terrorism and violence. And I might add that even with those conditions that we still have U.S. law in place.

The new government, I am confident, will be debating vigorously the elements of this platform and working very hard to try and implement it. This lengthy document has a number of detailed positions in it, including on economic and political reform.

It does not directly address Resolution 1559. It calls for a respect for international law and resolutions of the council "within the framework of sovereignty, solidarity, and national unity."

On political reform, the statement promises a new electoral law within 5 months; a merit-based civil service, a fight against corruption in an effort to improve transparency in government; and to promote an independent judiciary.

A great deal of the document, the platform, offers specific policies on economic reform, such as increasing revenues through better tax collection, improving debt management, rationalizing the budget, exploring privatization of certain key sectors, implementation of measures requested by the international community as a part of support and assistance to Lebanon; accession to WTO, and protection of intellectual property rights.

The United States considers that there is a strong public and Parliamentary support for genuine reform. They believe that there is backing within the Parliament for that as well. We expect, and we expressed this to Prime Minister Siniora in our meetings with him, both publicly and privately, that his new government should tackle these urgently needed reforms.

We expect that others in the government, and in the Parliament, will set aside their political disagreements, and their personal agendas to put the longer-term needs of the Lebanese people first.

In that vein, we have encouraged the Parliament to approve this ministerial statement addressing good governance and reform ini-

tiatives. It is important that the Lebanese Government do what its people have asked it to do and implement the needed political, economic, and institutional reforms.

We have an assurance from Prime Minister Siniora to the Secretary of State that that is his intention. The Lebanese Government is going to need the support of the international community, including the United States, as it pushes ahead to do that.

There are some difficult trade offs involved in some of these reform decisions. We met in June with a small group of countries, including the United Kingdom, France, Russia, the European Union, the UN, and the World Bank, to determine the best way the international community could work together to support a reform agenda for Lebanon.

Representatives of this group hope to meet with the Lebanese Government in the coming weeks in order to discuss assistance and to suggest an international donors conference for Lebanon later in the fall.

Our assistance to Lebanon, as my colleague, Mr. Kunder, will explain, includes in the Fiscal Year 2005 budget: \$35 million in Economic Support Funds (ESF); \$700,000 in International Military and Education (IMET) funds; and \$2.3 million in Non-Proliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining, and Related Programs (NADR) funds.

The State Department's request for Fiscal Year 2006 duplicates that: \$35 million more in ESF; \$700,000 again for IMET; and this time, \$1 million for NADR funds.

In response to the upswell of popular support in Lebanon for change, Congress appropriated \$5 million in the Fiscal Year 2005 Emergency Supplemental to support the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, to help strengthen the independent democratic developments there in Lebanon.

We are very grateful for that extraordinary gesture of support. There are a lot of challenges that remain. Some of the Members in their statements have reflected on that, and in particular the call in Resolution 1559 for disarmament of all militias.

The international community supports a Lebanon free of violence, terrorism, and foreign interference, and as such, expects Lebanon to meet those international obligations. In our judgment, exercise by Lebanon of its full sovereignty will make a contribution to regional stability, because when that government asserts sovereignty over all of Lebanon and disarms Hezbollah and other militias, including the armed Palestinian groups, this will be a great support to regional stability.

Until that happens, those groups will not only endanger Lebanon, but we believe present a threat to the region, and in the case of Hezbollah, we believe it presents a continuing threat to the United States, U.S. personnel, and U.S. citizens.

Hezbollah admits materiel support for Palestinian terrorist operations. In doing so, it is undermining the Palestinian leadership's goal of stopping violence, not only within the Palestinian territory, vis-a-vis, Israel.

In addition to that, there have been incursions by armed members of Hezbollah across the so-called Blue Line as recently as June 29, which resulted in casualties, including one death on the Israeli side.

This is a serious escalation of tensions that cannot continue. Our belief is that the Lebanese armed forces, which are the only duly-authorized armed entity in Lebanon, should deploy throughout that country, in particular to the south, as called for by UN Resolution 1559 and previous UN resolutions.

In order to better accomplish this mission the Lebanese armed forces need both equipment, training, and other support. The United States can offer some support through IMET and NADR funds, and we are encouraging our friends and allies to also offer assistance.

By the time of change in Lebanon, we believe the continuing role of UNIFIL, the UN forces in the south of Lebanon, continues to be important. UNIFIL monitors activity along the Blue Line between Israel and Lebanon. It reports violations to the Security Council, and provides assistance to the Lebanese civilian population in this area.

On July 20, the Secretary-General of the UN delivered his semi-annual report to the Security Council, calling for a renewal of the UNIFIL mandate. That is being discussed now in the council and a vote is imminent. We expect in that vote that the council will extend the UNIFIL mandate for another 6 months, until January 2006.

We remain deeply disturbed, Mr. Chairman, by the continued interference of Syria in Lebanese internal affairs. As I said earlier in my opening statement, President Assad has declared that his forces are out. We do not agree with that statement.

While the military, the formed military units, have appeared to have withdrawn, we believe there remains a covert Syrian intelligence presence inside Lebanon.

We also see a campaign of intimidation and violence, and threats of violence, and most recently a very obvious overt campaign of closure, economic strangulation of the border, including, oddly enough, the arrest of Lebanese fishermen.

This blockade presents Lebanon with costs of over a quarter-of-a-million dollars a day, with millions lost already. Lebanese farmers bear the brunt of these losses in their inability to export their goods to their Arab trading partners.

While in Beirut last week, the Secretary of State repeated her concerns about this border issue to the Lebanese Government, to all parts of the Lebanese Government, and asked them to address that with Syria. And she publicly called on the Syrian Government to end this blockade, and to play the role of a good neighbor that it claims itself to be by rapidly working out a solution to this problem.

We also believe that Syria continues to destabilize Lebanon by facilitating Iranian resupply of Hezbollah, and by support for armed Palestinian militias inside of Lebanon. We continue to bring these matters to the attention of our European and Arab friends in order to press the Syrian Government to change these policies, as I said, because of their destabilizing effect throughout the region.

Despite these challenges in Lebanon, it is a new day there. We are optimistic about the future. There are certain obstacles, but for the first time in nearly three decades, as I said, the proud and

strong people of Lebanon really do have an opportunity to take control of their own future.

We, the United States, should be there beside them and with the support of this Committee, I hope that you will lend the resources of our taxpayers to that end. We believe that this government should deliver to its people in confronting these challenges and building a new future.

Once again, thank you very much, and I am delighted to be in front of you again.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Welch follows:]

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

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to address the Committee today. I have just returned from a trip last week to Beirut with Secretary Rice where we met with Lebanon's new leaders, including new Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, and Saad Hariri and Michel Aoun, leaders of the largest bloc in Parliament and the largest opposition bloc, respectively. We also met with President Emile Lahoud, and Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri.

The new Government's policy platform is being discussed in Parliament today and its plans for reform are impressive. It will not be an easy process, but the United States and the international community will stand with the people of Lebanon as they navigate their transformation to a free, prosperous, secure, and fully sovereign country. As Secretary Rice said during her Beirut visit, "You'll not find a more supportive partner than the United States for what Lebanon is trying to achieve. This is a wonderful breakthrough for the Lebanese people to have control over their future."

Lebanon has experienced seismic changes in the last six months. Spurred into action by the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and 19 others on February 14, 2005, the Lebanese people decided the time had come for Syria to end its domination of Lebanon. Massive protests in Beirut demanded the withdrawal of Syrian troops. The international community added its voice to that of the Lebanese people, confirming its call for an end to Syrian interference that it had made six months earlier with the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 1559. Shortly thereafter, Syrian President Asad announced his intent to withdraw from Lebanon and on April 26 he announced that military troop withdrawal was complete.

We are now entering a new phase in Lebanon's political development. The parliamentary elections held May 29–June 19 were judged to be free and fair by UN and EU observers. For the first time in 29 years, the Lebanese people voted without Syrian influence and elected a parliament—with sixty-one new faces—dominated by the anti-Syrian former opposition. The elections gave the opposition led by Saad Hariri, slain former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri's son, an absolute majority of 72 seats of the 128 seats in the Chamber of Deputies. Christian leader Michel Aoun's bloc received 21 seats and the Shia Hizballah/Amal bloc captured 35 seats. Fouad Siniora, a former finance minister and a close ally of the Hariri family, was selected as prime minister.

After three weeks of negotiations, President Lahoud accepted Prime Minister Siniora's Cabinet list on July 19. The 24-member Cabinet retained a two-thirds majority for PM Siniora's supporters that is essential to avoiding gridlock. It includes three allies of President Lahoud and five members of the Hizballah/Amal alliance. Michel Aoun's block remained outside of the government, but Aoun has publicly said his supporters will play the role of a constructive opposition. One formal member of Hizballah holds a Cabinet position: Mohammad Fneish is the new Minister of Energy and Water. Consistent with our long-standing policy, U.S. government officials will not meet with any member of Hizballah, which is a designated Foreign Terrorist Organization. We do not believe that Hizballah can be a legitimate political actor until it lays down its weapons and renounces terrorism and violence.

The new government, led by Prime Minister Siniora, submitted its Ministerial statement to Parliament for approval July 26. Parliament convened today (July 28) to discuss the statement and is widely expected to hold a vote of confidence on the statement and the proposed cabinet July 30. The 31-page document offers specific, detailed policies on economic and political reform. The statement does not address UNSCR 1559, but calls for a respect of international law and its resolutions "within the framework of sovereignty, solidarity, and national unity." On political reform,

the statement promises a new electoral law within five months, a merit-based civil service, to fight against corruption, to improve transparency in government, and to promote and independent judiciary. More than half the document offers specific policies on economic reform such as increasing revenues through better tax collection; improving debt management; rationalizing the 2005 budget; exploring privatization of the telecom, power and energy sectors; implementation of Paris II measures; accession to WTO; and improving protection of intellectual property rights.

There is strong public and parliamentary support for genuine reform. The new Parliamentary opposition leader Michel Aoun, back from 15 years in exile, has pledged support for a credible national reform program. We expect Prime Minister Siniora to tackle needed reforms. We expect President Lahoud and others, including Aoun, Hizballah, and Amal, to put aside previous political disagreements and more narrow political agendas and put the longer-term needs of the Lebanese people first. In this vein, we urge the Lebanese Parliament to approve the Ministerial statement that addresses key good governance and reform initiatives. It is important that the Lebanese government seize the opportunity now to firmly commit to implementing the needed political, economic, and institutional reforms, as Prime Minister Siniora assured Secretary Rice he would do.

The Lebanese government will need the continued support of the international community to push ahead with a difficult reform agenda that will require some sacrifices by all. The United States met in June with a small group of countries, including the UK, France, Russia, EU, UN, and World Bank, to determine the best way the international community could work together to support the new government's reform agenda. Representatives of this group hope to meet with the Lebanese government in the coming weeks to offer assistance and suggest an international donors conference in Beirut later this fall.

U.S. assistance to Lebanon in the FY 2005 budget includes \$35 million in Economic Support Fund (ESF), \$700,000 in International Military and Education (IMET) funds, and \$2.3 million in Non-Proliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining, and Related Programs (NADR) funds. State's request for the FY 2006 budget includes \$35 million in ESF funds, \$700,000 in IMET funds, and \$1 million in NADR funds. In response to Lebanon's popular political upheaval, Congress appropriated \$5 million in the FY 2005 Emergency Supplemental for State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor to strengthen Lebanon's independent democratic development.

Many challenges remain, including the need for full implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1559, which includes a call for the disarmament of all militias. The international community supports a Lebanon free of violence, terrorism and foreign interference, and as such expects Lebanon to show commitment to its international obligations. Lebanon can only exercise its full sovereignty, and contribute to regional stability, when the Government asserts sovereignty over all of Lebanon and when Hizballah and any other militias, including the armed Palestinian groups are disarmed. Until then, these groups will continue to endanger Lebanon and threaten stability in the region. Hizballah has openly admitted its material support for Palestinian terrorist operations, which undermines the Palestinian leadership's goal of stopping violence in Israel and the Palestinian territories. Hizballah's incursions across the Blue Line on June 29, which resulted in the deaths of one IDF soldier and two Hizballah fighters, seriously escalated tensions along the Blue Line. This cannot continue.

The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) should deploy throughout the country, and in particular to the south, as called for in UNSCR 1559. In order to better accomplish this mission, the LAF needs both equipment and training. While the United States can offer some support through IMET and NADR funds, we will urge our allies and friends to offer assistance in the form of training and equipment refurbishment.

At this time of change in Lebanon, the stabilizing role of UNIFIL continues to be important. UNIFIL monitors activity along the Blue Line, reports violations to the UN Security Council, and provides assistance to the Lebanese civilian population. UN Secretary General Annan delivered a semi-annual report to the UNSC on July 20 that called for a renewal of UNIFIL's mandate. In this report, SYG Annan noted that his Personal Representative, Geir Pedersen, would discuss with the GOL the next steps to prepare for the GOL's extension of its authority to the south and the support the UN could provide to achieve this. When UNIFIL's current mandate expires on July 31, we expect that the UN Security Council will vote to extend its mandate for another six months, until January 2006. However, during the next renewal process, the Security Council may want to review UNIFIL's mandate, size, and composition in light of the GOL's efforts to extend its authority throughout the entire Lebanese territory.

We remain deeply disturbed by Syria's continued interference in Lebanese internal affairs, including through its covert intelligence presence, its campaign of intimidation and threats of violence, and, most recently, its economic blockade along the Lebanon-Syria border. This blockade has resulted in a virtual economic stranglehold on the Lebanese economy, costing Lebanon approximately \$300,000 per day, with millions lost already. Impoverished—and innocent—Lebanese farmers have borne the brunt of the losses. While in Beirut last week, Secretary Rice repeated her concerns about the seriousness of the border issue. She publicly called on Syria to end the blockade and to play the role of a good neighbor by rapidly working out a diplomatic solution with the Lebanese government.

Syria also continues its attempts to destabilize Lebanon by facilitating Iranian re-supply of Hizballah and by its support for armed Palestinian militias. We continue to work with our European and Arab allies to press the Syrian government to end its policies that are destabilizing the region—from its interference in Lebanon, to its failure to stop Syrian territory from being used by those supporting the insurgency in Iraq, to its support for Palestinian groups seeking to sabotage the peace process.

Despite these challenges in Lebanon, we are optimistic. The new government will undoubtedly face obstacles, but for the first time in almost thirty years, the Lebanese have an opportunity to take charge of their own future. We will do our best to support the people of Lebanon, and the new government, as their nation confronts these challenges and builds a new future.

Thank you. I will now take your questions.

Chairman HYDE. Thank you, Ambassador. Mr. Kunder

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE JAMES R. KUNDER, ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR, BUREAU FOR ASIA AND THE NEAR EAST, U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. KUNDER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We at USAID also very much appreciate the interest of the Committee in this important topic, and we share your enthusiasm for Ambassador Welch's promotion to Assistant Secretary.

We have worked with him long, and we think effectively, in Egypt and very much look forward to working with him across the region. The statement that I have submitted for the record goes into considerable detail, Mr. Chairman, on what the USAID program is.

So I will just encapsulate it in a nutshell for the Committee and try to emphasize the four areas, the four targets that we are trying to accomplish in Lebanon with the United States taxpayers' dollars at that \$35 million level.

First, as the Assistant Secretary has said, the American people have a long interest and connection with the Lebanese people, and we have tried to show that continued humanitarian concern.

So we have a range of programs across Lebanon, everything from working with landmine victims to rural women's cooperatives, in the most impoverished areas of Lebanon so that we show a human connection in our continued national interest in the welfare of the Lebanese people.

The second thing that we are trying to accomplish is to continue to link the most isolated, impoverished parts of Lebanon, especially in the south, both to the Lebanese mainstream, and then to the international mainstream. We reject the strict economic determinist's argument of terrorism.

Poverty does not equal terrorism. But on the other hand, we realize that in the most isolated, impoverished, unstable parts of the world, you are likely to get increased recruitment for terrorism.

So we are doing everything, from our so-called SMART Bus which brings computer technology into the most rural and isolated parts of Lebanon, to providing scholarships for students from these areas to the American University of Beirut, and other American institutions of higher education in Beirut, trying to reach out into these areas and bring them into the economic and political mainstream.

The third thing that we are trying to do is strengthen municipal government across Lebanon. In our analysis, one of the reasons that the factions exert appeal is there is a loss of confidence in effective government in Lebanon.

We are actually working with municipal authorities and municipal governments to make them more effective, and to allow them to generate revenue so that they can provide some of the projects that otherwise will be done by Hezbollah and other terrorist organizations. And this is computerization. This is basic training in citizen services, and transparency of local government to restore the Lebanese people's faith in the effectiveness of government.

And the fourth thing that we are doing is focusing our resources in the south. Approximately 54 percent of the \$35 million that the Congress has made available is directed into the southern parts of Lebanon.

And that is also to reach the most isolated rural villages and bring them into the mainstream. We also focused specifically on water projects in the south, recognizing that in that dry part of the world, conflict over the Litani and Qaraoun basins' water resources are a potential source of conflict between Lebanon and Israel.

We have done what we can to try to increase the water availability in those two basins, and reduce the potential for conflict in that area.

All of these programs that we are doing now are a prologue to the opportunities that Ambassador Welch has been describing. To some extent, we have been waiting for a long time for this very moment for the Lebanese Government to become an engaged partner in these efforts that we have been working on for the last decade.

We have not been working through the Lebanese Government. We have been working through local municipalities, through Lebanese organizations, through international NGOs, to deliver these services to the Lebanese people.

Now it is time to get the government into the picture as well. We think that the reform package, as Ambassador Welch said, has many of the right elements in it. We are working closely with his team, and with the other donors, to be prepared.

We have conducted analyses of the main problems affecting the Lebanese Government in order to fully implement 1559. One of the issues that has not come out in the testimony is the enormous debt burden faced by the Lebanese Government.

They have one of the highest debt burden to population ratios in the world. They are unlikely to extend effective government control over the entire countryside as long as they are crippled with this level of debt.

So one of the first things that we are going to have to grapple with is a program of reform, of restructuring, to try to get that debt burden off the backs of the Lebanese people. I will close by saying,

and just reiterating in direct response to the Chair's question, that we understand full well our statutory and policy responsibility, vis-a-vis, terrorist organizations. We will not be conducting any direct contact with any members of Hezbollah. Thank you, Sir.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Kunder follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE JAMES R. KUNDER, ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR, BUREAU FOR ASIA AND THE NEAR EAST, U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Chairman and other distinguished Members of the Committee; it is a pleasure to have the opportunity to appear before the Committee on International Relations to discuss USAID/Lebanon's program and our efforts to support Lebanon at this time of transition.

The Lebanese people's popular demands for democratic change have led to the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon and successful parliamentary elections. These remarkable developments present a significant opportunity for the newly established government to move forward with crucial economic and political reforms.

The United States has a strong interest in promoting a stable, independent, democratic, and economically prosperous Lebanon at peace with Israel and neighboring states. Our current assistance program in Lebanon is aimed at helping the Lebanese address the economic, political, and environmental challenges facing their country.

In accordance with U.S. policy objectives, including the promotion of democracy, education, and economic prosperity, USAID focuses on three main areas: revitalizing and expanding economic opportunities in rural areas; strengthening the foundations for good governance; and improving environmental policies and practices through community-based approaches. Our program activities target the development and revitalization of South Lebanon.

Revitalizing and Expanding Economic Opportunities

The program focuses on strengthening three sectors of the economy, namely agribusiness and light agro-industry, rural tourism and information and communications technology.

The agricultural sector in Lebanon faces major challenges related to lack of marketing and competitiveness, low prices, absence of quality control, lack of proper extension services and minimal government support to farmers. The USAID program addresses this situation through a variety of activities aimed at promoting the productivity and competitiveness of key traditional as well as new agricultural sectors in Lebanon.

Our agribusiness portfolio in South Lebanon is quite extended and covers the areas of Saida, Maghdousheh, Tyre, Hasbaya, Marjayoun and Rashaya Al Foukhar where we are working on improving the production of fruits, vegetables and flowers and promoting the Lebanese olive oil sector. We established women cooperatives for the production and processing of traditional foods in fourteen centers in South Lebanon. Through our "SMART" (Stimulating Markets and Rural Transformation) program, we provide training for women on natural food preservation techniques, processing of surplus agricultural produce and marketing techniques. Because of USAID's support, a line of jams, syrups, preserves, pickles, vinegars and traditional rural Lebanese specialties are now sold and marketed by women under the brand name "Rural Delights". USAID has also provided farmers with awareness of new agricultural techniques such as organic growing, agro-packing and processing units, and market opportunities in 48 villages.

In the area of rural tourism, we have succeeded in promoting, for the first time in Lebanon, eco-tourism and rural tourism by highlighting hidden and neglected attractions in rural areas and drawing a large number of local and foreign tourists. USAID's rural tourism portfolio in South Lebanon covers a variety of activities including community development projects, improving the infrastructure of nature reserves, rehabilitating historic sites and promotional efforts (festivals and brochures).

USAID's continuing efforts to revitalize rural communities focus on the development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) knowledge and capabilities in rural areas. Rural community websites have been developed to place villages on the map and promote economic opportunities.

Another component of the USAID program helps survivors of landmines and their families in the Southern district of Jezzine, Lebanon's most heavily-mined and casualty afflicted area, lead productive lives by providing them with income-generating

opportunities. To date, 1,000 beneficiaries including their direct dependents have improved their income as a result of the program.

The USAID program also supports Lebanon's efforts for membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO) through technical assistance.

In the area of education, we are providing funds to American educational institutions in Lebanon. USAID funding to the American University of Beirut (AUB), Lebanese American University (LAU), American Community School (ACS) and International College (IC) supports scholarships for more than 1,000 students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds. In FY 2005, that support will total \$4 million dollars.

Strengthening Foundations for Good Governance

USAID provides funding to empower and strengthen Lebanese local government, Parliament, oversight agencies and civil society. The program improves the delivery of governmental services to citizens and municipalities, thereby enhancing the democratic nature of Lebanon's overall political system. By enhancing administrative and financial capabilities, expanding social services, encouraging public participation, and increasing accountability, transparency, and effectiveness, our program provides an essential counterweight to extremist elements that exploit the public's mistrust of government and dissatisfaction from lack of services, particularly in rural areas.

USAID's municipal reform program is working with municipalities to strengthen their capacity for transparent budgeting and improved service delivery. The nationwide program is credited with successfully rebuilding essential local government foundations, providing modern management systems, e-government procedures and the training necessary to improve the quality of governance. Through the successful implementation of these new systems, tax revenues have risen by almost 50 percent.

We are providing technical assistance and training to the Lebanese Parliament to work more effectively with municipalities. Although the Lebanese Parliament has been advocating more authority for local government, a major challenge has been to sensitize Parliament to the needs of local government in support of a modern, progressive legal framework that addresses the obstacles to municipal effectiveness. Recommendations were developed in that respect to include the decentralization law, the municipal law, and the electoral law.

In addition to the work on strengthening democratic practices at the municipal level, the program promotes democracy building by working with local advocacy groups to promote transparent and democratic practices at the grassroots civil society and public sector level. The USAID-funded Transparency and Accountability Grants (TAG) program provides small grants of up to \$25,000 to local organizations seeking reform by empowering them to play a constructive role in advocating for change and enhancing transparency, accountability, and good governance.

To support the dramatic political changes taking place in Lebanon in 2005, USAID rapidly reprogrammed \$1 million to support the recent parliamentary elections. Activities included technical assistance, election monitoring, voter education, and polling.

Improving Environmental Policies and Practices

USAID's program focuses on increasing the use of appropriate environmental management practices, supporting waste management programs in rural Lebanon, improving participatory approaches in water management and increasing the effectiveness of water authorities, laws and policies.

In addition, special activities are being implemented to address the serious water pollution problem in the Litani River Basin due to unregulated solid and liquid domestic and industrial waste disposal practices that are threatening public health. USAID is working at two levels with the objective of improving water management practices and alleviating pollution. Through the Litani Basin Management Services project, USAID is identifying water quality management options and scenarios for the upper Litani River basin and Lake Qaraoun and developing an environmental management plan for the implementation of such options by assisting stakeholders in selecting optimum scenarios for water quality management and water pollution remediation.

In parallel, through the Small Village Wastewater Treatment Plants project, we are providing a comprehensive solution to mitigate water quality degradation from uncontrolled discharge of untreated domestic wastewater in the upper Litani River basin. The project has identified and selected 14 candidate municipalities for design and construction of new wastewater treatment facilities. Six sub-regional treatment plants will cover the municipalities.

USAID's water policy program is working on sensitive policy and financial issues related to public private partnerships, water utility management and tariff pricing at both national and local levels with the first pilot activity implemented in partnership with the South Lebanon Water and Wastewater Establishment (SLWWE). The Water Establishment suffers from a high rate of water loss, a high rate of illegal/unregistered connections, understaffing and insufficient revenues to cover expenses. USAID is providing technical, institutional and capacity building support to the SLWWE.

Support to the New Government

Currently, the USG does not have a bilateral agreement with the Government of Lebanon. Most of our assistance to Lebanon is channeled through U.S. non-governmental organizations, local non-governmental organizations, American educational institutions, and private firms through grants, cooperative agreements and contracts. This situation has proven to be advantageous in terms of flexibility, innovation, and results.

USAID is prepared to respond to political and economic openings and support the new government's efforts for reform. We have developed a framework to expand our assistance to support Lebanese economic reform, expand Lebanon's trade capacity, advance Lebanese WTO accession, and foster enhanced bilateral trade and investment ties. In the area of democracy, we would support the development of a new election law and work in the areas of rule of law and anticorruption. In the water sector, we would expand ongoing sustainable waste management programs.

These are encouraging times for Lebanon; we look forward to working with the international community to support the new government's reform agenda.

Chairman HYDE. Thank you. We will now entertain questions. Mr. Lantos.

Mr. LANTOS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank our witnesses. Let me state at the outside, Secretary Welch, that I was very much impressed by your testimony, and with the arrival of Secretary Rice at the Department of State, we have seen a sea change in both the direction and rationality of our policy toward this region.

I want to commend you, first of all, for a statement which is in direct contradiction of a letter written to every Member of Congress by our previous Secretary of State concerning an initiative that I took in the last Congress.

You may recall that I called for the Lebanese army to deploy along the full length of Lebanon's borders. And you say, and I quote you: "The Lebanese armed forces should deploy throughout the country, and in particular to the south, as called for in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559."

Now, I applaud this statement, because this statement should have been made by a previous Secretary of State, and I am delighted that it is being made on behalf of our current Secretary of State.

Secondly, I strongly commend you for your realism with respect to the continued role of Syria, which is a singularly negative role, vis-a-vis, Lebanon. You state, and I quote you: "We remain deeply disturbed by Syria's continued interference in Lebanese internal affairs, including through its covert intelligence presence, its campaign of intimidation and threats of violence, and most recently its economic blockade along the Lebanon-Syria border."

I think this states it perfectly. I think that Assad in Damascus must understand that the withdrawal of the uniformed Syrian military is step number one. Step number two is to stop controlling Lebanon by a variety of nefarious means and intimidate those Lebanese who want to recreate an open and free democratic society.

Now, I find it profoundly disturbing that in a statement today the new prime minister of Lebanon says that the government considers the resistance, meaning Hezbollah terrorism, a natural and honest expression of the Lebanese people's national rights to liberate their land and to defend their honor against Israeli aggression and threats.

I am unaware of any Israeli aggression and threats to Lebanon as we sit here. It is appalling that the new prime minister should perpetuate this myth that there is aggression against Lebanon today from external sources other than Syria.

And I would like to ask you to comment on the Lebanese prime minister's statement, and I would like to ask if I may, Mr. Secretary, to comment on his failure to deal with the most important issue facing Lebanon, namely the disarming of a terrorist organization within its borders.

Ambassador WELCH. Thank you, Congressman Lantos. We are more than realistic, Sir, on Syria. As I mentioned, we are disappointed in what we see as their performance. And Lebanon is one of the issues, but it is not the only one of concern.

There is the Syrian relationship to extremist Palestinian groups that are headquartered in Damascus, and despite the rigor of Syrian control over the Lebanese border, there is a dismaying lack of rigor of Syria's control of its border with Iraq, which also presents certain other problems to the United States.

With respect to the extension of Lebanese sovereignty over all of its territory, as you know, Sir, and you know UN resolutions very well, this is a feature of all such resolutions. It is a right afforded to governments representing their people, that they should be sovereign over their territory, and it is an expectation of the international community that that would be discharged by those governments.

Hence, I think it is important for us to record that position, because that gets at this issue of what are the rights here. We don't consider resistance a right in this context. There is no part of Lebanese soil that is occupied by Israel. I don't know what they would be resisting.

With respect to the statement of the prime minister, it is a statement of government. It is a draft now being presented and debated in the Lebanese political context. It includes many lengthy elements.

We have expressed our views in public and in meetings there in Beirut with the government's platform. There are some elements that we have differences with, and some with which we would contest vigorously. And some that we find promising and we would like to lend support to. If I could somewhat briefly state what those are. We think that this government should be forthright in dealing with the requests and obligations put in front of it by the international community, particularly those embodied in 1559, which does include disarmament of all militias. That would mean Hezbollah and the Palestinian armed groups still present there.

We think that the statements on reform in that platform are quite promising. Ambitious? Yes, but they should, if carried out, have a very meaningful impact on the lives of Lebanese.

At the end of the day though, this is a government elected by the people, and they have to satisfy the requirements of the people, that is an important new standard that we have seen expressed more and more throughout the region and thus important to support in a Lebanese context also. Thank you.

Chairman HYDE. Ms. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. Following up on those very questions, I wanted in my statement to ask you to elaborate on the reasoning behind the international community's push for the recent elections before all aspects of Security Council Resolution 1559 were implemented.

Also, if you could please comment on Secretary Rice's statement in Lebanon this past week, that she believes that the United States can support both through international organizations and through direct support the economic and political reforms that would be undertaken.

Was she referring to civil society support, or is the United States proposing to send direct assistance to the Lebanese Government? As you know, I introduced the Lebanon and Syria Liberation Act, which focuses on building and strengthening a Lebanese independent civil society by providing assistance to such eligible groups and we believe that it is not wise to aid the Lebanese Government that was elected under a Syrian-inspired law, and which has Hezbollah as a full participant before all aspects of UN Security Council Resolution 1559 are implemented.

Finally, if we decide to do so, how will future direct assistance to Lebanon be provided to ensure that members of terrorist organizations in the government do not benefit from United States aid and that the State Department conforms with all applicable laws and regulations?

And will the Administration consider passing a Security Council resolution initiating a transparent, internationally-monitored process of arms decommissioning by the militias in keeping with 1559? A lot of questions. Thank you.

Ambassador WELCH. Well, I will take a stab at each of those. The murder of Rafik Hariri opened a groundswell of public outrage in Lebanon, directed principally at Syria.

But that was in a sense a negative direction. That is, an outcry saying something that they did not like. But there was something else that they said that they did like, and that was to run their affairs themselves, to have a handle on their own future.

Since the Parliamentary elections were intended in any event in Lebanon, and given the history of the awkward extension of the tenure of the current President of Lebanon, we, the United States, felt that it was enormously important for us to signal our support for the Lebanese people, who came out in great numbers, and that we were behind them in their demand for change, and in their demand to have an election that would show that change.

After all, when you get a million people on the streets of Beirut, I think that represents nearly a quarter of their population. That is a dramatically large number. I don't know what the figure that would be comparable here in the United States would be, but it would be a lot larger than the million person march.

This is a unique event in the region, and I think, like all events, it has some elements that are positive, and some elements that are not so positive. And I think the Lebanese people need to feel that the international community is there to support them.

And how do you do that, Congresswoman? There is a number of ways to do it. Mr. Kunder has expressed how we are trying to use our current aid programs. I mentioned in my opening statement some extraordinary assistance afforded by Congress to support democratization, which we took advantage of in this context.

And, yes, civil society would be an important target of our efforts. We were able to do some things quite quickly during the election process to be supportive of that process. The election law, that is a matter for the Lebanese people to decide.

I noticed that in the new platform that they are considering taking a look at issues like that. I think that represents some indication of the public dissatisfaction there with the rules that were in place, but those are the rules that they used, and I think the election was reasonably free.

And certainly that is the way that the UN and the European Union observers found it. We are not going to deal with any members of terrorist organizations in the Government of Lebanon, or anybody else in any other government who is on the FTO list, the Foreign Terrorist Organizations list.

That is a matter of U.S. law. We cannot and will not have a relationship with those people or with those entities.

With respect to how you disarm organizations or militias, I mean, that is something that the Lebanese people are going to have to come to grips with. They have only begun to do so.

As I think one other Member indicated, there is an understanding that that may take some time, and we hope it is not a long time. And the fact that it may take some time does not dissuade the Government of Lebanon, and the people of Lebanon, from facing up to this very significant challenge.

There are still armed groups in Lebanon who operate outside the authority of the existing government, and for most responsible governments around the world, a monopoly on the exercise of force is a feature of government, and we expect to see that in the case of the Lebanese Government as well. Thank you.

Chairman HYDE. Mr. Ackerman of New York.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. First, for Administrator Kunder, during my trip last month to Lebanon, just south of Beirut, I had the opportunity to visit a USAID project, which was absolutely magnificent. It was an agricultural project.

But during the presentation that they made, they took out a rather large map, and on the map it had Lebanon and its neighbors. And one of its neighbors was Palestine. There was no Israel, and Palestine was all of the area that is Israel, as well as the West Bank and Gaza.

I pointed this out and they were very apologetic. They said that was a map that they were given. I am sure that map was not just created specifically for this site. Do you think that we could replace all the USAID project maps that deny the existence of Israel?

Mr. KUNDER. Well, we are very familiar with this appalling incident, and as you described, what happened was when you were

there, they were looking quickly for a map, and they grabbed a map that was available, and it had this ridiculous absence of Israel on the map, and so we have reiterated our instructions to our team out there.

Mr. ACKERMAN. This was not a map that they pulled out of the glove compartment. This was fully mounted for a presentation, and which I am sure that they have done many, many times.

Mr. KUNDER. As you know, Sir, there are maps that are produced in the Middle East that are done in that way. So we have reiterated our instructions to our team out there that those kind of maps should not be used in any way in connection with a U.S. Government project.

Mr. ACKERMAN. It is a broader question, and instead of just the team there, if the map is being procured by USAID and provided at any of the sites that USAID does business, could we get an accounting of that and just have all those maps replaced by appropriate maps reflecting U.S. policy?

Mr. KUNDER. Yes, Sir, absolutely. We are not procuring any maps that do not show the realistic picture of the nation states of the Middle East, including Israel. But in that case where we have grabbed one off the shelf as it were, we understand that this was just an appalling incident, and we apologize for it.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Okay. Thank you. I just wanted to make sure that it is not a broader problem.

Mr. KUNDER. It is certainly not our policy, no, Sir.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Secretary, the State Department placed Hezbollah's TV station, al-Manar, on the terrorist exclusion list. Why hasn't it been placed on the more restrictive designated terrorist group list, as is Hezbollah; and why isn't there any distinction made at all between Hezbollah and their TV station, al-Manar, since the latter is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the former?

Ambassador WELCH. I don't know the answer to that question, Congressman Ackerman. I will get an answer for you.

Mr. ACKERMAN. That is the best answer that I have heard at any hearing and I appreciate it.

[The information referred to follows:]

WRITTEN RESPONSE RECEIVED FROM THE HONORABLE C. DAVID WELCH TO QUESTION ASKED DURING THE HEARING BY THE HONORABLE GARY L. ACKERMAN

Al-Manar was placed on the terrorist exclusion list (TEL) in December 2004. We continue to consider all other possibilities for designation of al-Manar.

Ambassador WELCH. Well, better an honest one than an incomplete or incorrect one.

Mr. ACKERMAN. We have heard those before and this is refreshing, and I thank you. But if I could go back to Administrator Kunder for a minute, and I thank you for the great work that you and USAID do. Could you tell us briefly what roles non-state actors such as Hezbollah play in the social services and other developmental assistance to the Lebanese population?

And how would you assess the quality of the service that they provide? Do Hezbollah projects interfere with USAID's work? Does the USAID see itself in competition with Hezbollah, and are USAID projects having any effect on the Lebanese attitude toward the United States and toward American values?

Mr. KUNDER. Let me take the last one first. We think indisputably that a range of our projects such as the scholarship programs to the American institutions of learning in Beirut reach out into the most impoverished parts of the countryside, and have an impact on attitudes.

We think that our projects to bring women into the mainstream in women's cooperatives, and microenterprise programs, have a tremendous impact on attitudes.

And we think that most directly that we have had for some years a small grants program to civil society organizations across Lebanon, and obviously many of those organizations that we have been providing technical assistance to those that participated in the Cedar Revolution.

So we think at that level that there is no question that our programs are targeted at the most isolated spots, and that these civil society organizations change attitudes. Directly in southern Lebanon, we are working in more than 200 villages. There are about 230 villages where we are not working because they are Hezbollah-dominated.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I appreciate that, but before the clock is rung, are you in competition with Hezbollah? How do you assess what they are doing, and how were they received in the projects that Hezbollah is providing?

Mr. KUNDER. We are in competition with Hezbollah, yes, Sir.

Mr. ACKERMAN. And how would you assess the race for the hearts and minds of the Lebanese people?

Mr. KUNDER. I think that our resources, the U.S. taxpayers' dollars, are better and more effectively spent than their resources. This organization provides a range of social services in the communities in which they have control.

And there are people who are appreciative of getting food and medical care from those organizations because they are desperately poor. I believe that our programs are more effective, more widespread, and more sustainable than theirs. I think we are a better development organization than Hezbollah by a thousand percent.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Yes, I am on our team.

Chairman HYDE. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. ACKERMAN. But the question really is how was it viewed by the Lebanese people? Are they doing a better job than we are? They are certainly spending a lot more money.

Mr. KUNDER. And in those villages—

Mr. ACKERMAN. We are talking about ratings. I am not talking about—

Mr. KUNDER. Yes, in those 200 villages that we are working, we are welcomed with open arms, and there is some pressure from the Hezbollah folks in the region to not have us in there, and these are folks who are susceptible to some pressure because of the armed nature of Hezbollah, and we are welcomed in those communities. So I take that as people voting with their feet in southern Lebanon.

Chairman HYDE. Mr. Chabot.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ambassador Welch, you have already touched on this topic, but let me ask it again because I think it is very important, and I would like to get as much as we can on this.

Does the Lebanese army currently have the capacity to disarm Hezbollah and secure its borders, and what are the impediments that it faces toward disarming?

Ambassador WELCH. There are two significant security organizations in Lebanon; the Lebanese armed forces, its army, and the internal security forces, which is sort of a national police force. Both of those organizations represent the backbone of the security capability of the Government of Lebanon.

Each has their own problems. They are undermined by years of civil war, by a continuing Syrian military presence until very recently, and by inadequate support from the government.

Both organizations are in need of some substantial rehabilitation. One thing that we are looking at is how we can participate in doing that, and I would say it is also not just a task for the United States. There are other countries that have military relationships with Lebanon, or relationships with the security organizations, including some Arab countries.

In our judgment, this needs to be an international effort and not just exclusively an American effort. But it is a critical piece of the puzzle. If you look at the three elements of reform that the government faces, economic is perhaps the most challenging because as Jim mentioned, the heavy debt burden under which this society now labors.

And political, where there are issues in front of the Lebanese people about how they will organize themselves in the future. But also security. Your question about how quickly can they do it, I think, is very, very important, but also hard to answer, Congressman.

In some respects, capabilities are comprised of both ability and will, and I think they are lacking on ability, but not lacking to such a degree that they couldn't exercise it more thoroughly throughout the country.

Will. Will is another question, Sir. I think in certain areas of Lebanon the assertiveness of some there, such as Hezbollah in certain areas of the south, is really quite strong and has inhibited the government from exercising a greater role.

As it strengthens itself though, it is going to have to meet that challenge, and I think one element of the international support that we will be devoting a lot of the attention to is, how do we provide it in the security area?

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you. You referred to the blockade of Lebanon by Syria. Could you elaborate a bit on that and what their justification or rationalization for doing that is, and what forms as a practical matter does the blockade take?

Ambassador WELCH. I like your word "rationalization," Sir. The justification is poor. They believe, or Syria has asserted a security justification for closing its border to economic traffic. As a result, there is a backlog of trucks on both sides.

Ironically, there is economic damage to Syria as well from this happening. As you know, Lebanon has only two neighbors: Israel, with which it has no relationship; and Syria, which it should have a much better relationship.

And it needs that pipeline to its Arab export markets. This is now a political issue between the new Governments of Lebanon

and Syria, and our understanding is that they intend to pursue it directly and immediately once they are voted into office, which should be in the coming several days.

The view of the United States is that it is a good thing for Lebanon and Syria to have decent ties as neighboring countries should, and we do not understand why Syria would choose to pressure Lebanon in this way.

And by the way, it is not the only way in which they are doing so. But it is the more graphic and immediate way. And it is very damaging to Lebanon and also to Syria. People in Lebanon speak out about it more readily though.

Mr. CHABOT. I yield back the balance of my time.

Chairman HYDE. Mr. Berman.

Mr. BERMAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to just focus for a moment on Iran's role in Lebanon. I take it that it is the United States position, is it the UN position that any Iranian presence in Lebanon violates the terms of the Security Council Resolution 1559?

Is an Iranian presence in Lebanon—what kind of support and what kind of materials are supplied to Hezbollah forces in southern Lebanon by Iran, and was there a section—there were reports that a section dealing with a continuing Iranian presence in Lebanon that was included in the draft of a May verification report, and presumably on 1559, was excised at the urging of the Iranians. Is that true?

Ambassador WELCH. My recollection, Congressman, and I will check it, but I am reasonably confident that I am correct in this, is that Iran does have a diplomatic presence.

[The information referred to follows:]

WRITTEN RESPONSE RECEIVED FROM THE HONORABLE C. DAVID WELCH TO QUESTION ASKED DURING THE HEARING BY THE HONORABLE HOWARD L. BERMAN

There is an Iranian Embassy and ambassador in Beirut. The Ambassador is Massoud Idrissi.

Mr. BERMAN. Yes, apart from that.

Ambassador WELCH. Well, that is not an unimportant fact, Sir, because Syria does not. It is quite curious that after all of these years of such close relations that Syria does not even have an Embassy in Beirut.

Mr. BERMAN. Well, it is part of greater Syria. Why would it?

Ambassador WELCH. It is just more than curious, I suppose. We do have a concern about other elements of an Iranian presence in Lebanon, and I don't know if this is the right format in which to go into that, but we have some worries, and we have had them before, and we continue to have them, that the Iranians maintain personnel in association with Hezbollah inside of Lebanon.

As to your question about whether that was reflected in a UN report and excised by—

Mr. BERMAN. Well, just on that first point. There have been reports about sort of cadres of Iranian revolutionary guard working with training and helping to supply Hezbollah forces. Is that what you are speaking of?

Ambassador WELCH. Yes, that is what I am speaking about. Whether there was something in the UN report, Sir, and that was excised at the behest of someone, I honestly don't know.

Having worked on UN matters in the past, I know that governments quite frequently do try and influence the content of reports, and I can't say if they were successful in this regard.

But our judgment, quite apart from the information supplied to us in that report, is that there continues to be an Iranian presence, including an association with Hezbollah, inside of Lebanon.

Mr. BERMAN. Is this something that you would prefer not to elaborate on in an open hearing, or—

Ambassador WELCH. Well, Sir, as I said, we would rely for this judgment not on a UN report, but on our own sources. I think that you may have touched on this, but could you do it again, but the existing Syrian presence now in Lebanon, and their efforts to exert political influence in Lebanon.

In terms of presence, we believe that there is a continuing covert Syrian presence there. It is a little—it is probably going to be very hard to specify and then root out with complete certainty all elements of such a presence. But let me give you an example of an area of concern.

There are armed Palestinian camps in Lebanon, which should not be there, and I would see those as a natural place for a continuing Syrian presence since at least one of those groups is actually headquartered in Damascus as well.

Elsewhere in Lebanon, we believe that it is very, very likely, and we have some information to suggest that this is the case, that there is indeed a continuing Syrian presence. Their formed military forces, and their large intelligence headquarters, and those things with an address on them, have moved out.

But that does not relieve us of all of our concerns. Then the broader question that you asked, Mr. Berman, is I think perhaps at least as important, and that is are they attempting to continue to exercise influence. The answer to that is a very straightforward yes.

You see it on the border itself with this blockade, and we saw it during the election, in terms of their interaction with some people who were running for election. We see it in how they communicate with the political establishment in Lebanon, and that occurs on a daily basis.

Now, it will be one thing for the United States to worry about this, but when we come before you and we testify about this subject, we are also trying to represent what we hear from the Lebanese themselves, and I think that they are the best in expressing their concerns.

There is just no question about it. If you visit Lebanon today, almost every Lebanese that you meet with will talk to you about the continuing influence of Syria, and it is just a matter of designation as to whether they regard that as benign or dangerous. Most fall in the latter end of the spectrum.

Chairman HYDE. Mr. Issa.

Mr. ISSA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ambassador, can you contrast the real possibilities of Lebanon sending its military down to

its southern border while Syria was still there, and what would be possible today?

And reiterating the question in a different form, looking back, would you say that it was unrealistic to expect that President Lahoud or anybody, including now deceased, assassinated, Rafik Harifi, could have done that without huge consequences as long as Syria had a foothold that it once had?

And then contrast if that was 100 percent impossible without widespread loss of life where we are today. Is it 50 percent, or 40 percent, or 10 percent? You can use a different matrix, but that would be my first question.

Ambassador WELCH. Congressman, I think we all have a new level of respect for Lebanese sovereignty. Before the withdrawal of Syria, Lebanese sovereignty was fundamentally compromised.

Now that the Syrian military forces and large visible intelligence elements are out of Lebanon, now that they have had a reasonable free election, and they are forming a new government with a reform platform, we believe that it is time to give full expression to what sovereignty would mean for that country.

An important part of that is the extension of the rule of law through the established security organizations of the government over all of the country. That is what every country expects of its government, and this is an expectation of the Lebanese and of the international community who want to support them.

Is that process of deployment easier now that Syria has moved out? I would think so. But as I said in response to Mr. Chabot's question, it is a question of capability and will, and to some extent the capability needs to be strengthened, and we need to continue to encourage the determination on the part of the Lebanese Government to do that.

I think they have to dialogue with their people also to enable that process. I am not saying that this is going to be easy for them, and that they could just order the policemen down there around the neighborhood all that easily.

We recognize that there are some political challenges there, and that they have to have a process that addresses that. But they should have that process and we would hope that it would proceed reasonably expeditiously.

Mr. ISSA. And just sort of a two-part follow-up question. One, which I think is probably obvious, but which needs to be said as many times as possible, but our continued strong pressure on Syria from here and from our allies around the world has to be part of that process if we are to expect them to come to the south.

And, two, in increasing the ability, how would you characterize—and you may want to follow up after more reflection, but how would you characterize how we get from here to there? And I will just give you a hypothetical. It, today, is nearly August and we go out of business about a year from now in this particular Congress, in the next year, in the time of our Chairman, what would it take to bring that military up to speed?

We have some existing programs, as I am sure you know better than any of us. Egypt has expressed a willingness to do any type of police or actual military training that we ask them to do for any forces in support of democracy.

Is it realistic, assuming that we provided you the money, that we could dramatically improve their capability in that 1 year? And because I know my time is going to run out, I think the same question, and a different one to Mr. Kunder, would be that if we went from \$35 million or so to \$350 million, would we dramatically increase—and maybe not in a year, but would we dramatically increase our ability to displace Hezbollah in the hearts and minds of the Lebanese? Sort of two different questions for each of you. Thank you.

Ambassador WELCH. Thank you, Congressman. First, we are gathered here today to discuss of course Lebanon, and I try to make a presentation that advocates in favor of the new Lebanon.

But you are absolutely right. You can't talk about Lebanon unfortunately without also talking about Syria. And I don't think I could be any more clearer than the President and the Secretary have been in terms of our concern about Syrian behavior.

We repeat it constantly to anybody who will listen to us in the international community, and in the Arab world. We have very serious concerns about continuing Syrian assertion of influence over Lebanon.

We also have a concern about their behavior with extremist Palestinian organizations headquartered in Damascus, including ones that are operating in the Palestinian territories and against Israel.

And we are also worried about the border with Iraq, and every time we pick up the newspaper, we see that Iraqi civilians are dying at the hands of terrorists, many of whom have infiltrated through Syria into Iraq. And not to mention attacks against our own troops and those of other coalition partners.

Yes, pressure on Syria is essential. But what to do to support Lebanon, and it is good to look to that future. Lebanon is not a small aid program for us any longer, but it does not have a very significant military component, Sir.

We are going to organize an assessment of the Lebanese security forces if we are invited by the Lebanese Government to do so. I have some expectation that we will be. On the basis of that assessment, which will be done by people more qualified than I am, we may well come back to ask for some support.

As you know, in the past, we have had some limitations on providing military support to the Lebanese Government, but there is a different environment now and a different context, and we would look at that.

We think that the Egyptian offer of training and other support is an excellent one, and it is good that some of their moderate Arab friends are stepping forward in the Lebanese context, and in other context, to offer such assistance.

It is up to the Lebanese Government if it wants to avail itself of that, but we have no objection. With respect to economic assistance, I will let Jim Kunder answer that. But let me say that we are grateful for what is already on offer.

Lebanon is not a large country, and so I wouldn't mean to say that \$35 million is an insignificant amount. It is actually fairly significant. But we probably could do with more. We are going to organize this international appraisal of what Lebanon's economic

needs are. We believe they will be considerable, and in that context, we may well be back to you for further requests.

Mr. ISSA. Do you have anything to add to that?

Mr. KUNDER. Just very briefly. I am glad that you asked the question, Congressman, because I wanted to make it clear that it is not U.S. influence versus Hezbollah influence. Just as the Ambassador said, this is a new day for Lebanon.

It is the Lebanese vision of their own future that counts in southern Lebanon, and as I mentioned earlier, we have been able to work quite successfully through these community organizations, NGOs, and so forth. And the interesting component has been the Lebanese Government extending its control, not just militarily, but in every way in southern Lebanon.

If we had—and let me just go through the steps, and it is not just a question of throwing more money on the table right now. We do have to assess, as David said, this reform package that the prime minister has put forward.

We have to meet with our other donor organizations, because it shouldn't be just the U.S. taxpayers picking up the whole bill. There are other significant resources, from the World Bank, the United Nations, and other major donors that could go in.

But at the end of the day after we go through that process, we will want to engage the government, and I think that Ms. Ros-Lehtinen was expressing some concern about maybe cash transfers. That is not what we are talking about.

We are talking about lessons that we have learned elsewhere in the world in areas like limiting corruption, and making the instruments of the Lebanese Government; more oversight, more transparency, and working with the Parliament to make sure it is effective.

If we get to that stage, and we determine that as an Administration that we need more resources, we may want to talk to you about that, and at that point I would say, sure, more resources will enable us to help the Lebanese Government engage in the southern part of the country, yes, Sir.

Chairman HYDE. Ms. Watson.

Ms. WATSON. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, and I want to thank the Ambassador and Mr. Kunder for coming here and spending this time, and helping us understand how Lebanon is progressing.

When it comes to Hezbollah and USAID, Mr. Kunder, do you see them delivering the services that we have traditionally delivered under USAID? Or are we in competition with them, and going to what are our values as they translate to helping build a new government sovereignty in Lebanon, and are they making—and I am talking about Hezbollah, but are they making an impact?

And what are we doing to impact on Lebanon to show that we are indeed interested in their success and we come to assist through USAID? Can you address that?

Mr. KUNDER. Congresswoman, I am glad that you used the term values. In direct response to Mr. Ackerman's question earlier, I said, yes, to some extent we are competing, but I think I would rather express it in this positive way.

I mean, there is a battle for ideas, for values, going on. And both the Lebanese Government and the United States Government are signatories to the National Convention on Human Rights. We believe in certain things.

We believe that everyone should have access to the political process, and we believe that women should have rights and so forth. And it is those ideas that we are trying to promote in southern Lebanon.

We have women's cooperatives so that women can at their own choice participate with other women in public service, or in the economy, the broader Lebanese economy. And these are the values that we are trying to promote.

We are trying to support civil organizations so that they can lobby the Lebanese Government for the things that they consider important, and can participate in the legislative and electoral processes.

So these are the ideas that we are trying to promote. The mechanisms that we use are a range of support to community organizations, to cooperatives. As I mentioned earlier, we have a so-called SMART Bus. It is a school bus. We are working in cooperation with the Microsoft Corporation and the American NGO Mercy Corps.

We literally drive this bus loaded with the latest computer gear into these isolated, hard scrabble villages in southern Lebanon, where people have not seen an Internet cafe, so that they can have some idea of how the Internet can be an empowering tool and link them to the outside world.

So it is a battle of values, and we are participating. The Hezbollah, and Truth in Advertising, delivers a certain range of social services in the communities in which they are active.

We also provide, as I mentioned earlier, 54 percent of the money that Congress has made available is directed into southern Lebanon, and so we believe that we are fully engaged there as well.

And I believe, as the recent Cedar Revolution has indicated, that the trend is in our direction across Lebanon as a whole.

Ms. WATSON. Hezbollah and other groups such as that prey on people's idealologies and attitudes. Can you see—and I think you just mentioned it—progress in the attitudes changing toward the United States? Now, we are in some ways in competition with them in the region.

They have operated in the region and they have a history in the region, and here we are, and USAID spreads good works anywhere they are. That is what they do, is give aid. Are we making a breakthrough? Are we having the kind of positive impact? I think you indicated it, but can you expand on that, please?

Mr. KUNDER. Yes, Ma'am. We have not done any recent public opinion polling, if you will, in southern Lebanon. But what I mentioned earlier was that I think that in our analysis the most effective measurement that we have is that in the approximately 200 villages in which we have United States foreign assistance programs of some kind or another in southern Lebanon, we are welcomed in those areas.

There is some pressure from other parties to push us out, and we have gotten strong community support. We have not been

pushed out of those villages. We have not received a lot of pressure or threats in those areas.

So I had characterized it earlier as the Lebanese voting with their feet. So, we are welcomed in those communities, and I take that as a strong indication of community support for the kinds of things that we are doing.

Ms. WATSON. I think that my time is probably almost up, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman HYDE. It is. Thank you. I want to thank this panel. We have another panel that we want to hear from, but you have been very helpful and very instructive, and very forthcoming, and I would like to invite the Members of our Committee to submit questions in writing if that will be acceptable to our witnesses and respond.

Ambassador WELCH. We would be delighted to answer any questions that are submitted to us in writing. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for affording us the opportunity to come before you today.

One of the last testimonies that I gave some years ago to this Committee on the subject of Lebanon, we were talking about the passport restrictions on American citizens traveling there. We certainly are in an entirely different day now. Thank you very much, Sir.

Chairman HYDE. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Kunder. Our second panel is now coming forward. Ms. Rima Merhi is the Group Coordinator of the Inter-University Project Team. She represents over 50 students from the American University of Beirut.

Ms. MERHI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Committee for giving me the opportunity to testify here today.

Chairman HYDE. Would you mind withholding. I want to fully introduce you. If you will just wait a second.

Ms. Merhi, as I say, represents over 50 students from the American University in Beirut, the Lebanese American University and St. Joseph's University. The inter-university team drafted a comprehensive reform program, entitled, "A United Voice," which is funded by the European Commission, and published by Beirut's *Daily Star*. This youth action plan for Lebanon is an inspiring testament to the ability of Lebanon's youth who have come together in a collaborative effort, crossing all sectarian and political divides to define a set of national priorities that will contribute to Lebanon's long term stability. Ms. Merhi holds two Master's degrees from the American University in Beirut, and will soon be traveling to Oxford to further develop the work of the inter-university team. She will be participating in this hearing via live video conference from Beirut, Lebanon.

Dr. Paul Salem is one of Lebanon's leading writers and political analysts. He is a founding member of both the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies and the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections. Dr. Salem is a former lecturer at the American University in Beirut, and has authored several books on politics in the Arab world. He recently ran for Parliament as a Greek Orthodox candidate in North Lebanon. He holds a Ph.D. in Government and Political Science from Harvard University.

Dr. Marius Deeb is currently a professor at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies. He has published

many books and articles, including a book entitled, *Syria's Terrorist War on Lebanon and the Peace Process, 1974 to 2001*. Dr. Deeb studied at the American University of Beirut and holds a Ph.D. in Politics from Oxford University.

We now will focus our attention on the video monitors to hear Ms. Merhi's testimony from Beirut, Lebanon. Ms. Merhi, would you proceed with a 5-minute summary of your full testimony, which will be made a part of the record? Ms. Merhi.

**STATEMENT OF MS. RIMA MERHI, GROUP COORDINATOR,
INTER-UNIVERSITY PROJECT**

Ms. MERHI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and once again, Members of the Committee, for giving me the opportunity to testify here today. An initiative of the Delegation of the European Commission (EC) in Lebanon, the *Youth Action Plan*, was produced and written by students from the American University of Beirut, University of St. Joseph, and the Lebanese University, and not the Lebanese American University.

The EC encouraged us to participate in this project in the wake of the assassination of our late Premier Hariri as a vivid attestation of our commitment to national solidarity and determination to advance national reforms.

This is both a happy and a sad day for Lebanese youth. Happy, because I have just returned from Berlin, where Germany was the first European country to give Lebanese youth the opportunity to present their aspirations for a better Lebanon. And today also due to the American Government interest in Lebanese youth.

And sad because unfortunately the Lebanese Government has failed. We have failed to gain the attention and recognition of the Lebanese Government. We have asked the government to allow us to present our ideas in Parliament with extensive media coverage, but to no avail.

We sincerely thank the American Government for taking an interest in Lebanese youth, and without further adieu, I would like to focus on our priorities, national priorities, in terms of political, economic, and social reforms.

In the political arena, first and foremost, Lebanese youth refuse to compromise on national sovereignty. Syria is far from being out of Lebanon in practical terms. They continue to hold the country hostage, not only by closing the borders to Lebanese goods and arresting fishermen, but also by assassinating prominent writers, and terrorizing the country with mysterious explosions.

The Syrians clearly continue to have their agents within the Lebanese security apparatus. We call on the international community to conduct a persistent and transparent international investigation to discover the truth of February 14.

Lebanese youth seek justice. With no accountability, our future in Lebanon remains grim. We clearly need to develop a more democratic secular and representative system of governance. We must develop our electoral laws. This was already mentioned in the hearing today.

I would like to add to that that we need to have respect for our Constitution and a system of checks and balances that controls the

power of the President. A staunch Syrian supporter, Emile Lahoud, modified the Constitution to extend his term in office.

On 1559, I have several remarks. First, I would like to address this to Congressman Lantos. You have mentioned, Sir, in your testimony, or in your remarks, that you believe it is naive on the part of the Lebanese to hope that by allowing Hezbollah into our political system that they would drop down their weapons.

On that we would like to make and state very simple facts. With 1½ million Shiites in Lebanon, mostly loyal to Nasrallah, and bearing into consideration that Hezbollah has won 14 seats in our government, it is very hard to sell Hezbollah as a terrorist organization in Beirut.

And, yes, it might not work. It might be naive to expect them to drop their weapons, but we are willing to take that risk because the risk of alienating 1½ million Shiites in Beirut will end up in chaos, and that we are not willing to take.

I believe the Honorable Hyde mentioned something about our will to forego security and stability for the sake of reform, and there is a limit to that because I think that after so many years of war, and the run-in's and explosions that have taken place in the last 6 months, the Lebanese have had enough.

There is a limit to how much and the extent to which we can forego our security and stability in the short run, and I would like to add that it was Ambassador Welch, I believe, who mentioned something about Hezbollah is inhibiting the Lebanese State.

To that I would like to state that Hezbollah is not inhibiting the Lebanese State. Rather, Hezbollah has taken the place, and is filling the vacuum, of a largely incompetent state that fails to reach out to the suburbs of Lebanon, and to these largely underprivileged Shiite communities.

Lebanese youth want more women to be given the opportunity to pursue a career in politics. We call for a temporary and obligatory quota arrangement to allow women a fundamental initial foothold into the largely closed political system.

Third, we need to protect the rule of law as a fundamental building block in our society. In Lebanon, there is a significant gap between the law and its implementation. We call for a complete reform of the judiciary to ensure that it is independent from the political system.

So long as our judges are not well paid, and they are not getting enough money, they will continue to be bribed by our politicians. We call on the international community to assist us to safeguard the freedom of the press.

The assassination of Samir Kassir was a national tragedy that necessitates the stepping up of all security measures to protect our most sacred national assets. We must pursue an open political dialogue to safeguard all human rights, including the rights of women, children, and the elderly.

The elderly in Lebanon are not provided for. Women are not allowed or do not have maternity rights if they divorce from their husbands, and hundreds of children continue to work in gas stations, with little to no government interference.

Hundreds of Palestinians continue to live in abysmal conditions in camps. It is not enough for the Lebanese Government to allow

them their right to work. With the continued support and financial assistance of the international community, we must grant all Palestinians their basic human rights.

We need to create an environment that fosters citizenship and solidarity between Lebanese nationals at home and the Lebanese Diaspora. We favor greater involvement of the Lebanese Diaspora in domestic affairs, and have called on them to take active measures to vote in the Lebanese Embassies of their countries in the future.

In terms of economic priorities, Ambassador Welch covered most of the ideas that I have here before me. I would just like to make two points, two additional points. That we also recommend in terms of the management of the growing public debt that it has to occur in conjunction with good governance.

And also we need to continue the drive toward privatization. We recommend improving foreign debt investment through more effective investment laws, and less bureaucratic procedures, and greater access, to arrive at information and statistics.

We seek support for small to medium enterprises and entrepreneurial initiatives in general as an important step toward developing a middle class in Lebanon.

Finally, in terms of economic priorities, I would like to say that we are adamant to develop sustainable tourism. In listening to you today, I only heard about Hezbollah.

[Brief audio interruption.]

Ms. MERHI. We need to take active measures to manage poverty and promote durable national development through the implementation of Lebanese Development Plan from 2002 to 2006.

We find it essential to invest more funds in public education and health, and this was already touched upon, especially in light of Hezbollah's dominance of the south and directing more funds into these areas, and gaining the loyalty of these communities.

We make several recommendations for reforming our national curriculum to allow it to emerge as a more flexible, pragmatic, and open system of learning. We need financial assistance, and I would like to stop at this point.

We need financial assistance to develop the first respectable public library in the country, and hopefully a think tank also. We highlight the need for a nationwide project to fight against smoking and drug abuse.

We urge the government and the international community to control drug trafficking along the border, especially in light of the vast hashish yield in the Bekaa Valley.

We demand the legalization of optional civil marriage as an important starting point in managing sectarianism and securing equal rights for women. We propose consolidation of communication networks between national, regional, and international environmental NGOs, to pursue more effective environmental governance.

Finally, in my concluding statement, I would like to say this in the name of Lebanese youth. As government officials at home and abroad, intellectuals, journalists, members of the international community, join together in intellectual circles to discuss the future of Lebanon and fathom nice titles like the rebirth of democracy, the assassination site of our late Premier Rafik el-Hariri, two blocks

away from the HSBC building where I used to work in Ain-el-Mreisseh, one of the most beautiful and commercial areas in the city, remains closed with burnt cars, debris, and a hoard of idle security men proving to be no more and no less than a constant reminder of government failure, corruption, and if I may add, international negligence.

Lebanese youth watch in complete despair as the same government officials resume office once again, making a complete mockery of our desperate cry for national reforms. Every explosion in this seeming jungle is an attack on our national sovereignty, values, and aspirations for a stable, secure, and prosperous Lebanon.

We urge the United States of America and the international community to help us to surpass these difficult times by doing more than raising the flag of democracy, justice, and world peace. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Merhi follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MS. RIMA MERHI, GROUP COORDINATOR, INTER-UNIVERSITY PROJECT

I. YOUTH ACTION PLAN

An initiative of the Delegation of the European Commission in Lebanon, the "Youth Action Plan" was produced and written by students from the American University of Beirut, University of Saint Joseph, and the Lebanese University. *The EC encouraged us to participate in this project in the wake of the assassination of our late Premier Harriri as a vivid attestation of our commitment to national solidarity and determination to advance national reforms.*

II. ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- *The Youth Action Plan was presented to EU ambassadors, Lebanese economists and government officials at ESA on the 10th of June 2005. An open debate followed giving students the opportunity to defend their recommendations for political, economic, and social reforms before prominent figures in the audience. The event was a success and won mass media coverage and incredible public support for Lebanese youth.*
- *Work is currently in progress to shift into implementation phase. This requires a close scrutiny of the complete action plan to define the most important and realistic national projects, identify group members that are keen on working on these goals, and focusing all our energies to develop an international network of connections, with a clear emphasis on civil society organizations, research institutions and think tanks, as well as influential figures at home and amongst Lebanese Diaspora. We need all the support that we can obtain.*
- *As group leader, I was the first Lebanese to win a scholarship with the German Council of Foreign Relations in Berlin to present the Youth Action Plan. This is the first time that this world renowned research institute awards scholarships to participants from the Middle East. It was a big honour to commence the International Summer School, attended by 35 high calibre students and professionals selected from 25 countries worldwide, with our recommendations for a better Lebanon. It proved to be an excellent opportunity to seek feedback from an international audience. Two local German newspapers covered the event to encourage other learning and educational institutions to give opportunities to Arab youth.*
- *I am currently involved in an action plan for the Middle East, sponsored by the Ana Lindh foundation, to promote inter-cultural dialogue between Arab and European youth. We focus on the importance of educating the West about Islam. Indeed, the Honourable Hyde is correct to note that in terms of terrorism, "America is not doing a good job of selling its story abroad" or at home one may add, especially in light of the growing discrimination against Muslims and Arabs in general in the US. We hope to join forces with American youth to promote an inter-cultural dialogue that surpasses national borders.*

Despite mass media coverage, including local and international newspapers, magazines, and the German press and notwithstanding incredible support of the Daily Star (the best English newspaper sold with Herald Tribune in Lebanon) in publishing our whole project as a supplement with its newspaper on the 8th of July as well as providing it online for all its readers worldwide for the past week, *we fail to gain the attention and recognition of the Lebanese government*. We have asked the government to allow us to present our ideas in parliament with extensive media coverage but to no avail.

III. NATIONAL PRIORITIES

We sincerely thank the American government for taking an interest in Lebanese youth and hope that we can work together to build a better future for us all. Lebanese youth are in agreement that our national priorities in the political, economic and social sphere are as follows:

(A) Political Arena

1) First and foremost, Lebanese youth refuse to compromise on national sovereignty.

Syria is far from being out of Lebanon (in practical terms). They continue to hold the country hostage, not only by closing the borders to Lebanese goods and arresting fishermen, but also by assassinating prominent writers, and terrorizing the country with mysterious explosions. The Syrians clearly continue to have their agents within the Lebanese security apparatus.

We call on the international community to conduct a persistent and transparent international investigation to discover the truth of February 14 and adopt immediate interventionist measures to put an end to the ensuing chain of terror and political crimes that has ravaged the country since the assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq El-Harriri. Lebanese youth seek justice. Without accountability, our future in Lebanon remains grim.

2) We clearly need to develop a more democratic secular and representative system of governance.

We must develop our electoral laws to allow new blood into the stagnating and corrupt political system, respect for our constitution, and a system of checks and balances to control the power of the president. A staunch Syrian supporter, Emile Lahoud modified the constitution to extend his term of presidency.

Lebanese youth have developed a progressive plan of action to move away from sectarianism, seen as a debilitating social force in our community. Some of the proposals we recommend include focusing on youth policies that promote inter-sectarian community services at a young age; the basic teaching of all religions as a fundamental part of the national curriculum; a youth driven project supported by the EU to develop a national history book to be taught in all schools in Lebanon.

On 1559, Lebanese youth would like to state simple facts that remain largely ignored by the international community. With one and a half million Shiites in Lebanon mostly loyal to Nasrallah, and bearing into consideration that Hezbollah has won 12 seats in our government, it is very hard to sell Hezbollah as a terrorist organization in Lebanon. It is not the weapons of Hezbollah that makes them an influential party; rather, it is the profound loyalty of their followers and the largely incompetent Lebanese state that has allowed Hezbollah and other political sects and leaders to provide basic subsistence to rural communities.

Lebanese youth want more women to be given the opportunity to pursue a career in politics. We call for a temporary and obligatory quota arrangement to allow women a fundamental initial foothold into the largely closed political system.

3) We need to protect the rule of law as a fundamental building block in our society. In Lebanon there is a significant gap between the law and its implementation. We call for a complete reform of the judiciary to ensure that it is independent from the political system.

4) We call on the international community to assist us to safeguard the freedom of the press. The assassination of Samir Kassir is a national tragedy that necessitates the stepping up of all security measures to protect our most scared national asset.

5) We must pursue an open political dialogue to safeguard all human rights, including the rights of women, children, and the elderly. Hundreds of Palestinians continue to live in abysmal conditions in camps. It is not enough for the Lebanese government to allow them the right to work. With the continued support and financial assistance of the international community, we must grant all Palestinians their basic human rights.

6) We need to create an environment that fosters citizenship and solidarity between Lebanese nationals at home and amongst the Lebanese Diaspora. We favour

greater involvement of the Lebanese Diaspora in domestic affairs and have called on them to take active measures to vote in the Lebanese embassies of their countries in the future.

(B) Economic Priorities

1) Our primary concern is management of the growing public debt in conjunction with good governance. We also need to develop a more effective monetary and fiscal policy, and continue the drive towards privatization.

2) We need to further develop the water, industry, agriculture, and energy sectors as well as maintain our lead position in the financial services sector in the region.

3) We recommend improving foreign direct investment through more effective investment laws, less bureaucratic procedures, and greater access to reliable information and statistics.

4) We seek support for Small-to-Medium enterprises and entrepreneurial initiatives in general as an important step towards developing a middle class in Lebanon.

5) We are adamant to develop sustainable tourism and disseminate a positive image of our country.

(C) Social Priorities

1) We need to take active measures to manage poverty and promote durable national development through the implementation of Lebanese Development Plan (2002–2006).

2) We find it essential to invest more funds in public education and health (especially in rural areas), and develop a social welfare system in general.

3) We make several recommendations for reforming our national curriculum to allow it to emerge as a more flexible, pragmatic, and open system of educational learning. We need financial assistance to develop the first respectable public library and think tank in the country.

3) We highlight the need for a nationwide project to fight against smoking and drug abuse. We urge the government and international community to control drug trafficking along the border especially in light of the vast Hashish yield in the Bekaa valley.

4) We demand the legalization of optional civil marriage as an important starting point in managing sectarianism and securing equal rights for women.

5) We propose the consolidation of communication networks between national, regional, and international environmental NGO's to pursue more effective environmental governance.

IV. CONCLUDING STATEMENT

As government officials at home and abroad, intellectuals, journalists, members of the international community . . . join together in intellectual circles to discuss the future of Lebanon and fathom nice titles like “the rebirth of democracy. . . .” the assassination site of our late premier Rafiq el-Harriri—two blocks away from the HSBC building where I used to work in Ain Mreisseh—remains closed with burnt cars debris and a hoard of idle security men proving to be no more and no less than a constant reminder of government failure corruption and international negligence. Lebanese youth watch in complete despair as the same government officials resume office once again, making a complete mockery of our desperate cry for national reforms. Every explosion in this seeming jungle is an attack on our national sovereignty, values, and aspirations for a stable secure and prosperous Lebanon. We urge the United States of America and the international community to help us to surpass these difficult times by doing more than raising the flag of democracy justice and world peace.

Thank you.

[Recess.]

Chairman HYDE. Ladies and Gentlemen, we will try to continue.
Mr. Salem.

**STATEMENT OF PAUL SALEM, PH.D., WRITER AND ANALYST,
BEIRUT, LEBANON**

Mr. SALEM. Thank you, Chairman Hyde, and Distinguished Members of the Committee, I am honored to be here today. And I will try and summarize a few of the points that I made in those more detailed reports about the situation in Lebanon, and about the necessary reforms, and the foreign policy issues.

I would like to highlight a few things in my oral comments, and a number of things have already been mentioned in previous testimony today. Lebanon today is taking the first steps in a new phase of its modern history.

And I would like to emphasize that point in general when we talk about everything that Lebanon faces today, whether it is about the army, public policy, reform. This is the first election that we have had as a free country, and the first government that has been formed in Beirut and not in a neighboring country. And we welcome this change. We do remind also the Members of Congress that the United States for many years somewhat quietly accepted Syria's presence in Lebanon, and Syria's influence, and we welcomed Secretary Rice's visit to Beirut.

Many previous Secretaries used to visit Damascus and not visit Beirut. So we have seen a change in the international policy and in the United States policy, and it was very welcomed in Lebanon and was indeed the backbone, or one of the main backbones, for the liberation of the country and the beginning of this new phase.

The assassination of Rafik Hariri on February 14th was the low point in Lebanon's modern history, but as the testimony in this hearing has shown, the outpouring of unity and nationalism that culminated in the mass demonstrations by the youth and the population of the country of March 14 marked the highest point of Lebanon's modern history.

It is true that there have been many disappointments in the last weeks and months alone. The election laws that were passed are the same ones that were passed by the Syrians, and the leaders of the opposition promised one thing, and made alliances in different ways.

The assassination of Hariri, which we hoped would be the last, was followed by other assassinations and other bombings. The Syrians left, but they closed the border. We are still facing a very difficult and very complex situation. And for most of this period we were without a functioning government in place.

Today we are at the beginning of a new phase. The government sitting before Parliament in Beirut today is a coalition government bringing together Parliamentary blocs and leaders from various tendencies and parties, and these are very important things to build on. The challenges it faces are many, and it has committed itself to addressing most of them. It needs our help and yours in overcoming those challenges. It needs the support of the national community and the United States.

It is facing a number of key challenges, some of which have been mentioned today. The first and most important is security. It needs to move quickly to strengthen the army and internal security forces in order to fill the gaps left by the Syrian withdrawal. It also needs to reform and reorganize the intelligence services such that they are under civilian control and at the same time effective in preventing assassinations, bombings, and other forms of terrorism.

Secondly, it needs to reform the political system. We have come from a civil war, and foreign domination, and now the political system must be reformed. The youth, as Ms. Merhi so plainly stated, are extremely frustrated. It needs to move ahead with a new election law that would bring about more equitable and responsive rep-

resentation, and a new political parties law that would help the country move away from the politics of sectarianism, patronage, and personalities, to a politics of programs, parties, and policies.

Third, Lebanon has not had a foreign policy of its own for decades. We need to rebuild our relations with Syria on a healthy basis, and with the Arabs, and the United States, and Europe.

Fourth, the judiciary needs to be built up as was mentioned.

Fifth, civil society. Lebanon survived the war because we had a civil society, but it is still needed and still needs to be strengthened; and by a civil society, I don't just mean NGOs, but the universities, the media, the unions, and political parties. All of that needs to be revived.

Sixth, the drastic reform of the public sector. The government needs to make good on its pledges to undertake drastic reform in the public sector, and to fight corruption, reduce waste, and dramatically improve efficiency.

Perhaps the most complex issue that has been talked about in the last few days is the further implementation of 1559, the disarmament of the militias. That essentially means the armed Palestinian groups in Lebanon and Hezbollah. Those are the two major groups. And Lebanon has accepted UN Security Council Resolution 1559.

Many Lebanese were disappointed that that was not expressly stated by the government, and that is a point of internal debate in Lebanon today on why it was not mentioned.

Lebanese certainly hope that 1559 would be implemented within a year, and we certainly hope that it does not take as long as Resolution 425, or 194, or other resolutions that have not been implemented for decades.

The Palestinians in Lebanon and Hezbollah are both complex issues. The Palestinian camps have been there since they were expelled from their homeland in 1948. Many of them are heavily armed. There are many groups there. The Lebanese Government does not control those camps, nor does the Lebanese army.

The last time Lebanon tried to move against the armed Palestinians in the early 1970s, the state collapsed, and the army collapsed, and we had 15 years of internal chaos and civil war.

The Lebanese right now find it very difficult to take on armed Palestinians head on. The Palestinian armed presence in Lebanon is part of the Palestinian issue in general, and requires United States, and European, and Arab-Israeli cooperation, and Palestinian cooperation in particular to deal with.

The issue of Hezbollah is somewhat different. Although established by Iran, and backed by Iran and Syria, it is also a Lebanese party. It has services and has been a legitimate party within the electoral system for many years.

It is a representative of hundreds of thousands of Lebanese who live in Lebanon today. Also, one must keep in mind that Hezbollah emerged during the time when Lebanon was subject to five Israeli incursions or invasions between 1978 and 2000, and Israeli occupied the south of the country for nearly 22 years.

And Hezbollah did have, whether one likes it or not, a main role in pushing the Israelis or getting them to leave Lebanon in May

2000. And many Lebanese respect Hezbollah for that aspect of what they did.

The Lebanese are against terrorism, and the Lebanese suffered terribly from terrorism, and the Lebanese people and the Lebanese Government are intent on trying to root out terrorism in their country, or the sources of terrorism in their country.

Moving against Hezbollah as a confrontation is not what the Lebanese want, nor is it very feasible. As was mentioned, the Shiite community is the largest single group in the country. Hezbollah is involved in many services and involved in many other things.

And we feel that as we dealt with our militias after the war, through politics, through negotiations, through bringing them under the umbrella of the state, we might be able to do the same with Hezbollah. Give it some time and give it some support and leeway and we hope, and we are going to try, to succeed.

We recognize that we need to do that as quickly as possible. A possible scenario might include—and this is being discussed in some circles—a withdrawal of Israel from the disputed Shebaa Farms.

The Shebaa Farms might be a fig leaf, and as in the Bible, fig leaves often play important roles. That could then lead to the army deploying in the next few months in the south of Lebanon, and Hezbollah coming back from the border, and then integrating Hezbollah's fighters and heavy weapons within the Lebanese army, as was done with other militias after the war.

So there are ways to approach this, and they are being addressed, and it needs to be given some time. The Lebanese Government is brand new in that sense, and we need to give it some time to strengthen itself.

The United States and the international community, as well as Saudi Arabia, and other Arab states, have all played important roles in helping Lebanon regain its sovereignty. It is essential that our friends around the world continue to help us in the coming months and years.

I want to emphasize that Lebanon is a rare example of democracy in a generally authoritative region. It is a necessary and very important example of Christian-Muslim understanding in a very dangerously divided region and divided world.

The demonstrations of March 14 and the events that followed are examples of a peaceful change in a region where change is all too often driven by violence. The Lebanese experience shows the triumph of cooperation over division, dialogue over monologue, moderation over extremism.

The United States and the international community can help Lebanon by helping us help ourselves. We need continued diplomatic support in dealing with the complex regional issues that penetrate our small country.

We need support in rebuilding the army and the security services. We need help in strengthening our state institutions and public administration, and need help in managing our public debt, which is now 170 percent of our GDP.

Other than that, we want an open country that we have always been, a place for investment, education, business, tourism, and cultural exchange. We have been through a lot in the last 30 years.

But the Lebanese people have shown that we have come through it united, determined, and enthusiastic, and quite able. Statehood, democracy, and growth are not new to us. We have finally regained the independence that can make their fuller development possible in the coming months and years.

I am confident about our future. We hope to always see our friends and allies by our side to build a more democratic, and a more prosperous Lebanon and Middle East. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Salem follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF PAUL SALEM, PH.D., WRITER AND ANALYST, BEIRUT,
LEBANON

Chairman Hyde, distinguished members of the committee, I am honored to be here.

Lebanon today is taking the first steps in a new phase of its modern history. It has regained its sovereignty after years of external domination. It has just held its first elections free of outside control.

As we sit in the halls of Congress in Washington today, the new Lebanese government is sitting before the Lebanese Parliament in Beirut, presenting its platform, and seeking the Parliament's confidence. This new government is the first to be formed *in* Lebanon, rather than in a neighboring capital, for many years.

The assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri on February 14, marked the lowest point in Lebanon's modern political history; but the astounding outpouring of unity and nationalism that culminated in the mass demonstrations of March 14 marked the highest point. The Lebanese people shouted out their will to be free, to be united, and to participate in building a strong democracy. These were shouts that were heard around the Arab world.

It is true that there have been many disappointments since the heady days of March 14. The opposition promised one election law, but acquiesced in the passage of another. Leaders championed one set of political slogans, but ended up making electoral alliances that ran counter to them. The opposition itself split in two, and the elections ended up sadly reinforcing confessional divisions. The assassination of Hariri was followed by other assassinations and bombings. And the Syrian withdrawal was followed recently by border closings that have worsened an already difficult economic situation.

A lot has happened in the past six months. And for most of this period we were without a functioning government.

Today we are at the beginning of a new phase. The government sitting before Parliament in Beirut today is a coalition government bringing together parliamentary blocs and leaders from various tendencies and parties. Despite some structural weaknesses I believe it can achieve results in a number of areas.

The challenges it faces are many, and it has committed itself to addressing most of them; it needs our help and yours in overcoming those challenges:

First, with regard to security, it needs to move quickly to strengthen the army and internal security forces in order to fill the gaps left by the Syrian withdrawal. It also needs to reform and reorganize the intelligence services such that they are under civilian control and at the same time effective in preventing assassinations, bombings and other forms of terrorism.

Second, it needs to undertake fundamental reform of the political system by moving ahead with a new election law that would bring about more equitable and responsive representation, and a new political parties law that would help the country move away from the politics of sectarianism, patronage and personalities, to a politics of programs, parties and policies.

Third, having regained the ability to formulate its own foreign policy, Lebanon has to reconstruct its relations with its Arab friends, especially Syria, on a sound basis, and strengthen its relations with its friends in Europe and America.

Fourth, an independent and effective judiciary must be transformed from an empty slogan to a reality.

Fifth, we all need to work to strengthen and develop the institutions of civil society—NGOs, universities, media, unions, and political parties. It is these institutions that can provide the stability, unity and civility of democracy and ensure the continued integration between the population at large and the machinations of the political class.

Sixth, the government needs to make good on its pledges to undertake drastic reform in the public sector: to fight corruption, reduce waste, and dramatically improve efficiency.

Seventh, the government needs to build on the economic achievements of the post-war years by continuing to encourage Lebanese, Arab, and foreign investment and continuing to re-position Lebanon as a hub of business growth in the Arab East. The government needs to do all this while keeping government spending down and finding ways to manage our 35 billion dollar debt.

Perhaps the most complex challenge facing the government is the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1559 and the disarmament of remaining armed groups in Lebanon, which means mainly Hizbullah and the Palestinian militias in the camps.

The Palestinians have been in Lebanon since their expulsion from their homeland in 1948. The conditions in the camps are very volatile with rival Palestinian militias jockeying for control and various fundamentalist groups also gaining footholds.

Lebanon cannot deal head-on with the issue of disarming the Palestinians in Lebanon; the last time that was tried, it led to the collapse of the state and a decade and a half of chaos and destruction.

The Palestinian issue in Lebanon is part of the Palestinian issue in general, and it will require patient and serious cooperation not only from the Palestinians but also from other regional and international partners in the peace process.

The issue of Hizbullah is quite different. Although it was established and backed by Iran, and although it enjoyed protection and support from Syria, it is in the end a Lebanese party, with Lebanese membership and leadership. Its main issue has been the struggle against Israeli occupation.

One must keep in mind that south Lebanon was subject to five Israeli incursions or invasions between 1978 and 1999, and was occupied for a full 22 years.

Most Lebanese have respect for Hizbullah's role in liberating south Lebanon and regard it as a major and legitimate representative of a large portion of the Shiite community. They also acknowledge that all Lebanon's militias, at one time or another, were involved in extra-legal activities. But most Lebanese would like to see Hizbullah continue to transform itself into a regular political party.

With regard to their disarmament, the Lebanese prefer this to be a political and negotiated process—*not* an armed confrontation. No one in Lebanon wants another civil war.

A *possible* process might include a number of steps, such as an Israeli withdrawal from Shebaa Farms, followed by the deployment of the Lebanese army to the entire Lebanese-Israeli border, and the pullback of Hizbullah to behind army lines. Hizbullah's fighters and heavy weapons could then be brought under government control by integration into the Army as happened with other Lebanese militias after the war.

It is not possible in these brief comments to give a full assessment of the challenges and prospects facing the new Lebanon; (I have submitted two longer detailed statements for the record that deal with the issues in more detail) but it is clear that events are moving very quickly and great opportunities, as well as dangers, lay in our path.

The US and the International community, in general, as well as Saudi Arabia and other Arab states, have all played important roles in helping Lebanon regain its sovereignty; it is essential that our friends around the world continue to help us in the coming months and years.

Lebanon is a rare example of emerging democracy in a generally authoritarian region. It is a necessary example of Christian-Muslim understanding in a dangerously divided world. The demonstrations of March 14 and the momentous events that followed are examples of peaceful change in a world too often driven by violence. The Lebanese experience shows the triumph of cooperation over division, dialogue over monologue, moderation over extremism.

The US and the international community can help Lebanon by helping the Lebanese help themselves. We need continued diplomatic support and cooperation in dealing with the complex regional issues that penetrate our small country. We need support in rebuilding our army and security services. We need help in strengthening our state institutions and public administration. And we need help in managing our large public debt.

Other than that, we want to be the open country that we have always been; a place for investment, education, business, tourism, and cultural exchange.

We have been through a lot in the last thirty years, and the Lebanese people have shown that we have come through it united, determined, enthusiastic and able.

Statehood, democracy and growth are not new to us; we have finally regained the independence that can make their fuller development possible.

I am confident about our future, despite the complexities and dangers; we hope to always see our friends and allies by our side to build a more democratic, tolerant and prosperous Lebanon and Middle East.

Thank you.

Appendixes:

- Article entitled “Lebanon at the Crossroads,” P. Salem.
- Article entitled “Twenty Key Issues for Building a Better Lebanon,” P. Salem.

TWENTY KEY ISSUES FOR BUILDING A BETTER LEBANON

By Paul Salem
June 2005

Lebanon is at a historic and critical crossroads, filled with dangers and opportunities. The withdrawal of Syrian forces has brought back the opportunity to regain full sovereignty and independence and to rebuild Lebanese politics on new grounds. The emotional outpouring that followed the tragic assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri has forged new bonds of national unity and identity. The rapid political changes have also opened discussions on issues and challenges that have lain dormant for too long. On the other hand, the confrontation between the US and Syria carries many dangers including the danger of replacing one external influence with another. In addition, the assassination of Hariri has left a gaping void in our national political leadership and has dealt a strong blow to the course of rebuilding and re-launching postwar Lebanon.

Despite the many divisions that we see today, the Lebanese today have more in common than perhaps ever before. All parties accept the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon, although they disagree as to whether this should be linked to UN Security Council Resolution 1559 or the Taif Agreement. They all agree that Syrian domination should not be replaced by any other form of external domination, whether it is European or American or otherwise. They all agree that Lebanon should maintain and rebuild special relations with Syria based on the best interests of both countries. They all agree that we should arrive at the complete truth regarding the assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri, Deputy Basil Fuleihan, and their companions, and the attempted assassination of Deputy Marwan Hamadeh. They all agree that we should proceed to Parliamentary elections as soon as possible.

We are coming up to a dramatic change in power in Lebanon, both internally and externally. What is currently calling itself the opposition, will probably form the next authority. Thirty years of Syrian domination is ending and Lebanon is enjoying an unprecedented and unlikely-to-be-repeated amount of Arab and international attention and support. The leader who was the Prime Minister of Lebanon for most of the postwar period, and who carried the main engine and project of postwar Lebanon, is now gone. Whether one agreed with all aspects of Hariri's work or disagreed with parts of it, he did have a plan, and he had the vision, energy and power to push ahead with implementing it. His martyrdom brought Lebanese together like never before. It underlined the enormity of his role and the size of his loss, but what we see today is much political activity but very little of the long-term vision and will that Hariri exhibited. We owe it to our people and to his memory, to pull together and to think deeply and seriously about the vision and programs we need to achieve in this new phase of our history.

Ideally, this should be the subject of a positive national dialogue involving all key political players as well as members of civil society. We should be sitting down together to discuss what issues will need our attention in the months and years to come. There is the danger that the loose coalition today called the opposition will soon reach power in parliament and the executive branch, but that it will lack a unifying and mobilizing agenda, and will fall back into division and politics as usual, and Lebanon would have lost a historic opportunity for progress and change.

I propose below some issues that I believe should be part of such a national agenda for reform and action. Several of these issues are elements of the Taif agreement that were never fully implemented; others, are elements that are not strictly part of Taif but are a necessity for building a more successful Lebanon.

1. the first order of business is consolidating the sovereignty and independence of the Lebanese state after 15 years of war and 15 years of external influence. This is not a simple or easy task but involves consolidating the Lebanese army and ensuring its authoritative deployment throughout the country. It also involves retraining the internal security forces, and, most importantly, restructuring the intelligence and security agencies and bring-

ing them under the full control of the political authority. Lebanon's strength was never in its weakness, and we paid a heavy price for past mistakes. The Lebanese state must be a strong state able to protect its borders and able to ensure full security within them.

2. a second general goal is the consolidation of freedoms and the rule of law in the country through renewed respect for individual rights, freedom from arbitrary arrest and prosecution, and respect for the freedoms of the press, association, assembly, demonstration, and political expression. Lebanon was a primary author of the universal declaration of human rights; its *raison d'être* in the Arab world is as a haven for freedom, justice and human rights. This must be reinforced.
3. a third goal is the consolidation of democracy. As we have seen in the past months, democracy is not a dream or a luxury, and one ignores it at one's peril. Democracy is based ultimately on respect for the will and the authority of the people. It is they that elect a Parliament, and through the Parliament, a President, Prime Minister and Council of Ministers. They are the original and ultimate arbiter in all matters. Lebanon had distinguished itself during much of the 20th century among its Arab neighbors in having and preserving a democratic political system. But we fell prey to internal divisions in the 1970s and 1980s and then to outside control in the 1990s and beyond. Throughout much of this period, the institutions of democracy were manipulated to give the illusion of democracy without real choice and without full authority to the population. This attitude among the political class must end, and the empowerment of the people and their involvement in ultimate decision making must continue. Many new and old politicians will be voted out by the people; and hopefully new choices and new movements will come to the fore. Concurrently, the democratic political system is always a work in progress. There are many reforms and institutions that still need to be instituted, and I will mention some of them in the points below.
4. one of the cornerstones of the Taif agreement is achieving true national reconciliation. This should be achieved by ending the exile and imprisonment of prominent leaders and building a truly inclusive political system. Progress should also be made on completing the return of displaced people to their towns and villages, which is still not complete 15 years after the end of the war. It should also include a national program of national dialogue and reconciliation to make sure that the fears and hostilities of one generation are not handed down to the next. It is significant that this month was the only time that an organized remembrance and rejection of the war was organized on a national scale. We must also beware that a return and reconciliation among the political leaders of the war does not lead to a rebuilding of the war elite; the Taif settlement did include a general amnesty for all war crimes, but there has been no Truth and Reconciliation Commission in postwar Lebanon, nor has anyone taken any responsibility for the crimes and destruction perpetrated during the war. While the Lebanese do not want any community or leadership to be treated unfairly, they do not want to return to the political systems of the past, but they want to move beyond the war and build new leaderships and new visions.
5. The withdrawal of Syrian forces completes part of the Taif agreement, but that section must be completed by focusing on and ensuring truly good and special relations between Lebanon and Syria in the coming months and years, based on mutual respect and sovereignty, but also based on a sincere belief in significant common interests at the strategic and economic levels. Any remaining Lebanese prisoners in Syrian jails should be released immediately. This should be followed by vigorous efforts to rebuild relations between the Lebanese and Syrian people and to overcome the tensions and misunderstandings of the past months and years.
6. This must be balanced with rebuilding strong relations with our other Arab friends as well as with the West and the international community as a whole. Lebanon is a founding member of both the Arab league and the United Nations. We have special relations with Syria, and excellent relations with the Arab world and the West. We should not be dragged into other people's global conflicts.
7. With regard to Israel, we have largely completed the liberation of the South, as stipulated in the Taif Agreement. We will not pursue or sign any separate security or peace agreement with Israel; indeed, most Lebanese

agree that Lebanon should be among the last Arab countries to do so, and should only do so if and when Syria is ready to do so. The Shebaa Farms issue is a serious one, but Lebanon has always operated within the framework of international legality. If we can present a full legal case, with written Syrian acceptance, to the United Nations and regain international acceptance for the Lebanese-ness of the Shebaa Farms then it can become again a potent international claim for us. However, we should not let the Shebaa Farms dispute dictate our security situation. With regard to Lebanese captives in Israeli jails they should remain high on our agenda of international claims in the UN and with other international mediators and we should work vigorously for their release.

8. Within the Taif context as well we should open a Lebanese dialogue with Hizbullah regarding its political and resistance role in the future. Hizbullah is one of the principal political parties in Lebanon and has a permanent and central role in the future of the Lebanese democracy. Also, Hizbullah is a main deterrent against Israeli aggression, but at the same time it cannot remain indefinitely outside the purview of the Taif Agreement regarding the disarming of all non-state organizations. There are many ways to do this in a cooperative and productive way by restructuring Hizbullah's military forces into a new relationship with the Lebanese state and the Lebanese armed forces. This must take place simultaneously with serious progress in disarming the Palestinian organizations in Lebanon which are also mentioned in Taif. Progress can be achieved peacefully on this front after the withdrawal of Syrian forces and in cooperation with the new Palestinian leadership that has expressed great openness in this regard.
9. Among the institutional reforms mandated by the Taif agreement, many have yet to be implemented. The election law is the most important law in any democracy as it is the vehicle for vesting popular authority in an elected assembly and gives legitimacy and legal authority to the entire state. We have used a different election law for each election since the end of the war, and none has been in accordance with the Taif agreement. Taif speaks of elections based on the muhafaza and after the redrawing of the administrative map. Some redrawing of the map has occurred in the last few years but in a haphazard and unplanned way; also many discussions have taken place with regard to election laws in Lebanon. This redrawing and discussion must be resolved once and for all and election laws should be fixed and not changed from election to election. In addition we should prepare for the setting up of a National Electoral Commission that manages and supervises elections, like in most democracies today, and end the old practice of having the elections managed by the Ministry of. Of course, after the heroic national role played by the nation's youth in the past weeks, the political class should be shamed into finally lowering the voting age to eighteen.
10. A new election law should be accompanied by a new law and policy regarding political parties. There can be no meaningful and functioning democracy without democratic and national political parties. Elections without parties renders elections largely devoid of real political meaning, and renders them a personal contest among local leaders rather than a referendum on national political will. This policy should favor the development of internally democratic national non-confessional or multi-confessional parties and discourage the dominance of regional or mono-confessional parties. This can be done in many ways through political party law and through an appropriate election law that also encourages the same. We cannot let party politics in Lebanon remain confessional, nor can we afford not to develop a modern democratic and national political party system in order to give meaning to national political life, to create meaningful political links between the will of the people and the political outcomes of elections, and to bring in new generations to national political life away from confessional politics or traditional family and zaim politics.
11. New laws for elections and political parties would form an important element of a broader necessity required by Taif, that of moving beyond political confessionalism. Organizing electoral and party politics along non-confessional lines would be an important first step in defusing political confessionalism. However, as stipulated by Taif, we must go ahead with preparations for establishing a Senate, which will preserve confessional balances and provide assurances on confessionally sensitive national issues, but liberate the lower house of Parliament from confessional constraints. All communities in Lebanon must move beyond their inherited fears regard-

ing the discussion of non-confessional politics. The national committee mentioned in Taif to draw up a national plan for the step-by-step movement away from political confessionalism must be set up. Confessionalism is one of the main flaws of the Lebanese political system. It cannot be eliminated over not, nor can it be treated lightly, as any mishandling of this sensitive area might lead to escalating tensions and unforeseen consequences. However, Lebanon is not stuck with political confessionalism forever. There is a way out. We must begin taking the first steps along that important path.

12. We have seen in recent weeks the price that we pay for a week and ineffective judiciary. The judiciary is supposed to be, in the Lebanese constitution, and in any self-respecting democracy, a full third independent branch of government. This is not a luxury but a necessity. The entire principle of rule of law rests on the existence of a strong and independent judiciary. A weak judiciary endangers basic rights and freedoms, it obstructs normal political life, it undermines the very ethos of a free and democratic society, and in addition it dangerously hampers economic growth as investors will not invest in a country where the quick and effective protection of the law does not exist. In a recent World Bank study, the Lebanese judicial system was ranked among the slowest and least effective in the entire Arab world. We cannot build a new Lebanon on this basis. We need a revolutionary approach to strengthening the judicial sector and rendering it powerful and independent. There can be no half measures here. The constitutional council must be truly a supreme court that protects the constitution; and judges at all levels must be truly given the support, protection and freedom to be the protectors of the law that they should be.
13. The legislative branch of government must also be reinforced and strengthened. In our Parliamentary system, the Chamber of Deputies is the main source of democratic authority in the state, and the main actor in electing a President, naming a Prime Minister, instating a Council of Ministers, passing legislation etc. Eighty years after its birth, and fifteen years after the end of the war, Parliament is still a crippled and weak institution. In most democracies, the Parliament is a major institution of state, with strong research and investigative capacities and a dominant position in the state. In Lebanon, it is nothing more than a large hall surrounded by a few secretarial offices and ringed by cafes and restaurants. Parliament is not just a place where deputies occasionally meet to vote; it should be, as it is in most democracies, a strong and separate branch of government able to guide public life and able to counterbalance the power of the executive branch.
14. the executive branch of government in post war Lebanon has been the most confused. Power has been contested between the office of the Prime Minister, the Council of Ministers itself, the office of the President, the Troika, and, of course, Damascus. The result was a large mess during the past fifteen years in which decision making was a slow and contradictory process and in which authority and responsibility was hard to pin down. The Taif agreement stipulated that executive authority would be vested in the Council of Ministers, as a collegial body. The council would be headed by the Prime Minister and he would set its agenda and be responsible for the general functioning of government, and the President could add items onto the council's agenda or could chair sessions when he wished. In effect, the Council of Ministers as a collegial body was never developed as a power or authority. It remains just a room, like the Chamber of Deputies, where ministers meet, but it has no autonomous institutional and administrative capacity. The President, in recent years, has overstepped Taif and tried to play the role of co-Prime Minister; while the Prime Minister, in most of the post-war years, has failed to encourage the authority of the Council of Ministers as a collegial institutional authority, and has sought only to strengthen the office of the Prime Minister. The Council of Ministers, as an institution, must be strengthened; the president must restrict himself to his constitutional role, and the Prime Minister should find a balance between allowing the Council of Ministers to develop as a collegial body and his leadership role over that body. We must either implement the letter and spirit of the Taif agreement in this regard, or eventually revise the agreement to have either a clearly Prime Ministerial system, or a Presidential system, or some third alternative, like a collegial presidency, or the like.
15. Decentralization is not an unimportant administrative detail but one of the main building blocs of balanced and rural development and an essential ele-

ment of the pyramid of democratic participation from the village and neighborhood level all the way to the national level. It is no secret that most postwar governments had no real understanding, appreciation or interest in decentralization. Most national politicians and officials did not want to share power nor resources with any other officials, especially elected officials in towns and regions that could challenge their monopoly of politics and resources. It took a national civil society initiative to get the government to hold local elections in 1998, and local municipalities have struggled through the last years begging for money that is theirs from the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Interior. The Taif agreement spoke clearly about the empowerment of local municipalities, the empowerment of local administrators (i.e. the *qaimmaqam* and *muhafiz*), and the establishment of elected *qada* councils to undertake development and administration at the regional level. True administrative decentralization is one of the keys to sustainable and balanced growth, especially for towns and regions not close to the capital. We must make quick and decisive progress in issuing a new decentralization law that revises and redraws the administrative map of Lebanon, empowers municipalities, and, perhaps most importantly, establishes elected *qada* councils with the administrative and financial resources and autonomy to undertake real development outside of Beirut and Mount Lebanon guided by the participation and choices of the local population, albeit within an overall national development plan.

16. The public administration must not be a place for political score-settling and electoral employment. Our dilapidated public administration is currently one of the main obstacles to economic development, while it should be the engine of change and reform if Lebanon ever hopes to compete with other countries in the region and the world. The reform of the public administration has to be approached in a radical way. At the moment, it is dominated by politicians who treat government ministries as institutions to plunder for money and services in order to enrich themselves or their cronies and to build their electoral base. The statements from potential ministers in recent weeks that they wanted ministries with ample resources that they could use in the upcoming elections have been shocking and should have led to legal prosecution or investigation at the least. We must undertake a high priority review of the entire public sector with an eye to dramatic restructuring and reform. The autonomy of the civil service must be rebuilt from the ground up, like we rebuilt the army. It should have a similar esprit de corps and internal rules of conduct. The central agencies like the Civil Service Board, the Central Inspection Commission, and the Bureau of Accounts, etc., should be rebuilt to the strength and authority that they were supposed to have in the beginning. High civil servants should be chosen with the utmost care and then supported and empowered.
17. Corruption at all levels is one of the main scourges of post war Lebanon. Regardless of the reasons, corruption at such high levels cannot be tolerated neither from the political and moral perspective, neither, more importantly, from the social and economic perspective. Corruption leads to the crippling of proper decision making and policy formulation, and it leads to the wasting or diversion of hundreds of millions of dollars away from the public interest and into private hands. Lebanon cannot coexist with massive and widespread corruption. It will lead to the further political disintegration of the political system and to continued economic crises and uneven distribution of wealth. It also skews the value system in both the public and private sectors and affects the behavior and expectation of new generations. What we must aim for is a serious national campaign, comparable to the national campaign for sovereignty, to fight corruption at every level and to find solutions to the administrative and legal loopholes that allow such widespread corruption to flourish.
18. In economic policy, the main objective must be to revive economic growth with the aim of creating sufficient jobs and opportunities to stem the brain drain and keep our young people from being forced to leave the country. Of course, the first conditions for economic growth include stability, sovereignty, rule of law, a good judicial sector and a better decision making and administrative system, as mentioned above. More specifically, however, Lebanon must return to the broken promises of Paris II and examine what still can be salvaged from that historic agreement, and how we must adjust our economic and fiscal planning in order to put the economic train on track again and to begin to regain the confidence of Arab and international inves-

tors. There were encouraging economic signs in 2003 and 2004 of a return to significant growth, and Lebanon certainly has the potential to achieve high levels of growth and begin competing gradually with such booming economic hubs as Dubai and Qatar and elsewhere. This will rely on bringing in a capable political and economic leadership to the country, creating the environment to encourage business and investment, and eliminating or radically reducing unnecessary obstacles to investment and the hurdles of corruption and delays. It is important for Lebanon to pursue its adherence to regional and international trading agreements such as the European Partnership Agreement, the Arab Free Trade Zone and the World Trade Organization. However, economic policy should also be concerned about helping Lebanon's various sectors avoid the pitfalls of further global integration and take advantage of the opportunities. Fiscal policy should continue to focus on reducing the state's budget deficits, reducing the growth of the overall debt, and keeping public sector costs low. The tax burden is already high on the public, although more progress should be made on income tax administration in order to ensure that higher income groups, that are often able to hide their income, pay their fair share of the tax burden, commensurate with their real income.

19. On the socio economic level, public education and public health are the two main sectors that saw insufficient improvement in the post war years, despite some progress. Lebanon is the country that developed and disseminated the alphabet, and education is its main national resource. There is no excuse for the dilapidated state of much of Lebanon's public school system; more importantly, the condition of the Lebanese university is almost at the level of a national crime. While private medicine flourishes in Lebanon, the public health system has failed in the postwar period. The ministry of health has been used as a place to be plundered by the political class with billions of dollars going to provide costly coverage in private hospitals. Lebanon still does not have a minimal network of public clinics and hospitals; significantly, it is behind Syria and most other Arab countries in this regard. While the passage of the old age pension plan in the past year is a welcome addition to the social security network, the general condition of the National Social Security Fund, especially given the pressures on the national currency, is a matter of great concern. Social development is a national necessity. We all have to develop and benefit together, all classes and all income groups. Lebanon must develop together, or it will fall into renewed division.
20. The main national resource that we might lose forever and that we cannot renew is our environment. Taken lightly by most postwar governments, the environmental issue is fundamental to the future of the country and its people. Although we don't have the oil resources of some of our Arab competitors, we have a more valuable and sustainable environmental resource. It is a main source of attraction for investment as well as tourism, and it is the environment in which we and our children live. The feeble decision to set up a small Ministry of the Environment without significant authority or resources and under direct political control, has not been and will never be a solution. What we need, in addition to much more public and political awareness of the importance of this issue, is the establishment of an Environmental Protection Agency, similar in autonomy and authority to the Central Bank, with the mission of protecting and enriching our national environment, like the Central Bank is tasked with protecting our monetary and gold resources. Without serious environmental policy and protection, the degradation of our natural heritage will continue and will move toward increased desertification, concretization, pollution, and resource crisis. Man is the child of his environment; if we ruin our environment, we are ruining the very possibility of a better future.

The current crisis in which we are living is full of risks and possibilities. It puts Lebanon at an important crossroads. We can think about and plan for our future, or we can stumble into it, divided and blind, as we are largely doing now. I believe that, as we have done several times in the past, we can and should step back from our immediate disagreements and look at the broader picture of Lebanon's future. I have tried in these ideas and proposals presented above, to underline a number of the key issues that I think should form the basis of a renewed national dialogue and the building a profound national consensus. Unity is build by joint action; and

joint action is built on a common vision and a common agenda. The time to think is now, as the opportunity to effect fundamental change is fast approaching.

LEBANON AT THE CROSSROADS: REBUILDING AN ARAB DEMOCRACY

By Paul Salem

Introduction

The assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in a massive car bomb explosion on February 14 of this year triggered a series of changes that are bringing fundamental change to the country. The Syrian army and intelligence services, who have been in Lebanon since June of 1976 have finally left; a country that went through fifteen years of civil war followed by fifteen years of Syrian domination is finally getting a real chance at sovereignty and independence; a nation divided among several religious communities has come together in an unprecedented outpouring of national unity; a population cowed by years of militia rule followed by years of foreign domination has found its strength and its voice in massive demonstrations that reverberated around the world.

Yet, Lebanon still faces many serious challenges. Caught in the middle of a showdown between the United States and Syria, Lebanon hopes to reap the benefits but not pay the cost. Bereft of the larger-than-life Prime Minister who led most of Lebanon's postwar governments and engineered the country's reconstruction and postwar revival, Lebanon is in search of new political leadership. Saddled with a national debt equivalent to about 170% of its GDP, the country is struggling to avoid sliding back into economic collapse and social chaos. Having disarmed most militias after the end of the Lebanese war in 1990, Lebanon still has to negotiate the disarming of Hizbullah and of Palestinian groups in the refugee camps.

The crisis touched off by the Hariri assassination and culminating in Syria's withdrawal was the result of changes in international attitudes toward Lebanon and in domestic Lebanese political dynamics that had been building for several years. To capitalize on these changes, Lebanon will need wise and moderate leadership, a unified vision for domestic political and economic development, and targeted support from the international community. If these can be achieved, and the above challenges overcome, Lebanon could yet achieve its potential—renewed after a long hiatus—to stand as a regional example of democracy, prosperity, and coexistence in the Middle East.

Six Months that Changed the Country

The underlying conditions for change in Lebanon were set several years ago by two fundamental changes: one was September 11 and the profound changes it brought about in US foreign policy, particularly toward the Arab and Islamic world; the second occurred a year earlier with the death of long-time Syrian President Hafez al-Assad and the succession of his less-gifted son Bashar to the presidency. The former event would soon propel the United States directly into Middle East politics; the latter would mean that there was not a wise and prudent head in charge in Damascus to understand and absorb the new US dynamic and to avoid a losing confrontation with it.

The immediate causes of the dramatic changes in Lebanon go back to the summer of last year. Prime Minister Hariri had dominated the political scene in Lebanon since his first assumption of office in 1992. The Syrians initially had mixed feelings about him: he promised economic and social stability for a country that they sought to control, and his appointment with their approval in 1992 and beyond gained them points with the Saudis, Americans and French. On the other hand, as he accrued greater power, they increasingly saw him as an independent-minded Sunni leader whom they could not control as they controlled most other Lebanese politicians, and whose success could project indirectly into Syria and tantalize the ambitions of a Sunni majority that had been suppressed for more than thirty years by an oppressive Alawi minority.

In 1998, the Syrians supported the army commander, General Emile Lahoud—as per tradition, a Maronite Christian—to assume the presidency. Thus began six years of political confrontation and deadlock between the President and the Prime Minister that stalled government decision-making as well as the economic recovery. The event that precipitated the current political upheaval was the Syrian decision in August 2004, as President Lahoud's term in office was coming to an end, to prevail upon the pliant Lebanese parliament to amend the constitution and extend the President's term for another three years. Using threats and coercion, the Syrians even forced Hariri to move the amendment in the cabinet and vote for it in parliament.

International opposition to Syrian domination of Lebanon, led by France and the United States, had already been growing. The extension of Lahoud's term led to a countermove by France and the United States that produced UN Security Council Resolution 1559, which called for an immediate and total withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon, as well as the disarming of Hizbullah and the return of full sovereignty to the country.

From this moment the confrontation between Syria and the West became increasingly overt. The Syrians reacted angrily to UNSCR 1559; they accused Hariri of being behind it, and pressed their allies in Lebanon to denounce the resolution as an illegitimate interference in consensual affairs between Lebanon and Syria. An indication of the escalating level of tension emerged with the attempted assassination of Deputy Marwan Hamadeh in early October in a car bomb attack; Hamadeh was a close ally both of Hariri and the Druze leader Walid Junblatt who had also thrown his political weight behind the demand for a Syrian withdrawal. Hamadeh miraculously survived the attack, but the event signaled a showdown and unleashed long pent-up frustrations. The attack on Hamadeh in turn helped crystallize the emerging anti-Syrian coalition among leading opposition politicians, and the assassination of Rafiq Hariri on February 14, 2005, came as these battle lines were becoming clear.

The reaction to Hariri's assassination was a cathartic outpouring of grief and unity among the population. After Hariri's assassination the Syrians' position in Lebanon was no longer tenable. While they had previously had a difficult time controlling elements of the Christian opposition, now they had also lost control of the Sunni and Druze communities as well. Anti-Syrian demonstrations in Beirut on March 14 brought 1.2 million people onto the streets, almost a third of the country's population.

Only the large Shiite community stayed out of the oppositionist fanfare and close to the Syrians. Among the Shiites, Hizbullah was opposed to 1559 because it aimed to disarm it; and the Amal movement was opposed to it, because their leader, Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, derived most of his political power from Syria and was likely to lose it if they left. In addition, the Shiites had always been somewhat wary of resurgent Sunni power in the country, led by Hariri, and hence reacted differently to the assassination. A pro-Syrian demonstration organized by Hizbullah on March 7 brought out about half a million people.

Some analysts mistakenly argue that the assassination of Hariri led to the Syrian withdrawal; it is more accurate to say that *because* the Syrian position in Lebanon had become impossible to sustain, Hariri was assassinated. While Syria dominated Lebanon, they could always keep Hariri in check; if they had to leave, he would quickly increase in power and then, through his regional and international alliances, would be able to project the specter of Sunni power into an embattled Damascus. In one blow, with the assassination of Hariri, the Sunni community could be temporarily, but seriously, orphaned and crippled.

It proved to be a massive miscalculation. Syria has now been forced by a unique combination of popular, international, and Arab pressures to undertake a military and intelligence withdrawal from Lebanon. It has accepted 1559 and accepted that, for the time being at least, it must cease its direct interference in Lebanese affairs. There is a growing sense in Syria that the regime has overplayed its hand and committed several strategic mistakes that have brought the threat of confrontation with the United States to the regime's doorstep. They hope that by pulling out of Lebanon, they will be able to gain international good will. However, while the battle yesterday was for domination of Lebanon, the real question today regards the survival of the Assad regime itself.

Whither Lebanon?

Lebanon today is in the midst of decisive parliamentary elections; however, there has been great discord over the election law and over electoral alliances. Before the assassination of Hariri, the government at the time had proposed an election law featuring small electoral districts; this was favored by the Christian opposition. However, this law was never passed in parliament, and attempts to pass it later failed. Consequently, the country had to fall back on the 2000 election law that was on the books which features large districts; these large districts were favored by Amal and Hizbullah, and, as it turned out, by the Hariri bloc and Junblatt as well, in addition to some members of the Christian opposition. The problem with these large districts is that the results of the election are determined more by the formation of coalition lists, than by voter choice; once a strong list has been assembled, it generally will sweep all the seats in that particular district. The continuation of this election law, which had been drawn up under Syrian patronage in 2000, was seen among the general public as a negative first step in newly independent Leb-

anon, and as an attempt by the political class to hang together and preserve its interests in the face of potential democratic change.

Also, the turbulent and short election season has mixed up political alliances in the country. The opposition that faced the Syrians together included the Hariri bloc, Junblatt, several Christian parties and leaders, as well as exiled General Michel Aoun, and a number of leftist parties. During the election season, Muslim-Christian unity which had been greatly cemented in the demonstrations leading up to March 14, was shaken by accusations made by the Maronite Patriarch, that Muslim leaders were trying to hand-pick Christian candidates. Opposition unity was also shaken by accusations that, while they all publicly supported the small-district election law, many of them secretly favored the continuation of the old large-district law. It was also shaken by disagreements between Michel Aoun, who returned to Lebanon in early May after fifteen years in exile, and other members of the opposition who were wary of giving Aoun too much room or too many seats in the new parliament.

Nevertheless, the elections will take place over four Sundays, between May 29 and June 19. They will bring an overwhelming majority of deputies opposed to Syrian influence. The main blocs in parliament will be, in order of size, a Hariri bloc, a Junblatt bloc, a Hizbullah bloc, an Amal bloc, and blocs for Aoun, the Lebanese Forces (the Christian former militia), and the Lebanese Kataib Party. Although Amal and Hizbullah were on the pro-Syrian side in the recent standoff, they have been in alliance with Hariri and Junblatt during the elections. Exactly what alliance patterns will emerge among the various blocs after the elections is yet to be seen.

Among the main issues immediately facing the new parliament is whether to abrogate the two years left of President Lahoud's term and elect a new president. With a two-thirds majority in parliament, this can be done by amending the constitution to cancel the extension that was granted him in 2004. The issue then would be whom to elect to the presidency. There are several candidates for this position, including Aoun and various other Maronite politicians some allied with Hariri and others members of the Christian opposition coalition known as Qornet Shehwan. A second key issue is whether to reelect Amal leader Nabih Berri as Speaker of Parliament or choose someone else; there is widespread sentiment that Berri, who has served throughout the post-war period, has been too embroiled in corruption and has not developed parliament into an effective and democratic institution.

The upcoming contests for the posts of president and speaker of parliament are fairly open; the race for the prime ministership is much more restricted. The Prime Minister's post had been dominated by Rafiq Hariri; consequently, the Hariri family and their large political following now will have the primary say in who occupies this post. The family has named his second son, Saadeddine, to carry on his father's political role; he may choose to be Prime Minister, or he might name someone from their bloc to occupy the post.

In any case, much will depend on the successful leadership and cooperation between the new President and Prime Minister, and the new (or old) Speaker of Parliament. There is much to be done in Lebanon in terms of reinforcing the sovereignty of the state, the dominance of the Lebanese armed forces after the Syrian withdrawal, the restructuring of Lebanon's international relations, the development of Lebanon's democracy, the implementation of necessary internal reforms, and the re-launching of the Lebanese economy. The country will also be awaiting the results of the International Investigative Commission that was set up by UNSCR 1595 that is tasked with finding out the truth about the assassination of Hariri. The investigation might reach high up into both the Lebanese and Syrian political and security superstructures, with dramatic and unpredictable consequences.

Immediate attention, as well, must be paid to the issue of Hizbullah and its potential disarmament, as required in UNSCR 1559, alongside the question of what to do about the armed Palestinian groups in the refugee camps. All this must be done in an environment of continued tension and uncertainty with regard to US-Syrian tensions, US-Iranian relations, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Lebanon has been given a great opportunity by regaining its independence and sovereignty. It has the potential to make great strides toward building a truly democratic, free, and prosperous society. But, as a small and still somewhat segmented country in a turbulent environment, its path forward weaves through a minefield.

What has Changed?

A number of important changes have taken place over the recent months.

1. The international environment has changed dramatically. Syrian control of Lebanon since 1990 had been indirectly condoned by the United States who had needed Syria at the time during the construction of its Arab coalition against Iraq in the first Gulf War. France, Europe and most of the Arab world had gone along with this arrangement as the most handy solution to

the seemingly endless Lebanese war. After the death of Hafiz al-Assad, after September 11, and most recently after the assassination of Rafiq Hariri, Syria lost the regional and international acceptance for its role in Lebanon that it had once enjoyed, while Lebanon has reemerged as the subject of intense Arab, European and American interest. Whereas Lebanon in 1990 was an open wound that somebody needed to patch up; Lebanon in 2005 represents something quite different to the international community. For the Bush administration, the independence and success of Lebanon is now seen as an important feather in the cap of Bush's freedom and democratization 'vision' for the Middle East; for France, liberating Lebanon brings back a historic friend of France on the eastern Mediterranean; for Saudi Arabia, other Gulf states, Egypt, Jordan and other Sunni Arab countries, pushing the Alawi regime out of Lebanon is partly in retaliation for the assassination of Hariri, who after all was also a Sunni and a Saudi citizen, and partly to create balances in light of the eclipse of Sunni power by Shiite power in Iraq. Lebanon, today, has a dramatically different value and meaning in regional and international affairs than it did only a few years ago.

2. The international changes have also affected Hizbullah directly. Without Syrian political and military cover, Hizbullah's supply lines of money and materiel from Iran have been seriously jeopardized. Also, after the Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon in May 2000, Hizbullah has been having an increasingly hard time justifying its continued possession of weapons to the wider Lebanese public. The head of Hizbullah, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, has been very active over the past weeks reaching out to all sides in the Lebanese political scene and trying to find a path and a place for Hizbullah in the new Lebanon. Most Lebanese are still respectful and friendly to Hizbullah, as they credit it with pushing the Israelis out of Lebanon and they credit it with not abusing its power as other militias had done in the past. Hizbullah has remained a very professional group that has not become openly associated with corruption, smuggling or mafia-style behavior as most war-time militias did. Most Lebanese, therefore, make a distinction between the two main clauses of UNSCR 1559: they wholeheartedly supported an immediate Syrian withdrawal under international pressure; but with regard to the disarming of Hizbullah, they prefer that this be done in a cooperative and gradual manner in full consultation with Hizbullah and as part of a Lebanese process not a process imposed or forced by the United States or the United Nations. There are two issues closely related to the Hizbullah disarmament issue: the first is that most Shiites in the South remember that the PLO and other armed Palestinian groups largely ruled South Lebanon between the late 1960s and 1982; they fear a return to such a situation if Hizbullah precipitously disarms without strong military and political guarantees against a re-deployment of Palestinian-predominantly Sunni-armed groups from the camps into the South. Second, many Shiites as well as other Lebanese believe that Hizbullah, after having pushed the Israelis out of Lebanon, is a main deterrent against any future Israeli attacks or invasions of South Lebanon. They fear that if Hizbullah is disarmed, the Lebanese state and army would not be willing or capable of retaliating or inflicting any noticeable deterrent punishment on Israel. Nevertheless, Hizbullah, which has been a main player in postwar Lebanon, is facing dramatic new conditions in the post-Syrian era, and is looking for ways to move forward. It is likely that there will have to be intensive regional and international efforts in order to achieve a gradual disarmament of Hizbullah, along with a significant change in the situation of armed groups in the Palestinian camps, as well as some form of progress on the Arab-Israeli peace process.
3. Rafiq Hariri, who was the main political and economic leader in the post-war period, is gone. Hariri had many supporters and many detractors, but there was no denying that he was the main engine of the post-war period. With him gone, Lebanon has lost a clear and powerful leadership; it must fall back on its republican past and find ways to supplant his personal leadership with a more collective, yet effective, form of cooperative and collective leadership.
4. The political class is going through a period of significant flux. The politicians that constitute the political class today are the mixed result of fifteen years of war followed by fifteen years of Syrian control. Many will soon disappear from the political scene, others will have to quickly adapt to the new realities, and some newcomers will emerge. All politicians will have to move

away from the Syrian-brokered habits of the past and find ways to build national coalitions without help or obstruction from abroad.

5. They will also have to deal with another major change which is the awakening and empowerment of the people. Most of the Lebanese population had been beaten into fear, disillusionment and passivity by the fifteen years of war and fifteen years of foreign domination. However, the assassination of Hariri and the international community's stand against the Syrian presence triggered an explosion of emotion and will-power among most Lebanese. The demonstrations of March 14 brought out a third of the entire population of the country. Such a ratio of public participation occurs only rarely in history. The population has reemerged as a potent force in political life and the political class will have to take account of their demands in the months and years to come.

What Has Remained the Same?

Despite all the major changes taking place, there are many elements of stability and continuity, among them the following:

1. Unlike in Iraq, where a shift in external power brought about a fundamental change in the regime, state institutions and society, the changes in Lebanon are taking place within the context of constitutional and institutional continuity. The Lebanese constitution has been in force (with only minor suspensions under the French during World War II) since its writing in 1926. Fundamental amendments were made only twice: in 1943 to eliminate the clauses relating to the French Mandate, and in 1990 to introduce changes in the communal power-sharing formula agreed upon in the war-ending Taif Agreement of 1989. There have been regular parliamentary elections since 1927, except during the Lebanese War of 1975–1990, and fairly orderly transfers of executive power, despite the extension of the president's term twice in the post-war period, in 1995 and 2004. In addition, the military and civilian institutions of the state have existed and developed since the French Mandate era—even though their reach was dramatically circumscribed during the Lebanese War. Lebanon has had the institutions and political culture of statehood and cooperative electoral-based government for many decades. Although Lebanon faces much change, it is not embarked on some brand new political adventure or experiment, but rather reinforcing institutions and behavior patterns that it already has.
2. One of the elements that saw Lebanese society through the fifteen years of war without the dramatic collapse that we have seen in Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan and elsewhere, is a strong and vibrant civil society. Lebanon never had a totalitarian state unlike many other states in the region, hence its civil society developed steadily throughout the 20th century. Although Lebanese civil society is a mix of rather traditional communally-based associations as well as more modern and democratic-oriented civic groups, both types of associations and institutions provide a rich web of intermediate institutions, organizations and networks that provide strength and durability to the society even at times when the state is in great flux or has all but disappeared. This is one of the sources of Lebanon's strength and survival even in the most difficult of times.
3. One of the major elements of continuity and stability is the Lebanese Army. This army is still the center of much national identification and pride. Although it suffered divisions during the war, the Army was reunited after the war, and since almost all families have one or more of their extended family members in the army, it is a national institution that most people identify with directly. While the political class and the intelligence services got involved deeply in the political and security manipulation by Syria during the past fifteen years, the army was partly kept out of the process and was instead accorded standard military and security-keeping functions. During the recent confrontations between the government and the opposition, the army quietly took a moderate position, not openly disobeying government orders, but at the same time not clashing with opposition demonstrators and often looking the other way in order to facilitate their gatherings. Although the Army is no match for any of its neighbors, it is a strong force in terms of internal security. It is the largest and strongest institution in the state and society, and is functioning as a pillar of stability and transitional security in the current period.
4. With regard to external relations, although Lebanon is thrilled to be rid of the Syrian military and intelligence presence, most Lebanese still agree that

it is in Lebanon's interest to maintain close relations with Syria. The Lebanese understand that they have many common interests with Syria; but more importantly, they realize that if they drift into policies or alliances that are hostile to Syria they are likely to pay a very high price. Mainly this means that the Lebanese are largely agreed that they are not willing to pursue separate peace talks with Israel, if Syria is not going along as well. After the Israeli withdrawal of 2000, Lebanon does not have any major territorial disagreements with Israel except the minor issue of the Shebaa Farms on the Lebanese, Syrian, Israeli border. Syria, on the other hand has the entire Golan Heights to reclaim. Lebanon cannot afford to move ahead with separate peace talks with Israel and risk seriously angering Syria. Indeed, most Lebanese feel that, given how many times other Arab countries have accused Lebanon or Lebanese of treason, Lebanon is happy to be among the last in line of Arab countries signing peace with Israel.

Prospects for Stability, Democracy, Good Governance and Prosperity

Lebanon is currently enjoying a high level of internal unity. A thirty-year Syrian presence has come to an end. Following on Israel's withdrawal in 2000, Lebanon now has the opportunity to be sovereign in all its territory. A coalition of Arab and Western countries is keen to help Lebanon reinforce its sovereignty and take firm steps toward rebuilding its democracy and economy. The reasons for the outbreak of war in 1975 are no longer present; and the country has most of the institutions that would enable it to develop a well-functioning state, democracy and economy. Lebanon is facing a historic opportunity to move forward. For the first time in many years, the future of Lebanon is in Lebanese hands again.

The challenge now largely falls on the political leadership that will take the lead in the coming months. Will they have the vision and skills to reinforce national unity, develop state and democratic institutions, institute necessary reforms, and kick-start the economy? Will the population and civil society maintain the pressure on the political class to deliver necessary unity, reform and change? Or will Lebanon fall victim to political bickering and division, as it has on several occasions in its recent history, and lose this historic opportunity?

It is difficult to predict the answers to these key questions, as the country moves toward decisive parliamentary elections followed by decisive elections for the presidency, the prime ministership, and perhaps the speakership of parliament. The new leaders of tomorrow's Lebanon, most of whom are in the opposition today, will have to avoid falling into old patterns of division and disagreement. They will have to make a concerted effort to develop a shared program of reforms and policy initiatives in order to take advantage of the power shift that is taking place. They must do more than just kick the Syrians and their allies out of power; they must bring meaningful and useful change to the country.

Two main potential sources of instability in the coming period relate to Syria and South Lebanon, respectively. With regard to the former, if US-Syrian tensions continue to escalate and turn into pressures for regime change, a cornered Syria might lash out in Lebanon as well as elsewhere. Lebanon could scarce guard against the repercussions of such lashing out. Also, if the Syrian regime is overthrown, Lebanon would also bear the consequences: it is conceivable that a change of regime might be achieved through a quick *coup d'etat* that does not lead to a breakdown of order; but it is perhaps more likely that a change of regime might be accompanied and followed by a breakdown of law and order and near civil war, along the Iraqi model. This would be a dangerous if not disastrous scenario for Lebanon, given the proximity and inter-connectedness of the two countries.

With regard to South Lebanon, Lebanon has to find a way to deal with Hizbullah, the armed Palestinian groups, and Israel. UNSCR 1559 calls for the disarming of all non-government armed groups in Lebanon which includes Hizbullah and the Palestinian armed groups. This can only be achieved through intensive and delicate negotiations involving Hizbullah, the Palestinian leadership, as well as Iran, the United States, and indirectly, Israel.

Assuming that these two risk areas do not cause major security eruptions, Lebanon is likely to move in a positive direction. The removal of the Syrian domination of the country, is likely to lead, almost by definition, to increased sovereignty and better democracy. This in itself is likely to lead to a significant improvement in governance. There is much that needs to be done to enhance the benefits of this opportunity, but the general direction of change in this regard will probably be positive, even without major visionary leadership.

On the economic level, although Lebanon will continue to struggle with a massive debt burden, these changes in sovereignty, freedom, and governance can only have a positive effect on Lebanese, Arab and foreign investment in the country and on

the prospects for economic growth. Even in the difficult circumstances of the past, Lebanon achieved stunning strides in rebuilding the country after the war and in re-establishing a place for itself as an emerging hub of regional tourism and services. If this could be achieved under Syrian occupation, it is likely that much more can be done without it, even if its main architect, Rafiq Hariri, is no longer present.

The Role of the United States and the International Community

When all is said and done, the fact is that it was mainly the United States that pushed Syria out of Lebanon. Although Hariri may have been behind the idea for UNSCR 1559, and that he might have persuaded French President Chirac to engineer it, the fact is that had Chirac not convinced President Bush, and had the Bush Administration not provided the power to back it up, Syria would have been able to ignore the resolution.

While Lebanese are grateful to the United States, France, the United Nations, Saudi Arabia, and the international community for prevailing on Syria to get out of Lebanon, they are very concerned that Lebanon might break loose of one foreign domination only to end up under another. The examples of US-managed governments in Afghanistan or Iraq are neither appealing nor successful. Lebanon is a complex and delicate country. The United States should be careful not to overplay its hand, and not to interpret the ease with which Syria left the country as equivalent to the ease with which the United States could get directly involved in the country.

The United States, as well as Europe, the United Nations and the rest of the international and Arab community, should follow up their effective liberation of Lebanon with strong encouragement for Lebanon to reconstitute a strong, sovereign, and democratic state. The international community should help this new state rebuild its institutions and restart its struggling economy. Lebanon has the institutions and individuals to carry out these tasks, and the international community can successfully support an indigenous process. With regard to Hizbullah, which is the main US and UN-related demand of international concern within Lebanon, this should be done gradually and diplomatically. Lebanese understand that this issue cannot be postponed indefinitely, but the international community must understand that it cannot be achieved overnight and that it is connected to issues relating to the Palestinians, Israelis and Iranians. It must be said that both US and UN diplomats have been very balanced in their recent approach to these thorny issues, and have exhibited understanding of their complexities.

It would seem that after decades of division, domination and distress, Lebanon might finally be on the path to sovereignty, unity, democracy and development. The country has benefited greatly from the support of the international community. Further support should see Lebanon consolidate the historic opportunity that is before it and move toward a better future. Lebanon can then recapture its role as an example of democracy, prosperity and religious coexistence that is of great importance not only within the Arab and Islamic worlds, but within the international community as well.

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Paul Salem is a writer and political analyst based in Lebanon. He is the author of *Bitter Legacy: Ideology and Politics in the Arab World* (Syracuse Univ. Press, 1994), the editor of *Conflict Resolution in the Arab World* (American Univ. Press, 1997), and the author of various studies on issues of governance, development and socio-cultural issues in Lebanon and the Arab world. He is the founder and former editor of various periodicals including the *Beirut Review*, the *Lebanon Report* and *Abaad: A Journal of Lebanese and Arab Studies* (in Arabic). He was a contributor to the UNDP Arab Human Development Report and the World Bank's recent study on Governance in the Arab World. He is currently completing a manuscript entitled *Nation, Interrupted: The Troubled Journey of Modern Lebanon*, and working on a manuscript entitled *Essays on the Arab Predicament*. He pursued his undergraduate and graduate studies at Harvard University, receiving his Ph.D. in political science from there in 1987. He taught at the *American University of Beirut* between 1987 and 1999. He is the founder and former director (1989–1999) of the *Lebanese Center for Policy Studies*, Lebanon's leading policy think tank. He is a founding member of several advocacy NGOs in Lebanon including the *Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections*, the *National Coalition for Local Elections*, the *Lebanese Transparency Association*, and the *Lebanese Conflict Resolution Network*. Most recently, he has served as the Director of the Fares Foundation, a Lebanese non-profit charity and development organization. He is currently running for parliament.

Chairman HYDE. Thank you, Dr. Salem. Next, Dr. Marius Deeb, a professor at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies. Dr. Deeb.

STATEMENT OF MARIUS DEEB, PH.D., PROFESSOR, MIDDLE EAST STUDIES PROGRAM, PAUL H. NITZE SCHOOL OF ADVANCED INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

Mr. DEEB. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Committee, for inviting me to testify today. The Cedar Revolution in Lebanon would not have been possible without the UN Security Council Resolution 1559 of September 2, 2004, which empowered the Lebanese people to rise up against Syrian tyrannical domination.

The models they emulated were those of the Rose Revolution in Georgia, and the Orange Revolution in the Ukraine. The culmination of the Cedar Revolution occurred on March 14, 2005, as you know, when the political opposition mounted an unprecedented peaceful and non-violent rally of 1.2 million Lebanese calling for freedom from Syria, and the withdrawal of troops and intelligence apparatus, al-Mukhabarat, from Lebanese territory.

The Cedar Revolution, as I see it, has three objectives. First and most important, the end of the Syrian military occupation. This was achieved in large measure in the aftermath of demonstrations and officially completed by April 26, 2005.

Whether all Syrian intelligence, al-Mukhabarat, agents have left Lebanon is a moot question. For almost three decades, Syria's occupation of Lebanon transformed a number of political parties and organizations into instruments of its own intelligence services.

Those included minor parties like the Lebanese branch of the Syrian Ba'ath Party, and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, as well as major organizations such as Nabih Berri's Amal Movement and Hezbollah.

I argue that although Syria has withdrawn its army and its official intelligence apparatus from Lebanon, it still maintains a very large Trojan horse called Hezbollah.

The second objective of the Cedar Revolution is to achieve a complete reconciliation between the various religious communities. This attempt at reconciling all parties began as early as the summer of 2000 when the Maronite Patriarch Cardinal Sfeir visited the Druze leader, Walid Junblat.

The visit was followed by the reconciliation of the Druze leader and the former Lebanese President Amin Gemayel, a Maronite, and eventually with Samir Ja'Ja', the Maronite leader of the Lebanese forces.

A reconciliation between the Druze and the Christians is the sine quon non condition for the renewal of Lebanon, because these two communities were instrumental in their creation of Lebanon in the late 16th century.

Although reconciliation among the various religious communities has been practically achieved, there is still the issue of granting amnesty to the officers and the rank-and-file of the dissolved South Lebanon Army. This demand has been voiced recently by the

Maronite Patriarch Sfeir, and it seems that a solution is in the offing.

A third objective of the Cedar Revolution is for the Lebanese to be free, and to be able to enjoy the basic freedoms of speech, of the press, of worship, as well as to have free elections, and a free independent judiciary.

Lebanon is a religiously divided society, and therefore the only democracy possible according to the political scientist theorist, Arend Lijphart, is what is called Consociational Democracy, a genre of democracy that represents all communities and not just the majority. His theory was based on his comparative study of Lebanon and Switzerland.

Unfortunately, the recent Parliamentary elections which were held in May and June 2005 were not conducive to this form of representation. The electoral law applied in the recent elections was created in 2000 by the head of the Syrian intelligence services.

Its purpose was to pit the various religious communities against each other by marginalizing the Christian communities in Beirut, the south, and the north. It was also custom-made to serve the interests of the Amal organization and Hezbollah, the leading Syrian proxies in Lebanon.

The Maronite Patriarch Sfeir called, to no avail, for the return to the 1960 electoral law, which divided Lebanon into smaller constituencies, and allowed voters to be familiar with the candidates and choose those they believed would best present their interests.

To achieve a balance within Lebanon, a new electoral law should be divided based on the 1960 electoral system, so that all religious communities feel represented and full members of the Lebanese polity.

The Christians should not be treated as Dhimmis, that is, second-class citizens, and be dependent on leaders from other religious communities to represent them. They should be able to choose their own representatives in Parliament.

After an electoral law is issued, a new Parliament should be elected to reflect the will of the Lebanese electorate. Unless this is done, long-term stability will remain permanently elusive.

To safeguard what has already been achieved by the Cedar Revolution, it is of the utmost importance that the UN Resolution 1559 is fully implemented. This means implementing the resolution to dissolve all militias, which is primarily Hezbollah.

The disarming of Hezbollah will not only benefit Lebanon, but also the Middle East and the West. It will eliminate the second most powerful terrorist organization in the world, after al-Qaeda.

Hezbollah, working for its two masters, Iran and Syria, was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Americans and Europeans starting with the suicide bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut on April 18, 1983, and the simultaneous suicide bombing of the United States Marines and French troops of the multi-national force on October 23, 1983, through hostage-taking during the 1980s, and continuing with its role in the Khobar bombing in Saudi Arabia, targeting American servicemen on June 25, 1996.

One can argue that the terrorism perpetrated by the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah triangle prepared the group and inspired bin Laden's al-Qaeda. Lebanon would be the first to benefit from the disarming

of Hezbollah because it would mean putting an end to the existence of a state within a state in the regions of Lebanon controlled by Hezbollah.

The Lebanese national army could disarm Hezbollah peacefully or otherwise, because no sovereign state should tolerate a militia which controls part of its territory. Second, Syria's political influence would be weakened because Hezbollah is the major Syrian proxy in Lebanon. Third, disarming Hezbollah would debunk the myth that it is a resistance movement, with the objective of liberating Lebanon from Israeli forces.

Today, it justifies its existence by claiming that Israel is still occupying part of Lebanon, namely the Shebaa Farms, and that it, Hezbollah, is defending Lebanon's territorial integrity.

When Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon, and dismantled its security zone on May 24, 2000—

Mr. ISSA [presiding]. Dr. Deeb, could I ask you to very quickly sum up. And I apologize, but they have called a vote, and there won't be any opportunity to have a dialogue if you go any longer.

Mr. DEEB. I thought I had less minutes than previous speakers, but on May 24, 2000, President Hafiz Asad panicked and decided to create a pretext for keeping a low intensity conflict across the Israeli-Lebanese border by claiming that a small enclave of the Golan Heights called Shebaa Farms belonged to Lebanon.

That was used to justify keeping Hezbollah fully armed and deployed at the Lebanese-Israeli border. The people of southern Lebanon would be relieved if Hezbollah were to be disarmed, because the so-called war of liberation, which was fought by Hezbollah for the last 20 years, was a senseless war contrived by Syria, which has brought them nothing but death and destruction.

I have demonstrated in my book, *Syria's Terrorist War on Lebanon and the Peace Process*, how Israel was willing to withdraw from Lebanon as early as 1983, when it signed the May 17, 1983, agreement with Lebanon under the sponsorship of the United States.

Mr. ISSA. Dr. Deeb, with unanimous consent, your entire statement is going to be included in the record. I hope that you would understand—

Mr. DEEB. Okay. Let me summarize. In summary, I maintain that a genuinely representative democratic system in Lebanon can be achieved, first, by the creation of a new electoral law devised to satisfy all the religious communities. And, second, by the full implementation of UN Resolution 1559, which would eliminate the state within the state created by Hezbollah, and its political ally, Amal, and would curb the corruption which has become pervasive in Lebanon under Syrian domination.

If these conditions are changed, then Hezbollah could be challenged and even defeated at the polls, and Lebanon can become a freer and more democratic polity. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Deeb follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MARIUS DEEB, PH.D., PROFESSOR, MIDDLE EAST STUDIES PROGRAM, PAUL H. NITZE SCHOOL OF ADVANCED INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

HOW TO SAFEGUARD THE CEDAR REVOLUTION IN LEBANON

Thank you Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee, for inviting me to testify today. The Cedar Revolution in Lebanon would not have been possible without the UN Security Council Resolution 1559 of September 2, 2004 which empowered the Lebanese people to rise up against Syrian tyrannical domination. The models they emulated were those of the Rose Revolution in Georgia, and the Orange Revolution in the Ukraine. The culmination of the Cedar Revolution occurred on March 14, 2005 when the political opposition mounted an unprecedented peaceful and non-violent rally of 1.2 million Lebanese calling for freedom from Syria and the withdrawal of its troops and intelligence apparatus (al-Mukhabarat) from Lebanese territory.

The Cedar Revolution, as I see it, has three objectives. First and most important, the end of the Syrian military occupation—this was achieved in large measure in the aftermath of the demonstrations, and officially completed by April 26, 2005. Whether all Syrian Intelligence (al-Mukhabarat) agents have left Lebanon is a moot question. For almost three decades, Syria's occupation of Lebanon, transformed a number of political parties and organizations into instruments of its own Intelligence Services. Those included minor parties like the Lebanese branch of the Syrian Ba'ath Party and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, as well as major organizations such as Nabih Berri's Amal Movement and Hizballah. I argue that although Syria has withdrawn its army and its official Intelligence apparatus from Lebanon, it still maintains a very large Trojan horse called Hizballah.

The second objective of the Cedar Revolution is to achieve a complete reconciliation between the various religious communities. This attempt at reconciling all parties began as early as the Summer of 2000 when the Maronite Patriarch Cardinal Sfair visited the Druze leader Walid Junblat. The visit was followed by the reconciliation of the Druze leader and the former Lebanese president Amin Gemayel (a Maronite), and eventually with Samir Ja'ja', the Maronite leader of the Lebanese Forces. A reconciliation between the Druze and the Christians is the sine quo non condition for the renewal of Lebanon because these two communities were instrumental in the creation of Lebanon in the late 16th century. Although reconciliation among the various religious communities has been practically achieved there is still the issue of granting amnesty to the officers and the rank and file of the dissolved South Lebanon Army. This demand has been voiced recently by the Maronite Patriarch Sfair, and it seems that a solution is in the offing.

The third objective of the Cedar Revolution is for the Lebanese to be free, and to be able to enjoy the basic freedoms of speech, of the press, of worship, as well as to have free elections, and a free independent judiciary. Lebanon is a religiously divided society and therefore the only democracy possible, according to the Political Science theorist Arend Lijphart, is what is called Consociational Democracy, a genre of democracy that represents all communities and not just the majority. His theory was based on his comparative study of Lebanon and Switzerland.

Unfortunately the recent parliamentary elections which were held in May-June 2005 were not conducive to this form of representation. The electoral law, applied in the recent elections, was created in 2000 by the head of the Syrian Intelligence Services. Its purpose was to pit the various religious communities against each other by marginalizing the Christian communities in Beirut, the South and the North. It was also custom-made to serve the interests of the Amal organization and Hizballah, the leading Syrian proxies in Lebanon. The Maronite Patriarch Sfair called, to no avail, for the return to the 1960 electoral law, which divided Lebanon into smaller constituencies, and allowed voters to be familiar with the candidates and choose those they believed would best represent their interests.

To achieve a balance within Lebanon a new electoral law should be devised, based on the 1960 electoral system, so that all religious communities feel represented, and full members of the Lebanese polity. The Christians should not be treated as Dhimmis, that is, second-class citizens, and be dependent on leaders from other religious communities to represent them. They should be able to choose their own representatives in parliament. After an electoral law is issued, a new parliament should be elected to reflect the will of the Lebanese electorate. Unless this is done long-term stability will remain permanently elusive.

To safeguard what has already been achieved by the Cedar Revolution it is of the utmost importance that the UN Resolution 1559 be fully implemented. This means implementing the resolution to dissolve all militias, ie primarily, Hizballah. The dis-

arming of Hizballah will not only benefit Lebanon but also the Middle East and the West. It will eliminate the second most powerful Islamist terrorist organization (after al-Qa'idah) in the world. Hizballah, working for its two masters Iran and Syria, was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Americans and Europeans starting with the suicide bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut on April 18, 1983, and the simultaneous suicide bombing of the U.S. Marines and French troops of the Multi-National Force on October 23, 1983 through hostage-taking during the 1980s and continuing with its role in the Khobar bombing in Saudi Arabia targeting American servicemen on June 25, 1996. One can argue that the terrorism perpetrated by the Iran-Syria-Hizballah triangle prepared the ground and inspired Bin Laden's al-Qa'idah.

Lebanon would be the first to benefit from the disarming of Hizballah because it would mean putting an end to the existence of a state within a state in the regions of Lebanon controlled by Hizballah. The Lebanese national army could disarm Hizballah peacefully or otherwise, because no sovereign state should tolerate a militia which controls part of its territory. Second, Syria's political influence would be weakened because Hizballah is the major Syrian proxy in Lebanon. Third, disarming Hizballah would debunk the myth that it is a resistance movement with the objective of liberating Lebanon from Israeli forces. Today it justifies its existence by claiming that Israel is still occupying part of Lebanon, namely the Shib'a Farms, and that it, Hizballah is defending Lebanon's territorial integrity.

When Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon and dismantled its security zone on May 24, 2000, President Hafiz Asad panicked and decided to create a pretext for keeping a low-intensity conflict across the Lebanese-Israeli border by claiming that a small enclave of the Golan Heights called Shib'a Farms belonged to Lebanon. That was used to justify keeping Hizballah fully armed and deployed at the Lebanese-Israeli border.

The people of southern Lebanon would be relieved if Hizballah were to be disarmed, because the so-called war of liberation which was fought by Hizballah for the last twenty years was a senseless war contrived by Syria, which has brought them nothing but death and destruction. I have demonstrated in my book *Syria's Terrorist War on Lebanon and the Peace Process* how Israel was willing to withdraw from Lebanon as early as 1983 when it signed the May 17, 1983 Agreement with Lebanon under the sponsorship of the U.S. Syria fought this agreement, in order to keep the Lebanese-Israeli border ablaze, and Hizballah its tool for war and terrorism.

Fourth, the disarming of Hizballah will have an immediate impact on its two masters Iran and Syria. It would curtail considerably their ability to engage in terrorism against Lebanon, the West and Israel with impunity as they had done throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

Fifth, the disarming of Hizballah will remove the threat that it poses against Israel because it has deployed an estimated nine thousand Katyusha rockets, and has received from Iran the 240-millimeter Fajr-3 missiles with range of 25 miles, and the 333-millimeter Fajr-5 missiles with a range of 45 miles. Hizballah has also received from Syria the 222-millimeters rockets with a range of 18 miles.

Sixth, Hizballah has developed strong ties with the Palestinian organizations Hamas and Islamic Jihad and has inspired them and has helped them in their terrorist operations. Therefore disarming Hizballah would curb those who seek to undermine the peace process.

Seven, a leading operative of Hizballah, Imad Mughniya, who is on the list of twenty-two most wanted terrorists issued by President Bush on October 10, 2001, has links with Bin Laden's al-Qa'idah since the mid-1990s. He trained members of al-Qa'idah to launch coordinated simultaneous terrorist operations. Therefore disarming Hizballah would make a dent in our war against terrorism.

In summary, I maintain that a genuinely representative democratic system in Lebanon can be achieved first, by the creation of a new electoral law devised to satisfy all the religious communities. And second, by the full implementation of UN Resolution 1559 which would eliminate the state within the state created by Hizballah and its political ally Amal. This would undoubtedly curtail the practice of Muhasassa, and would curb the corruption which has become pervasive in Lebanon under Syrian domination. The popularity of Hizballah is exaggerated because it is based on fear as Hizballah is heavily armed and is based also on its usurpation of the powers of the state in the regions which are under its control. If these conditions are changed then Hizballah could be challenged and even defeated at the polls and Lebanon can become a freer and more democratic polity.

Mr. ISSA. And I want to thank you. I apologize, as Ranking Member Watson is having to head to the Floor, and we are unfortu-

nately going to be going to vote. I have slightly faster running legs, and so I will remain for a minute or 2 more.

Dr. Salem, I felt your statements were very thorough and balanced, and actually both of yours were, but I was particularly interested in each of you touching on the election law.

I would be the first to say that the election law was conceived without the best interests of fair voting. I will also say though that being a Californian, I know what gerrymandering is.

And so this is gerrymandering. I was in Lebanon when the proposal was made that we go to something much more consistent with Rafik Hariri's final vision of where he would like to end up.

And of course as you both know, that was rejected just as affirmatively, because Lebanon was not ready for, if you will, an at-large election. What I would like to know is that in your opinion that in spite of the gerrymandering, and in spite of using the old election law, how different in your opinions would the outcome have been?

And I don't want to say that we would have less Hezbollah, or more Hezbollah, or more Druzes, or that we might have more Christians, but as to the pro-reform, non-pro-reform, Syrian influenced, non-Syrian influenced, those major blocs, how different could it have actually been, no matter how you redid the election law?

Mr. SALEM. Well, it is a terribly complex thing, and I am not going to be able to claim to summarize it. It is not as simple as it looks obviously. I think the main drawback of going with the 2000 law, the main drawback was really the effect that it had on the population, and the credibility of the process.

Frankly, a lot of the politicians are the same faces, and a lot of the new faces belong to the old faces. There might have been a bit more of this, or a bit more of that. And it is incorrect to summarize the current balance as anti-Syrian and pro-Syrian.

As you know, Michel Aoun made alliances because the election law sort of forced him to do so in order to get somebody in Parliament. I would say that the main drawback is that after the mood of March 14, going back to an old law and a law in which you had huge districts in which you cannot really determine the outcome, just had a negative impact between the political class and the population.

Now, any new law for elections in Lebanon, there is no simple answer to what law is the best. The country is very complex, and the confessional situation is very complicated. I would say, and I would always say, that the tandem law, which is perhaps more important, is a law to organize political party life before the electoral law. And that is part of the government's platform as well.

Mr. ISSA. I want to make sure that my colleague in gerrymandering, Mr. Sherman, gets an opportunity to have his question.

Mr. SHERMAN. I just want to thank you for holding these hearings. I know that we have a vote soon.

Mr. ISSA. That is a record. As you both know, the United States Government's official position, congressionally and the Executive Branch, is that we will not in any way, shape, or form deal with members of terrorist organizations.

And that does not cease simply because somebody is elected in a free and fair election, or a non-free and fair election. How best

should the United States work with the existing government and existing Parliament in Lebanon?

And I particularly want to point out that since the Minister for Energy and Water is a Hezbollah member, and water is one of the issues in which the United States has a vested interest in engaging, how should we do that?

Mr. DEEB. I think as was mentioned before, it is very unfortunate that a Hezbollah member is in the Cabinet. He was not in the Cabinet when the Syrians were in domination, I suppose, because they had their Syrian patrons and they did not need to do that.

But I think there is no way of dealing with Hezbollah. I mean, Hezbollah is in the southern part of Lebanon, where it claims it has popularity. It is through fear that people work for it. If you have a heavily-armed militia, and there is no state, they have usurped the state's power.

And then obviously you have no choice, and that if you don't vote for them, you will not get a penny. You will not get any services. So, you cannot really have free elections in Lebanon with an armed militia controlling parts of Lebanon.

I mean, this is very clear, and therefore, even if you have a new electoral vote, which is an absolute necessity, the disarming of Hezbollah and other militias should precede the new election. I mean, this is so obvious that I can't see how people don't realize that.

And Hezbollah, of course, has links to al-Qaeda, and links to all kinds of terrorist organizations, and being a creation of its two masters, Iran and Syria, by disarming Hezbollah, we do so many good things, like weakening Syria and Iran, like weakening terrorism. It is a dent in our war against terrorism.

So I don't see how we can deal with a government which has a Hezbollah member, or has a foreign minister who was a former member and still close to Hezbollah. And I think this was done on purpose in case Hezbollah does not want to disarm. But I think the first business that we should do is disarm Hezbollah and the other militias. Otherwise, I don't think that Lebanon would move forward at all.

Mr. ISSA. Thank you very much, both Dr. Deeb and Dr. Salem. My apologies. Like Pavlov's dogs, we answer the bell. We would like to leave the record open for 2 weeks, and ask you to submit any additional answers or thoughts you may have.

And can I also ask would you accept questions from members of the panel that were unable to be here or had to leave? Thank you. Then with unanimous consent, which I am confident that I will get here today, we will leave the record open for 2 weeks, and appreciate your ability to do the dialogue by proxy. And with that, we are adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:56 p.m., the Committee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD

RESPONSES FROM THE HONORABLE C. DAVID WELCH, ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE HONORABLE HENRY J. HYDE, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, AND CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Question:

What is the size and strength of the Lebanese army? Does it currently have the capacity to secure all its borders and disarm all militias? Please describe in detail what is needed by the Lebanese army to help accomplish this task.

Response:

The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) consists of Army, Navy, and Air Force and numbers 58,000 troops. Insufficient funding for personnel, training, and equipment remains a problem and we believe that external assistance will be required to ensure that the LAF can successfully complete its mission of deploying throughout the country and securing Lebanese borders. The international community stands ready to conduct an in-depth multilateral assessment of the needs of the LAF, pending a formal invitation from the Lebanese government. However, the question of disarming militias and deploying to southern Lebanon is about more than funding—it is also a question of political will. Until the Lebanese government agrees internally on the necessity of disarmament and deployment, additional equipment will not ensure the LAF is able to deploy and disarm.

Question:

In your testimony you mentioned the possibility of being invited by the Government of Lebanon to conduct an assessment of their security services. Has that invitation been extended? If so, what is the time frame for the completion of the study and will its findings be shared with the public? Will the assessment cover possible roles for the United States' participation in the rehabilitation of the security services?

Response:

The Lebanese government has not yet extended the invitation. We will begin discussions with the Lebanese on the scope and timeframe of the assessment team once we have received the invitation.

Question:

Are there any plans by the Administration to seek Israel's withdrawal from the Shebaa Farms in the near future?

Response:

On June 16, 2000, the U.N. determined that Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon was complete and total in accordance with UNSCR 425 (1978). The U.N. Security Council endorsed this conclusion in a Council President's Statement on June 18, 2000. According to the U.N. determination, the Shebaa Farms are Syrian territory. The U.S. fully supports this position. The Administration is not seeking any new assurances on Shebaa Farms. The State Department has engaged in discussions with the governments of Israel and Lebanon regarding maintaining calm and respect for the U.N.-demarcated line of withdrawal and in the Shebaa Farms area. The State Department continues to encourage extension of sole Lebanese government authority throughout the whole of Lebanon's sovereign territory consistent with UNSCR 1559 and others.

Question:

Are there any plans to reevaluate the security threats posed to United States government officials in Lebanon?

Response:

Embassy Beirut remains a critical threat post and we continue to evaluate all threats to our mission and personnel on a regular basis.

Question:

What is the capacity—and inclination—of the Lebanese military to staunch the flow of arms across the Syrian border to Hizballah?

Response:

As with disarmament and deployment to southern Lebanon, staunching the flow of arms across the Syrian border is more than a question of capacity. It is also a question of political will and is contingent upon a decision by the Lebanese government to deal with the problem. Border security along the Syrian-Lebanese border is a patchwork of different agencies with different responsibilities, complicated by a lack of communication between the Syrian and Lebanese border officials. The July cross-border tensions and virtual economic blockade of the Lebanese border by the Syrian government highlighted the lack of cooperation that exists along the border. We continue to urge the Lebanese government to address the arms flow not only to Hizballah, but also to Palestinian rejectionist groups.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE DAN BURTON, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF INDIANA, AND CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

Mr. Chairman, thank you for convening this important and timely hearing to highlight the progress of democratic revitalization being made by the people of Lebanon as they embrace the spirit of democracy that is now spreading throughout the broader Middle East.

Over two years ago, the United States and a brave coalition of allies launched a bold military campaign that resulted in the liberation of some 50 million people. In the process, the U.S.-led Coalition toppled the oppressive Taliban regime in Afghanistan, and overthrew the brutal dictatorship of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. As a result of our actions, the spirits of democracy and freedom are reinvigorating the political debate in the broader Middle East and Islamic world.

As you know, the United States—since the end of the 15-year Lebanese civil war in 1990—has encouraged the reconciliation and rebuilding of Lebanon, while continuing to enjoy our long-standing diplomatic relationship and support of Lebanon's political independence.

In fact, I was pleased to see Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in Lebanon last week, encouraging the new democratic government of Lebanon—free of Syrian control—to strengthen relations between the two countries. As Secretary Rice stated, “The new Lebanon is one that is democratic; the new Lebanon is one that should be free of foreign influence. It is a Lebanon in which the Lebanese should make decisions for Lebanon.”

By way of strong diplomatic relations, the United States has continually opposed foreign occupation of Lebanon, especially the self-directed actions of the Palestinian guerrilla movement from the early 1970s through 1982, and the Syrian occupation from 1976 to 2005, which ultimately led to the beginning of Lebanon's *Cedar Revolution*. The United States must stand firm with our friends in Lebanon as they weed out corruption, grow the economy, and combat terrorism. Unfortunately, Lebanon is not yet free from the ruthless band of thugs who are trying to disrupt the free democratic process. In fact, just hours after Secretary Rice left Lebanon, a 50 pound bomb exploded on a crowded street in Beirut, and many have speculated that the bombing was retaliation for April's withdrawal of Syrian troops.

The Syrian occupation began in March 1976 with 35,000 Syrian troops entering Lebanon in response to then-President Franjyiah's appeal to protect the Christians. However, many have asserted that Syria's direct military intervention came after years of indirect subversion through two guerilla organizations who took their orders directly from Syria. Regardless, as we know, Syria altered their support from the main Christian factions, creating a very tenuous occupation that lasted nearly three decades.

Strong international support, including the U.S. backing of the United Nations Security Resolution 1559, ultimately compelled Syria—after 29 years of occupation—to completely withdraw their forces on April 26, 2005. Furthermore, the with-

drawal of forces resulted after the unfortunate assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri on February 14, 2005, and the subsequent protests against Syria's heavy hand in the Lebanese political system. To mark the one-month anniversary of his assassination and to ultimately intensify pressure on Syria to withdraw its troops immediately, hundreds of thousands of Lebanese rallied—on March 14, 2005—at the grave of P.M. Hariri. Many officials estimated that the demonstration garnered the support of close to one million people and stretched from Martyrs' Square through the city streets, and widely surpassed the Hezbollah rally from the week before. Unfortunately, Syria's withdrawal—while weakening their overall stranglehold on the Lebanese political system—does not, by any means, stop their influence through formal and informal intelligence channels and Lebanese allies who cross sectarian divides.

In addition to the withdrawal of Syrian troops, Lebanon made additional political progress with the recent elections for the National Assembly. The first elections free of Syrian dominance in three decades resulted in intensely contested campaigns that highlighted the long-standing rivalries from Lebanon's devastating civil war. As you know, anti-Syrian supporters—led by former-Prime Minister Hariri's son—gained a majority with 72 seats in Lebanon's 128-member Parliament. In addition, a pro-Syrian was re-elected Speaker of the Parliament and an anti-Syrian was appointed prime minister. More importantly, the coalition vowed to boost Lebanon's economy, fight corruption, and work toward national unity throughout the country.

However—along the same lines—we must be cautious as the new Lebanese government hands out positions to Hezbollah supporters, who are actually required under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559 to disband and disarm. It is my belief that Hezbollah is an agent of the Iranian and Syrian regimes, who are only using Lebanon's delicate balance of power to raise its profile and advance the Hezbollah agenda. As we know all too well, Hezbollah draws on Iranian funding to perform education, health care and employment services in Lebanon, while also galvanizing support for their domestic agenda. Lebanon must be extremely cautious of the underlying Hezbollah agenda and should not bring the organization into government leadership until they renounce terrorism and the incitement of violence against Israelis.

Mr. Chairman, over the past few years, we have witnessed tremendous strides toward democratization: the Rose Revolution in Georgia; an Orange Revolution in Ukraine; a Purple Revolution in Iraq; a Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan; and, the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon. And these are just the beginnings.

Make no mistake about it, freedom is on the march, and the would-be tyrants and ruthless thugs throughout the world should take notice. Terrorist regimes cannot be appeased, so they must be confronted. Congress and the Administration must work together in a spirit of bipartisanship to support democratic transformation in the Middle East. It should be the firm policy of the United States, and the rest of the world to restore freedom, stability, and peace throughout the greater Middle East.

Furthermore, with the Middle East peace process and moves toward greater stability within the region, the recent elections in Iraq, and the potentially destructive regimes of Iran and Syria, we need to ensure that we are all working as a cohesive unit to address the growing situations throughout the Middle East and protect our vital interests within the region.

Once again Mr. Chairman, I thank you for holding this important and timely hearing. I look forward to hearing from the witnesses and hope—by the days end—that we will have a better understanding of how best to move forward in our relationship with and support of Lebanon.

