

**SYRIA: OPTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR
LEBANON AND THE REGION**

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BEFORE THE
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SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIAN AFFAIRS
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THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2007

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

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:38 p.m., in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, John F. Kerry (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Senators Kerry, Feingold, Bill Nelson, Cardin, Casey, Lugar, Coleman, and Sununu.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN F. KERRY, U.S. SENATOR FROM MASSACHUSETTS

Senator KERRY. The hearing will come to order.
Ambassador, great to see you again.

And I apologize to folks for being a little bit late. We had an issue on the DOD conference, and there's a lot trying to happen in short order here, so I do apologize to colleagues and to the witnesses.

Ambassador Welch, we're very grateful to you for coming before the committee. Those of us on the committee know what a distinguished and long career you've had as a Foreign Service officer. I've had the pleasure of being with you in Egypt, and seeing your skills firsthand. I think I was there the moment you got a phone call and were about to become Assistant Secretary of State. I was there during the transition. You've also served as the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, so you are well versed in the region and area, having spent much of your time in the 1980s in key Middle East positions, including in Damascus. We welcome you here today.

This is not the first time that we've taken a hard look at the potential role that Syria could play in the Middle East, and we've had debates before, here, about whether to talk to this regime. Senior statesmen from both parties, from Lee Hamilton to Secretary Baker, have weighed in on the potentially critical role that Syria could play in advancing primary national security interests, and particularly with respect to preserving democracy in Lebanon. But also in stabilizing Iraq and advancing the Middle East peace process, dealing with Iran, and combating terrorism.

We're at a critical moment in Lebanon and the rest of the Middle East. And so, we very much look forward to hearing your views on

Syria's role in these regional questions, and also sharing with us some thoughts about the administration's potential leverage sources with Syria, and its overall strategy with Syria for going forward.

Let me just focus very quickly on the role with Lebanon. Syria, we all know, has had a long history, in terms of Lebanon, and a policy, certainly, of dominating the affairs of the pro-Western government in Lebanon—a government that, almost 3 years after the Cedar Revolution, is literally in a struggle for survival. You could say that the parliamentary majority is attriting by assassination, and it's a stunning situation. I was there just this past year, and was struck, not only to see this gaping hole still in the ground from the Hariri assassination, but to meet with one of the ministers who had undergone his 12th operation after having been bombed in his car. I think he lost his 2-year-old daughter in that bombing. It's an extraordinary story of fear and survival and intimidation, and there remain many unanswered questions about it.

The government today, as a consequence of this is on a precipice. The Parliament is preparing to elect a new President in just 3 weeks. Should ongoing negotiations over a compromise candidate for President fail, the Syrian-backed opposition has threatened to form a parallel shadow government, an act that could severely destabilize Lebanon.

It's no secret that Syria and its supporters in the opposition, including Hezbollah, have worked to undermine Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's government at every turn, and it's no secret that the money and weapons that empower Hezbollah come primarily through Syria, and much of it from Iran.

We are all clear here that we stand strongly in support of free and fair Presidential elections, without intimidation, without interference, and that means leveraging Syria to respect Lebanese sovereignty. An important part of this equation is the special tribunal for Lebanon which has been established to try the assassins of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and other anti-Syrian Lebanese leaders. And we look forward to hearing your views on where that tribunal is now.

Finally, on the reconstruction in Lebanon, when I was there last December, I was struck by how Iran had seized the opportunity to win over the local population by channeling some half a billion dollars of reconstruction funds through Hezbollah—those figures are obviously hard to count—but those are the estimates we heard. We also were told of how Hezbollah flags were brazenly planted on bombed-out buildings, homes from the war, and the message was clear—Hezbollah will rebuild this, this is Hezbollah's property—and, in a sense, an overt challenge to the authority and legitimacy of any governmental efforts, which were handicapped because of the lack of assistance. Since then, the United States has invested some \$770 billion in supplemental assistance, welcome and significant.

We all know of the degree to which Syria has been contributing to the instability in Iraq. In March of this year, Iraq coordinator David Satterfield said that at least 80 percent of the suicide bombers in Iraq had traveled through Syria, and there are continuing reports of Syria's efforts to build ties with—and host—Sunni insur-

gents in Iraq. In September, however, General Petraeus has said that the crossings had fallen to half or two-thirds of that level. So, we need to understand today whether that is some message—is it an overt trend? Is it something that we could perhaps use as an opening in dialogue?

Finally, Syria has played a counterproductive role in efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We know that Syria has sponsored Palestinian militants, like Hamas, and helped rearm Hezbollah. The Israelis know it, and it's particularly telling that Prime Minister Olmert recently said, in a bipartisan group of high-level American foreign policy experts, that Syria ought to be invited to the Middle East peace process in Annapolis later this month. So, I look forward to hearing whether the administration plans to do that, and what can be done to get Syria to play a more constructive role.

I will insert my remaining comments in the record, as if read in full.

[The prepared statement of Senator Kerry follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN F. KERRY, U.S. SENATOR FROM MASSACHUSETTS

Ambassador Welch, thank you for coming before the committee today. As we all know, Ambassador Welch has had a long and distinguished career as a Foreign Service officer, serving as U.S. Ambassador to Egypt, Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs, and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs. He spent much of the 1980s in key Middle East positions, including a posting in Damascus. He is currently the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs.

Ambassador Welch, this is not the first time that we've taken a hard look at the potential role that Syria can play in the Middle East. We've had debates before over whether to talk to this regime, and senior statesmen of both parties from Lee Hamilton to Secretary Baker have weighed in on the potentially critical role Syria could play in advancing our primary national security interests with respect to preserving democracy in Lebanon, stabilizing Iraq, advancing the Middle East peace process, containing and isolating Iran, and combating terrorism and weapons proliferation.

But here we are at a critical moment in Lebanon and the rest of the Middle East—and so we very much look forward to hearing your views on Syria's role in these regional questions, the administration's main sources of leverage with Syria, and its overall strategy for Syria going forward.

I would like to start by focusing on Syria's role in Lebanon. We all understand the history: Syria's had a longstanding policy of dominating the affairs of the pro-Western government of Lebanon, a government which almost 3 years after the Cedar Revolution continues its struggle for survival. Today, that government is on the precipice. The Lebanese Parliament is preparing to elect a new President in just 3 weeks. Should ongoing negotiations over a compromise candidate for President fail, the Syrian-backed opposition has threatened to form a parallel, shadow government—an act that could severely destabilize Lebanon.

It's no secret that Syria and its supporters in the opposition, including Hezbollah, have worked to undermine Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's government at every turn. It's no secret that the money and weapons that empower Hezbollah come primarily through Syria. Let's be clear: The United States must stand strongly in support of free and fair Presidential elections without intimidation or interference—and that means leveraging Syria to respect Lebanese sovereignty.

An important part of this equation is the Special Tribunal for Lebanon established to try the assassins of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and other anti-Syrian, Lebanese leaders—I look forward to discussing the role this tribunal could play in our policy going forward.

I also would like to discuss the key issue of our support for reconstruction in Lebanon. When I traveled there last December, I was struck by how Iran had seized the opportunity to win over the local population by channeling some half a billion dollars of reconstruction funds through Hezbollah—over twice as much as we had at the time.

The United States has since invested almost \$770 billion in supplemental assistance for Lebanon, a significant increase in funding from past years. We need to make sure that money is being used effectively—and consider what may be needed going forward.

Syria has also been a source of instability in Iraq. In March 2007, Iraq coordinator David Satterfield said that at least 80 percent of suicide bombers in Iraq had traveled through Syria, and there are continuing reports of Syria's efforts to build ties with and host Sunni insurgents in Iraq. In September, however, General David Petraeus said that these crossings had recently fallen to half or two-thirds of that level. We need to understand whether there is, in fact, a positive trend developing, and if somehow we can capitalize. I also hope to discuss Syria's pivotal role in the ongoing Iraq refugee crisis, as the home of over 1.4 million Iraqis.

Syria has also played a counterproductive role in efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We know that Syria has sponsored Palestinian militants like Hamas and helped rearm Hezbollah. The Israelis certainly know it. But it is telling that Prime Minister Olmert and a recent bipartisan group of high-level American foreign policy experts argued that Syria should be invited to the Middle East peace process in Annapolis later this month. I look forward to hearing whether the administration plans to invite Syria, and what can be done to get Syria to play a more constructive role in the Middle East peace process.

So we all fully recognize that Syria is engaged in many reprehensible activities throughout the region. And it's clear that U.S. policy has focused more on punishing Syria through isolation and sanctions than on real engagement. But it seems to me that our approach has not yielded much progress in terms of getting Syria to play a more constructive role in Iraq and the Middle East peace process and stay out of Lebanon—and that one result has been to drive Syria closer to Iran.

To test the Syrians, Senator Dodd and I met with President Bashar al-Assad for more than 2 hours last December. The meeting confirmed my belief that engagement with Syria could be useful in advancing our objectives. Make no mistake: The Syrian leadership will act in its own interests—but it's in our own interests to more aggressively seek out possible areas of common ground with Damascus. I look forward to understanding the substance of recent U.S. meetings with Syrian officials, what was asked and offered, and what the administration's strategy is going forward.

One of the challenges we face is to bring Syria's leaders to a place where they are willing to make a strategic decision to change direction, and shift their allegiance away from Iran. It is neither surprising nor coincidental that while our relations with Syria have grown more estranged, Syria's relations with Iran have improved. Greater cooperation between Syria and Iran undermines our efforts to isolate Iran on a range of issues, including its pursuit of nuclear weapons, sponsorship of terrorism, and destabilizing role in Iraq. So I think today it's critical that we probe the nature and scope of the Syria-Iran relationship, and whether it is possible to pull Syria away from Iran.

Thank you again for being here today.

Senator KERRY. Senator Lugar—I know Senator Coleman is coming although he's not here yet—did you wish to make any comment, as the ranking member of the committee?

Senator LUGAR. Mr. Chairman, I have a statement that I'll put in the record, and I'll reserve the time for questions so we can expedite—

Senator KERRY. Thanks.

Senator LUGAR [continuing]. Hearing our witnesses.

Senator KERRY. I appreciate it.

[The prepared statement of Senator Lugar follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. RICHARD G. LUGAR, U.S. SENATOR FROM INDIANA

Mr. Chairman, thank you for this opportunity to engage in an important discussion regarding recent developments in Lebanon and Syria. I join my colleagues in thanking Secretary Welch and our three accomplished witnesses on the second panel.

The hopes of the United States and most of the international community for Lebanon are clear. We seek a sovereign, democratic, and prosperous Lebanon at peace with its neighbors and free from foreign interference. These widely shared goals, however, are endangered by the present political crisis involving the selection of the

next Lebanese President. President Emile Lahoud's (Lahood's) term expires on November 24, yet elections have been postponed several times. If the election that is scheduled for next week does not take place and the current President's term expires without selecting a replacement, it is possible two parallel governments could be established. Such a development would dramatically heighten tensions in Lebanon. The United States and the international community must be unwavering and unambiguous in our support for the democratic process in Lebanon and in our opposition to political intimidation. In accordance with U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1559 and 1701, as well as U.S. Senate Resolutions 328 and 353, the United States should work with other nations to support a fair political process in Lebanon free of violence.

While a compromise selection for President may be the most effective short-term solution to the immediate crisis in Lebanon, much more is required to resolve the deeper conflicts undermining stability in that nation. Many of the maladies that plague Lebanon find their roots outside Lebanon's borders.

The nature of the conflict in Lebanon underscores two important points for U.S. policy. First, the U.S. cannot seek to address individual crises in an ad hoc and isolated manner. The U.S. cannot indefinitely jump from crisis to crisis narrowly focusing on the immediate sources of conflict, ignoring the larger regional conflicts that serve as the underlying catalysts. American policy should be based upon a comprehensive and proactive strategy grounded in U.S. vital interests that recognizes the transnational nature of the challenges in the Middle East. In Lebanon, for example, it is difficult to imagine a durable solution to the instability and political paralysis that does not involve progress toward an Arab-Israeli peace settlement. As long as the Arab-Israeli crisis persists, Hezbollah will continue to exploit Arab-Israeli tensions as a pretext to maintain its arms. This is not to suggest that an Arab-Israeli settlement will be a panacea for Lebanon's problems. However, a solution to the Arab-Israeli crisis will increase the chances of attaining political reconciliation and stability in Lebanon, as well as the broader Middle East.

Second, after years of abjuring direct talks with Syria, the U.S. has little to show for its strategy. The refusal to engage in meaningful and regular discussions with the Syrians freezes in place a dangerous status quo. The purpose of talks should not be to change our posture toward Syria. Nor should we compromise vital interests or strike ethereal bargains that cannot be verified. In fact, we should be pressing Damascus on human rights issues, such as its ban on foreign travel by political dissidents. For example, the case of Riad Seif (Ree-ad Safe), a prominent political dissident who is being denied the opportunity to travel outside Syria for treatment of prostate cancer, requires immediate resolution.

If we lack the flexibility to communicate with Syria, we increase the chances of miscalculation, undercut our ability to take advantage of any favorable situations, and potentially limit the regional leverage with which we can confront the Damascus government. We also should be mindful that although Iran and Syria cooperate closely, their interests diverge in many cases, opening regional diplomatic opportunities.

I look forward to the benefit of our witnesses' insights on these and other issues related to Syria and Lebanon.

Senator KERRY. Ambassador, we look forward to your testimony.

STATEMENT OF HON. C. DAVID WELCH, ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Ambassador WELCH. Thank you very much, Senators. Senator Kerry, it's good to be here in front of your subcommittee this afternoon.

This is a very challenging issue, and I'm grateful for the chance to talk it through with you and your colleagues.

I think now there's a proven record for Bashar al-Assad and his regime. A little less than a decade ago, he assumed power. And, at the time, there was a bit of a leadership transition in other parts of the Arab world, as well, so people looked to see what the new leaders of Jordan, Morocco, and Syria might be like.

Today, I think we have a record of some experience in understanding what Syria, under President Assad's leadership, is like. And let me just make a couple of remarks about that.

This is a government that, unfortunately, has tried to assert itself in Lebanon, undermining Lebanon's sovereignty and security directly and through proxies. It's a government that continues to harbor and support organizations that have been involved in terrorism, and that continue to be involved in terrorism. It's a government that has allowed some of these people to cross its borders into Lebanon and into Iraq, countries that nominally, have favorable relations with Damascus. And this is a regime that continues to turn a deaf ear to its own people's demands for freedom of expression and freedom to participate in political life.

This problem with respect to Lebanon is particularly poignant and important right now, as Lebanon faces a Presidential election again. There is a history of political difficulties in Lebanon that means that there's rarely been an easy Lebanese Presidential election. And this one is certainly not made any easier by what Syria has been doing.

Nominally, they withdrew from Lebanon in 2005, following Rafik Hariri's assassination, but we still see a very strong Syrian influence. Their allies, about this time last year, engineered the resignation or departure of an important element of the Lebanese Cabinet in an attempt to collapse the government and make it inoperable. They accused Fouad Siniora of leading an unconstitutional and illegitimate government. I think many of you have met Prime Minister Siniora, and you know he is a man of probity and courage. And he has withstood this assault on his government, and on his patriotism, with, I think, uncommon valor.

We don't know who is behind the rash of political murders in Lebanon, but there's a depressing theme to those assassinations and to the attempts. I don't know that there has been a pro-Syrian politician who has been targeted. Every single one of those killed has been known for their pro-Lebanon, prodemocracy, and anti-Syrian views.

Because we share with others a concern about Lebanon's Government's inability to perform its duties and its need for support in ending the culture of murder with impunity for political reasons, the Security Council decided to establish a special investigation of some of these crimes. Because Prime Minister Siniora was unable to get his Cabinet and his President to act on it, he requested the Security Council to assume some of the sovereignty of Lebanon in constructing a special tribunal to deal with prosecutions for these crimes. I'm pleased to go into the status of that effort during our question-and-answer period.

He would have done it through the Lebanese constitutional process, had he been able to, but the Cabinet couldn't agree to it, the Lebanese Parliament wouldn't meet, and the President wouldn't act, so it was necessary that the Security Council do that.

Mr. Senator, you also mentioned Syria as an entrepot for the flow of foreign fighters and the supply of weapons and financing to both Lebanon and Iraq. Syria remains a source of instability in this regard. We're concerned that it continues not to impose some of the

restrictions it could that would reduce this risk and put behind their words some evidence of sincerity.

Syria also continues to obstruct efforts at Israeli-Palestinian peace. There are Palestinian terrorist groups that operate, to this day, from Damascus, despite repeated demands from the international community for them to stop and a growing consensus in the remainder of the Arab world that the path of peace, not the path of violence, is the one that people want to see pursued.

I think, as my colleagues who have been before you and others in the committee on the issue of Iraq have testified, there is a disproportionate number of foreign fighters who do cross from Syria into Iraq. That remains a serious problem. And, despite the fact that Iraq has long borders with several other countries, it's notable that this border remains the preferred access route.

Syria could take decisive action against those who organize this jihad, as they call it, and the networks that support it. It could tighten its visa regulations on travelers from certain countries, or institute new procedures to address that risk, as most nations across the world have done in recent years. They could do more to step up their work with their Iraqi counterparts to look at measures along the border. We think it's entirely reasonable to expect that they should have taken these steps already.

We have been willing to talk to them. We have a diplomatic mission in Damascus. We are not represented at the level of ambassador, of course. We withdrew our Ambassador after the murder of Rafik Hariri, and we have not returned an ambassador yet. But we are able to talk to them. Secretary Rice has met with her Syrian counterpart twice this year, once in the spring and once just recently. Their words are, on the face of it, fine. But we need to see, behind those words, more than that. We need to see actions.

On the Lebanese election, Mr. Senator, it's coming down to the final days now before the constitutional end to Emile Lahoud's term. We have, day by day, worked on this issue with our partners in Europe, particularly France, but also the principal European troop contributors to UNIFIL, who played a very active role in trying to organize and sustain a common international call to allow these elections to proceed on time, in accordance with the constitution, and free of any interference or intimidation.

Last Saturday, Secretary Rice had a meeting with several of her counterparts on the margins of the Iraq ministerial in Istanbul, and they declared this position forthrightly and publicly, and then delivered it to Syria. This group included not only France, traditional partner for the United States in this regard, but also Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, and the Secretary General of the Arab League. I believe that this is an important statement of common purpose and of the common normative value about what ought to happen here. And we hope that the Syrian Government pays attention to it.

As you know, we've exercised a number of punitive measures. And we could take more. We have used authorities under the Syria Accountability Act to prevent certain transactions with Syria. Because Syria is a state sponsor of terror, there is a complete ban on any arms-related exports or sales to Syria, there are strict controls on dual-use items, and prohibitions on United States economic as-

sistance. You know, in a region where we have decent relationships with almost all the surrounding countries, it's extraordinary that Syria stands out as kind of a dinosaur in this respect, and has been unable to construct a more normal relationship with us and its neighbors.

We continue to talk to the Syrian Government about the issue of Iraqi refugees. As you know, they're host to quite a number of Iraqis who have fled Iraq. And, in this respect, we do appreciate Syria's decision to renew cooperation with us—on our programs—to address this humanitarian issue. We think that it's vital that it play this humanitarian role. There are quite a number of Iraqis in Syria, probably over one and a quarter million, and that's the majority of those displaced outside Iraq in the region. And, until recently, Syria has mostly kept its borders open to those trying to come out of Iraq, and has not sent them back. Iraqis do have access to some critical social services there, and we understand, as do others in the international community, this places an unusual burden on Syria.

We're trying to help. In that respect, we've directed some assistance toward the needs there. Our Assistant Secretary for Refugee Affairs visited Syria in the spring, to discuss these issues. And, just recently, we sent our new senior coordinator for Iraqi refugees, Ambassador Foley, to Damascus, where he reiterated our commitment to providing help to Iraqis living in Syria, through the U.N. and through international partners.

We have an agreed framework with the Syrian Government and with UNHCR, to carry out refugee admissions processing in Syria. Iraqis are being referred to us by UNHCR so that working with the Department of Homeland Security we can go through the resettlement process to the United States.

The Syrian Government has a parlous human rights record in treatment of its own citizens. That, despite the relatively new regime, really hasn't changed from President Assad's father's day. They continue to imprison human rights activists and harass others. They refuse even the most limited steps toward transparency and participation in the political process. Their parliamentary elections were not much to speak about earlier this year. In May, the President of Syria ran, without opposition, under a referendum to renew his mandate as President. There was little risk that it would not be renewed.

These concerns in all these areas, Senator Kerry, are documented in conversations with the Syrian Government, going back some years. And I—as you know, not merely because I'm a diplomat, but because I've worked in this area a long time—I'm all in favor of talking to people. The question is not whether to talk, but how we talk to them, what are we talking about, and what are they going to do about issues that divide us or issues of common concern?

Should they take positive steps, I think we'd know that, and we would consider further dialogue and engagement, but these are really important issues, which have cost the United States—lives and in money, and we, therefore, would expect that any engagement would be purposeful. I have no illusions about the difficulty of this problem.

With that, sir, I'm happy to take your questions on these subjects, and I'll come back to some of the ones that you mentioned in your opening statement.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Welch follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. C. DAVID WELCH, ASSISTANT SECRETARY, NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS BUREAU, DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Thank you, Mr Chairman and other distinguished members of the committee, for inviting me here today. I welcome the opportunity to discuss the current status of our relationship with Syria and outline the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. I would like to begin by emphasizing that despite our serious concerns with the Syrian Government's actions, the United States continues to stand with the people of Syria as they struggle under an oppressive dictatorship. The Syrian people deserve a government that respects human rights and does not use fear and intimidation for political gains. Our frustrations and concerns are directed solely toward the Syrian regime. This is a government that strives to undermine Lebanon's sovereignty and security through pro-Syrian proxies and partners; a government that continues to harbor and support terrorists and terrorist organizations; a government that has allowed terrorists and criminals to cross its borders; a regime that turns a deaf ear to its people's demands for freedom of expression, freedom of movement, and the freedom to elect a representative and responsive government. It is with this regime and its actions that the United States takes issue.

Some argue that we have not done enough to engage the Syrian regime and that diplomatic isolation has resulted in fewer opportunities to raise our concerns or explain our desired outcomes. In reality, our concerns are well known and well documented. The Syrian Government knows very well what the United States and the international community expect. While appropriate levels of interaction should continue, it is time for the Syrian Government to show it is willing to be a responsible member in the community of nations. As Secretary Rice said following her meeting with Syrian FM Muallem at the May 2007 conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, the Syrians claim stability in Iraq is in their interest, but "actions speak louder than words and we will have to see how this develops." We do continue to engage the Syrian regime on humanitarian issues. The U.S. is concerned with the plight of the estimated 1.4 million Iraqi refugees currently living in Syria. We recognize that Syria plays a humanitarian role in this regard and has largely kept its borders open to Iraqis fleeing violence and allowed Iraqis access to critical social services such as health care and education. We recognize that the refugees place a large burden on Syria's public services and institutions. PRM A/S Sauerbrey visited Damascus in March 2007 to discuss humanitarian and refugee issues. Ambassador James Foley, the Secretary's Senior Coordinator for Iraqi refugees, just returned from a trip to Damascus where he reiterated our commitment to providing assistance to Iraqis living in Syria through the United Nations and our international partners, as well as our commitment to the United States resettlement program. Thanks to A/S Sauerbrey's and Ambassador Foley's efforts, we have an agreed framework with the Syrian Government and the UNHCR for carrying out U.S. refugee admissions processing in Syria. Currently, 4,000 Iraqi and other individuals referred to us by UNHCR are being prepared for resettlement interviews with the Department of Homeland Security.

There are many points of tension that account for our current relationship with the Syrian Government, and among the most important issues is the flow of foreign fighters through Syria and into Iraq. Syria shares a long, porous border with Iraq. It is through this border that a disproportionate number of Iraq's "foreign fighters" have entered the country with the goal of killing innocent Iraqi civilians, Iraqi security forces, and U.S. and coalition troops. In recent months, coalition forces and their Iraqi partners have made strides against al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), and the Syrian regime has taken some steps to enhance its internal security posture. The Border Monitoring Technical Experts group has provided a forum for the U.S. and other countries to address this issue directly with the Syrians. However, the continued entry of those who seek to carry out horrific attacks poses a threat to recent gains. Syria is not powerless in this situation; there are a number of additional steps the Syrian Government can take. Were the regime in Damascus serious about helping Iraq and stopping the flow of al-Qaeda suicide bombers into Iraq, it would be more apparent. Decisive action against jihadi organizers and safe house networks represents one important step in this campaign. Beyond that the Syrians could institute a visa requirement for travelers from certain countries or regions to build addi-

tional barriers to the entry of terrorists and criminals into Syria. Syrian authorities can also work with their Iraqi counterparts to implement measures agreed upon during PM Maliki's August visit to Damascus. These include joint border patrols, exchange of liaison officers, and improved communications between the Syrian and Iraqi Interior Ministries. Syria also continues to provide safe haven to former Saddam Hussein regime loyalists and Baathist insurgent financiers, whose vocal and financial support to the insurgency in Iraq promotes extremism and undermines national reconciliation in that country. In the end, the Syrians share responsibility in following through on previous statements and promises and demonstrating a sincere belief that stability in Iraq is in Syria's interest.

Like all countries, Syria has a responsibility to promote peace and security, especially amongst its neighbors. In Lebanon, however, Syria continues to pursue a policy of interference and an unabashed pursuit of its own agenda. Through intimidation and violence Syria shows its blatant disregard for the sovereignty of Lebanon and the security of the Lebanese people. By refusing to establish diplomatic relations with Lebanon or delineate its shared border, Syria demonstrates that its words of respect for Lebanon's sovereignty are empty rhetoric. Although overt Syrian security forces formally withdrew from Lebanon in 2005 following the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, Syria and its Lebanese proxies and partners continue to interfere in Lebanon's internal affairs. For example, in November 2006, Hezbollah and its pro-Syrian allies engineered the resignation of six Cabinet members, including all five Shia ministers, and charged that the government of Prime Minister Siniora was thereby illegitimate and unconstitutional. Even worse, since Hariri's assassination six additional prosovereignty leaders have been murdered. Most recently, Lebanese Parliamentarian Antoine Ghanem—a staunch advocate for Lebanese sovereignty—was assassinated by a car bomb on September 19.

Lebanon's Constitution requires Parliament to elect a new President by November 24. We are very concerned that in the next few weeks Syria or its supporters will attempt to manipulate the outcome through violence, intimidation or an obstinate refusal to participate in the electoral process. These concerns are not unfounded. Hezbollah and its opposition partners have threatened to derail elections by boycotting required electoral sessions. Such a step would lead to a political vacuum and potential chaos in Lebanon. We are making it clear that interference or intimidation in the electoral process is unacceptable to the United States and to the international community. If Syria hopes to have a more normal relationship with the United States or play an influential and responsible role in the region, it will heed these warnings.

The Syrian regime, Hezbollah and pro-Syrian opposition elements in Lebanon have worked to deny justice to the Lebanese victims of political violence. The United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 1757 on May 30, 2007. This brought the Agreement establishing the Special Tribunal into force. The Special Tribunal was designed to bring to justice those responsible for Hariri's assassination and the related murders of those who defended Lebanon's independence and democracy. Pro-Syrian ministers in Lebanon's Cabinet resigned in an effort to prevent an Agreement between Lebanon and the United Nations to establish the Tribunal. Parliament speaker Nabih Berri refused to open Parliament's doors, depriving the legislative majority of its right to approve the Tribunal.

Syria continues to obstruct efforts to advance Israeli-Palestinian peace and remains designated a State Sponsor of Terrorism due to its continued support of Hezbollah and Palestinian terrorist organizations. These groups, including HAMAS, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—General Command continue to base their external leadership in Syria. Despite repeated demands from the international community Syria refuses to expel these groups or their leaders from the safe-haven Damascus provides. Moreover, evidence suggests Syria provides weapons and support to Hezbollah, and facilitates Hezbollah's efforts to smuggle weapons into Lebanon. Given uncertainties as to Syria's desires to pursue nonconventional weapons and the status of the government's current arsenal, we are concerned that Syria allows internationally designated terrorist organizations unfettered access to its borders. Additionally, the stakes are that much higher should Syria strengthen its ties with countries such as Iran who have already demonstrated nuclear ambitions.

We continue to have serious concerns about the respect for human rights that the Syrian Government denies its own people. We strongly support the Syrian people's desires for democracy, human rights, and freedom of expression. Throughout the last few months the government's already poor human rights record continued to worsen. The regime has increased restrictions on citizen's privacy rights and stepped up already significant restrictions on freedom of speech, press, assembly,

and association. The Syrian regime continues to harass and imprison human rights activists and civil society representatives and their families, as well as deny its people the right to travel abroad freely. After sentencing civil rights activist Kemal Lebواني to 12-years in jail, prison officials continue to subject him to physical and psychological mistreatment. The Syrian Government has refused medical treatment for prisoners of conscience such as Anwar al-Bunni and Michel Kilo. The Syrian regime continues to refuse Mr. Riad Seif, a former Member of Parliament and former prisoner of conscience and other dissidents the right to travel outside Syria. Seif desperately needs medical treatment for cancer that he cannot receive in Syria, but the Syrian Government continues to violate international humanitarian norms by refusing his request to leave the country for medical treatment. In response, the U.S. has made public statements and urged other countries to press the Syrian Government to adopt more humanitarian policies.

The Syrian regime also refuses to have an open, transparent, and fully participatory political environment. Syria's parliamentary elections on April 22 and 23 of this year were undermined by government manipulation. In May, Assad ran unopposed in a crudely choreographed Presidential referendum. Although opposition groups estimated voter turnout at significantly less than 50 percent, government statistics declared Assad had won 98 percent of the vote, with voter turnout officially reported at 96 percent. The Syrian people deserve democratically elected representatives who are willing to fight corruption, respect their human rights, provide job opportunities and inspire political participation by the next generation of Syrian leaders.

We are committed to assisting Iraq's most vulnerable citizens by working with the United Nations and our international partners. In fact, the United States increased humanitarian assistance for displaced Iraqis from \$43 million in 2006 to almost \$200 million in 2007, \$81 million of which went to international organizations for appeals that included programs inside Syria. A further \$3.7 of the \$81 million went to the International Federation of the Red Cross/Red Crescent in 2007 supporting health and other programs implemented by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and Jordanian Red Crescent Societies benefiting Iraqi refugees. In addition, the State Department awarded \$8 million in grants in FY07 to six nongovernmental organization partners for projects in Syria focusing on the health, education, and emergency assistance needs of Iraqi refugees. These projects also provide basic assistance such as food and nonfood items to the most vulnerable of the refugees. We plan to continue contributing generously to humanitarian assistance programs in 2008. In the aftermath of Ambassador Foley's visit, which I mentioned previously, the U.S., Syria, and UNHCR agreed on a framework for processing Iraqi refugee resettlement cases in Damascus. Syria has committed to issue visas to DHS adjudicators, who, in the coming weeks, will be interviewing hundreds of Iraqis referred by UNHCR to the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program.

It is clear there are a number of factors behind our strained relationship with Syria. I would like to now address the approaches we are taking to resolve our most serious concerns. First, Syria's actions threaten not just the Syrian people but the entire region. We are not the only ones alarmed by the Syrian Government's behavior. We are working closely with our partners in Europe and in the Middle East to coordinate efforts so as to maximize effectiveness, especially in the runup to Lebanon's elections. As an example of this coordination, Secretary Rice led a meeting on the margins of last week's Expanded Neighbors Conference in Istanbul with the Foreign Ministers of France, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Jordan, as well as the Secretary General of the Arab League to discuss the upcoming elections in Lebanon. We expect to consult more closely with our partners in the region on this subject in the coming weeks.

We have already taken a series of punitive measures and will take more. The President has exercised authorities from the Syria Accountability Act to prohibit almost all U.S. exports to Syria, except for food and medicine, and has banned Syrian commercial flights to and from the United States. Due to Syria's continued designation as a State Sponsor of Terrorism there is a complete ban on U.S. arms-related exports and sales to Syria; strict controls on the export of dual-use items; and prohibitions on U.S. economic assistance.

On August 1 of this year the President signed Executive Order 13441 to allow the property of persons undermining the sovereignty of Lebanon or its democratic processes and institutions to be blocked. It complements previous Executive orders, such as 13338, which financially isolates individuals and entities contributing to the Government of Syria's problematic behavior. President Bush signed E.O. 13338 on May 11, 2004, in response to the Syrian Government's continued support of international terrorism, sustained occupation of Lebanon, pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and missile programs, and undermining of U.S. and international efforts in Iraq.

These orders freeze any assets the affected individuals may have in the United States and prohibit U.S. persons from engaging in transactions with these individuals. Treasury recently designated four Syrian and pro-Syrian Lebanese individuals pursuant to these Executive orders. If necessary, the United States has the ability to further isolate the Syrian Government both diplomatically and financially.

In addition to corrective measures and coordinated, multilateral engagement, we are continuing to engage the Syrian Government where appropriate on issues of mutual concern, specifically the issue of Iraqi refugees. The Syrian regime is well aware of the steps it must take in order to have a better relationship with the United States. It has not taken those steps. Its failure to do so is not for a lack of U.S. engagement.

As previously mentioned, Secretary Rice met with Syrian FM Muallem in May and again last week in Istanbul, PRM A/S Sauerbrey traveled to Damascus to discuss refugee issues in March 2007, and Ambassador Foley has just returned from a trip to Damascus where he discussed Iraqi refugees with Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials. Even though we recalled our Ambassador in 2005 following Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri's assassination, there has continued to be limited engagement by senior level U.S. Government officials with their Syrian counterparts. Then Secretary of State Powell visited Damascus in May 2003. My predecessor, Ambassador Burns, met with Syrian President al-Assad in September 2004; Secretary Powell met with then-FM Shara'a at the UNGA in late September 2004 and again in Sharm el-Sheikh in November 2004; and former Deputy Secretary Armitage visited Damascus in January 2005. In each of these efforts, the Syrians promised to take action against the flow of foreign fighters into Iraq, end their interference in Lebanon, expel Palestinian terrorist leaders from Damascus, and to end Syrian state sponsorship of terrorism. Unfortunately, the Syrian regime has yet to demonstrate the necessary willingness to reorient its behavior back toward international norms. Despite the absence of an ambassador, we continue to have a diplomatic presence in Syria providing a mechanism for communication with the Syrian Government. An improved relationship with Syria can only come about when it behaves as a responsible member of the international community. We are under no illusions. The issues between Syria, the United States and the rest of the international community are complex and will take time and effort to resolve.

Senator KERRY. Thank you very much.

We'll start off with a 7-minute round, and try and get through.

Mr. Secretary, it's not hard to paint a tough case about Syria's behavior. We all understand that. I listed many of those behaviors, and they are well known as a matter of public record. The question is: What's the policy that, sort of, deals with that? And I think that's where we may have some concerns, and there are legitimate questions.

Isolation can work, but it has rarely, rarely worked when it's more unilateral than multilateral. And, as you know, none of the other major partners with whom we deal have withdrawn their ambassadors or have engaged in major sanctions or have joined us in a serious way to sort of leverage Syria to act differently.

Can you share with the committee, perhaps: What was the gist of the conversation that took place between the Secretary and the Foreign Minister? What did we ask? What is the state of play, in terms of our expectations from Syria and perhaps even Syria's expectations, if there are any, about what they might get in return from us if they do something?

Ambassador WELCH. The United States has, broadly speaking, in its foreign policy arsenal, a robust selection of punitive measures that it could apply against countries that are taking actions against our interests. And, you're correct, we have applied quite a number of those, vis-a-vis Syria.

Other countries have chosen to respond differently. Let me point out a couple of things that others have done.

The European Union has not replicated the steps we've taken, exactly, but I would describe relations between Syria and the European Union as essentially frozen. Many of the countries in the Arab Middle East have tried to improve their relations with continental Europe through the European Union Association Agreement Process. That agreement between Europe and Syria is presently frozen. The political dialogue between Europe and Damascus is equally very narrow, focusing only on the problems, and not on the opportunities. And I think that's a powerful signal to Syria of how gravely it has put itself in isolation from Europe.

Second, within the Arab world relations are very difficult between Syria and what you would normally expect to be its Arab friends. The relationship, in particular, between Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the Emirates—countries I mentioned that joined us in this demarche to the Syrians—is very cool. At a time when many of the Arab oil exporters are enjoying economic boom, their investments are going elsewhere in the Arab world, and I don't think that's a coincidence.

Finally, you know, it's not exactly relevant, Senator, to your question, but it is an irony, I think, at a minimum, that, of all the members of the Arab League, the only two countries that do not have ambassadors in each other's capitals are Lebanon and Syria. There is no formal diplomatic relationship between the two. One would think that these two countries, which share a long border and, in many respects, some common history, would be able to have a better relationship. That is not because of the Lebanese; but because of the Syrians.

With respect to the discussion between the Secretary of State and the Foreign Minister of Syria, I have known this gentleman for many years. He's a professional. And I would describe it, sir, as a professional conversation. We said our piece on the things that concern us. He said his. I think Syrians would like to see a better relationship with the United States, but he did not table anything that would back up his expressed desire to see that relationship improve.

Thank you.

Senator KERRY. Did we table anything—i.e., “If you do X, Y, or Z, here is the kind of response that you might see from us”?

Ambassador WELCH. As I mentioned, Senator Kerry, were they to take actions in the areas that concern us, we're confident we'd be able to see that.

Senator KERRY. Yes; but, you see, this is the problem. What I hear from people, who indicate to me, is that we basically go into these conversations and say to them, “You've got to start doing this—X, Y, and Z,” and that's, sort of, the end of the conversation. And then, they speak their piece, and say, “Well, you know, here's how we feel about X, Y, and Z,” and that's the end of the conversation.

Ambassador WELCH. Let me give you an example, sir, of what I mean. There is a problem with the flow of foreign fighters into Iraq. Some of the source countries know that and cooperate with us on dealing with this issue, as you know, sir, including countries with which we have a strained political relationship. They have been willing, uniformly, to take measures to deal with this threat.

To this day, Syria has no visa rules that would inhibit the entry of military-aged males from any Arab country into Syria. And this is the single most potent threat inside Iraq today. And if they wanted to do that, they could do it. I've been posted in Syria; it's a place where they can regulate entry pretty easily.

Senator KERRY. When I met with President Assad, I raised that issue with him. I've met with him twice now in the last 2 years, and both times, he said, "You know, your people come over, and they tell us, 'Well, we ought to be doing this or that,' and we actually wind up doing it, and we never hear from them again." And they suggested that there were some very specific things on the border, or in turning over certain individuals that we had identified, that they were prepared to do, and, in some cases, did. And I said, "Mr. President, would you be willing to go out and stand up publicly and say this, and create a sort of public demonstration of this effort?"

Now, he said, yes. Now, I'm not dumb enough or inexperienced enough to just take that at face value, but you certainly put it to the test, it seems to me. If the President of a country says he's willing to do that, it seems to me the Secretary of State could say, "OK, let's see if you really are," and you go out and you put it to the test, and go from there. And then, one step begets the next. It wasn't as if Henry Kissinger knew exactly what Mao or others were going to do when he first went to China but he went and we had a goal. What is the goal here? I don't see quite how this process of isolation and of telling them what they have to do, without some process to build a mutuality, gets you anywhere. That's what I think is frustrating.

Ambassador WELCH. We would share your frustration. We would prefer not to be in a vicious cycle, where the only answer to what we think is credible information and well-presented and documented information, is, "Well, yes, I've done some of it, and they should know it." We did present them, for example, with a list of persons of concern who we believe were conducting actions in Iraq, and their answer was, "Well, you know, we'll look at that," and that was over 3 years ago. And, to this day, they are hosting many of these same people, in various parts of Syria, and allowing them to operate.

Senator KERRY. OK.

Ambassador WELCH. Sir, this is not a U.S. request, this is a part of a mandatory Security Council Resolution, that all countries in the world do their best to interrupt this kind of traffic and support. So my belief is that the facts are as they are. As I said, there are long land borders for Iraq with other countries in the region, but this problem seems to be primarily located in Syria. And that has to be for a reason.

Senator KERRY. Well, I don't want to abuse the time here. I did raise the question of some of those incomplete things, and I must say that the response that needed to be put to the test that came from him was that they were upset that there had been no follow-through on the other things that they had done, so they sort of stopped, by admission—that's at least the way they framed it. And, again, unless there's some sort of ongoing initiative, more than just sort of saying, "You've got to do this," and they say, "You've got to

do this,” and nobody does anything, except you get mad at each other and continue down the road, it seems to me you never gain the high moral ground of being able to show people that you’ve actually gone to the lengths of demonstrating your bona fides in a more public way, I guess is the way to put it.

This is a battle partly for the Arab street and for the hearts and minds of a lot of people. And right now, given what’s happened with Hezbollah, and given what’s happened with Hamas, and given what’s happened in Iraq, and given the rise of Iranian ability to sort of look with impunity on any of our saber-rattling, and so forth, it’s not as if the, you know, leverage is increasing for the administration. So, one wonders, really, where that strategy takes us. We’ll come back to that.

Senator Coleman.

Senator COLEMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I’m going to yield, first, to my colleague Senator Lugar, who’s been here. And I do have a statement that I’d like to have entered into the record.

Senator KERRY. Absolutely.

Senator COLEMAN. But, why don’t I, at this time, yield to my senior colleague, Senator Lugar.

[The prepared statement of Senator Coleman follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. NORM COLEMAN, U.S. SENATOR FROM MINNESOTA

I would like to thank Senator Kerry for organizing this very important hearing to discuss our options with respect to Syria, which in recent years has proven to be an extremely difficult relationship to manage. I look forward to hearing the different perspectives on how to address the complexities we face in our relationship with Syria, which have tremendous security implications for the Middle East and the rest of the world. On a wide range of issues that the U.S. is dealing with in the region—from fighting al-Qaeda in Iraq to protecting democracy in Lebanon—Syria is intimately involved, unfortunately for the most part in extremely destabilizing ways.

There has been a vigorous ongoing debate here in Congress on how to deal with Syria. There are a number of critical issues of mutual interest where the U.S. and Syria could cooperate, such as stabilizing Iraq, since over a million refugees have fled into Syria. We would also like Syria’s help in stopping the flow of insurgents into Iraq, and we would like Syria to play a more constructive role in the pursuit of a peace agreement between the Israelis and Palestinians, among many other things.

Yet we face a dilemma as to whether to engage the Syrians and if so, how. I am someone who supports the idea of having conversations with countries, even those in which we don’t have the greatest relationship, in order to ensure that we are using all diplomatic tools at our disposal to address issues of national interest.

But I also think we need to be very thoughtful and realistic about our engagement with such countries so that we have a reasonable expectation of our ability to hold these countries to their commitments. We must also have a clear idea of what costs we are willing to bear for such cooperation. In addition, I think that more extensive engagement with any problematic country should be preceded by at least minimal actions of good faith on their part so we have some reason to believe that they might actually hold up their end of the deal.

One significant concern I have with respect to Syria is that the Syrians have done little, if nothing, to show that they are serious about pursuing a productive discussion with the U.S. If anything their actions have been destabilizing and provocative. I’ll just mention a few of the most egregious activities:

1. The Syrians were intimately involved in the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, who posed a threat to Syrian control through his peaceful and legitimate pursuit of greater sovereignty for Lebanon.

2. Since the assassination, the Assad regime has done everything in its power to thwart the Tribunal that was mandated by the U.N. Security Council in March, at the cost of the political process in Lebanon.

3. There is evidence suggesting that the Syrians are behind the campaign of political assassinations being carried out against anti-Syrian Lebanese lawmakers—so far six prosovereignty leaders have been murdered. This is an affront to the will of the Lebanese people who democratically elected these representatives, and a chilling disregard for the rule of law.

4. The Syrians continue to support terrorism in Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, and Iraq. Even U.N. reporting acknowledges the role that the Syrians have played in the rearmament of Hezbollah, and they continue to harbor and provide support to other terrorists groups such as Hamas. During his testimony in September, General Petraeus also made clear that the border with Syria is the main entrance point for insurgents. In interviews the general has described how the Syrians allow foreign fighters to arrive at Damascus International Airport and then cross the Iraqi border.

5. Syria is receiving significant arms material from Iran, in violation of Security Council Resolution 1747.

6. The Assad regime continues to repress its people and the squelching of political dissent. The regime has imposed a travel ban on all dissidents, including Riad Seif (Seef), who has been denied a visa to travel outside of Syria to receive necessary medical care for his cancer. He is being targeted because he has dared to speak of change for Syria.

Again, I understand that the pursuit of our national interests often compels us to deal with even the most distasteful of regimes, and it is an option I am always willing to entertain. Nevertheless, it would be foolish to simply turn a blind eye to Syria's involvement in destabilizing and undermining democracy and the rule of law in Lebanon.

Syria has the potential to be a constructive force for peace and stability in the Middle East. But their ability to be that positive force is in grave doubt at the current time.

So I am left with the following question: How do we balance a desire to pursue accommodations with Syria on issues of potential common interests without undermining important objectives for the region, such as a stable Lebanon free of Syrian control? This question is all the more challenging in a situation where all of the issues on the table are highly interconnected. I hope our witnesses today can give us some guidance on this very critical question and how we might navigate through the complexities of our relationship with Syria.

Senator LUGAR. Well, I thank my friend.

Mr. Secretary, in the election crisis in Lebanon—you've mentioned the March 14th elections, and I just ask, pragmatically, is there any other solution for that, other than the selection of a so-called compromise candidate? Would you discuss, for a moment, what the compromise might be, who the contending parties are, so that we all are, sort of, aware of what that might mean, and whether the United States favors that type of solution?

Ambassador WELCH. I will be happy to take a stab at it, Senator Lugar.

The politics in Lebanon today are roughly divided between the March 8th opposition, which holds a strong part, but not a majority in Parliament, and March 14 which does have a majority in Parliament. March 14 has a substantial Maronite Christian component, but March 8 has one, too. The next President of Lebanon, as were his predecessors, will be a Maronite Christian. So, the debate is over who might receive parliamentary support. The United States has taken the approach, in this administration, that it's best for us to help to support the process, but to stay away from the individual candidates. I think that's consistent with our approach broadly speaking, but, I think, especially in this case, it serves our purposes.

To some, in the present Lebanese political context, the word "compromise" has a pejorative tone. They like to talk more about "consensus." But the consensus is, to put it bluntly, "a deal," at the end of the day. Someone will be voted through the Parliament be-

cause they enjoy support. And that's where Lebanon's politicians have to decide.

We have said that the next President of Lebanon should be selected by the Lebanese, with no outside intimidation or pressure, of which there is a considerable amount right now, and that they should be allowed to do it in accordance with a constitution that has no extra-constitutional solutions like we saw in the fall of 2004. And they should be allowed to do it on time; that is, by midnight on November 23 of this month, when President Lahoud's term ends.

I don't know who they will select, Mr. Senator, and that's probably a good thing, because I don't think it's appropriate for us to be in that game. But we would like to see the next President of Lebanon be someone who looks to the sovereignty, security, and interests of his country, and not be manipulated by an armed terrorist group inside or an external neighboring power outside. Unfortunately, the current President of Lebanon has not demonstrated that he is that sort of figure. We would hope that his successor does a better job in that regard.

Senator LUGAR. Well, now, as you describe these two contending groups which may come to consensus, at least some observers would say one of the groups has been severely hurt by assassination of its members, ad seriatim, and the allegations are frequently that Syria had something to do with this. Now, on the other hand, it may be more far-reaching. Is there evidence that Iran has something to do with this, or some cooperation between the two. And at least Syria—rather, Lebanese who have come to visit with us over here are describing this attrition, that, if it goes on long enough, there will not be so-called consensus or compromise, the thing will have been decided by external forces, which then raises the question: Is this a legitimate concern for the United States? Is there some action we ought to be taking to preserve the integrity of the place, given actual violent killings and the aftermath of that, that's testified to by Lebanese coming for our help?

Ambassador WELCH. There are, broadly speaking, two courses available to us here. One is to do what we can to support and protect the process. And I think that, Senator, involves mainly political measures and support of the kind that we did last Saturday, in gathering with a few key Arab countries in France. I believe, sir, that that attention has to be devoted every single day to this problem. And hearings such as this are important for that. This will be big news in Lebanon. It may not make the front pages here—but I guarantee you, that you all show this interest in their future—it will in Beirut. The second course of action is to also say what we would not support. And, in that respect, I think the United States will be able to lead the international community in affording recognition to a legitimate democratically elected government, even if it's by a majority, if it comes down to that, and to deny recognition to any second government or to an illegally extended current system—as we see now. I think the mainstream of the Arab world and the mainstream of the Western world is united in that purpose.

The Lebanese have enough political difficulties on their own without their neighbors or the Iranians adding to them. Now, this

is not a fully satisfactory answer, because none of us knows what will happen in the next days and how the election will fare.

Senator LUGAR. Well, if we deny recognition to whatever comes up, where does this leave the Lebanese? You know, one strategy might be simply to create such chaos that we and others don't recognize. Then what? Doesn't this almost bring about domination by some other power, given the fact the Lebanese have not produced a government that people recognize?

Ambassador WELCH. Well, I think we have something of an example in what was attempted to topple the Siniora government. The opposition withdrew its membership in the Cabinet, the Parliament has not been able to meet and take decisions, pass laws. The President has refused to act, which he's constitutionally empowered to do at times such as that; and yet, the Siniora government, which is recognized internationally, has not folded. They've shown commendable courage under the circumstances, and their people support them. I believe it is imperative that the United States not abandon Lebanon during this time of difficulty. I'm confident that Congress supports us in that. There have been resolutions passed by the Senate and the House declaring that. And I think we need simply to keep repeating, because I think, in this instance, the most important things are the political measures, so that no one can be under any misunderstanding about what we want to see happen here. And that it's more than us, too. It's the other responsible countries in the region and in Europe.

Senator LUGAR. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator KERRY. Senator Feingold.

Senator FEINGOLD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Sir, thank you for your testimony. As you know, Syria has been denying visas to Department of Homeland Security officials who would process Iraqi refugee cases, and I'm told you mention in your testimony that Syria is committed to issue visas to DHS—

Ambassador WELCH. Right.

Senator FEINGOLD [continuing]. Adjudicators. Now, have they started issuing these visas? And, if not, when do you expect them to start issuing them? And, finally, how many agents do you expect to be issued visas? And will that be sufficient?

Ambassador WELCH. Senator Feingold, my understanding is that they have issued four after a period of not issuing visas to American government representatives. They have now issued some; a handful to DHS personnel. I don't think that they're in Syria yet. But, on this point, sir, I believe that with any kind of luck, and provided it is sustained, we may have turned a corner on getting the personnel necessary to do the adjudication of refugee status into Syria.

Senator FEINGOLD. Can you clarify for me the relationship between Syria and Iran? And what underpins the relationship? What does the administration think about it? And how does it fit into our broader concerns about Iran?

Ambassador WELCH. Syria and Iran have had kind of an odd partnership going back quite a number of years. Syria was one of the few countries that, after the 1979 revolution in Iran, maintained some form of stable relationship with the new Iranian gov-

ernments. You know, there is lots of speculation about why that might have been the case, Senator, but it might have had a lot to do with the fact that the Syrian regime at the time was bitter enemies with the regime in Iraq.

That said, over the many years since, the Iranian influence in Syria has grown. The number of Iranian travelers to Syria is really quite large. The interaction between the Syrian and Iranian intelligence services is vigorous. Iranian-supported terrorist groups move in and out of Damascus with ease. Iran projects its influence into Lebanon through Syria, including with shipments of weapons and other supplies to Hezbollah.

Another thing that is increasingly evident is, as the sense of concern has risen internationally about Iran, particularly in the Arab world, it's led to an equal deterioration or parallel deterioration in Arab relationships with Damascus. So, you know, while there may be no formal sanctions, per se, by the Arab world against Syria, there are certainly informal measures in effect, which have really severely diminished the political and other relationships that Syria would expect normally to have, with its Arab brothers.

Senator FEINGOLD. So, in a way, Syria has become more isolated—in part, because of its relationship with Iran?

Ambassador WELCH. Absolutely.

Senator FEINGOLD. In that vein, despite an attempt by the international community to prevent Hezbollah from rearming after the 2006 summer war, and border security, according to a U.N. Assessment Team report, is insufficient to prevent the smuggling. From your testimony, I understand the United States primary attempt to address this problem has been through sanctions. However, since the evidence presented in the U.N. report suggests that Hezbollah is rearming, I'm obviously concerned that sanctions will not necessarily be effective.

With the Lebanese President asking both the U.N. and the Arab League for assistance, what more needs to be done to curb this flow of weapons to Hezbollah? And I will make that my last question, not only out of deference to my colleagues, but also because every time I speak, this buzzing starts.

Ambassador WELCH. Well, Senator, we really are worried about this problem, because, while I believe that the security regime that's provided for in Resolution 1701 is a good and substantial one for southern Lebanon, it's very vulnerable, if there's a persistent rearmament of Hezbollah from outside. There are two Security Council resolutions that pertain here. One is that one; the other is 1747. There are not supposed to be any weapons going into Lebanon, except for the legitimate government, and Iran is not supposed to export any weapons. Both of these things are presently being violated. The Lebanese Government is stuck in the middle, trying to stop them.

We've encouraged a more systematic and rigorous international assessment of this problem because most of it is occurring in an area where UNIFIL is not deployed. So, the first step is to get a sense of the scope of the problem, and then get some ideas on how to deal with it.

The Germans have started a border protection program along some parts of the northern border. We are supporting that pro-

gram, including financial assistance, and we're asking others to do more.

So, that's the third component, is to continue to draw international attention and support to the issue.

Finally, in our own security assistance relationship with Lebanon, with the army, principally, and some parts of their gendarmerie, the internal security forces, we do see part of that going to support their effort along the border. The Lebanese Army has 8,000 troops deployed along this border, which is an extraordinary new level of deployment for them. If you add that to what they have in the south, over half of their army is deployed to protect the area covered by UNIFIL in the south and the border with Syria. They need help in that regard, and we're trying to help them do it.

Senator FEINGOLD. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator KERRY. Thank you very much.

Senator Sununu.

Senator SUNUNU. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary Welch, is the administration in any conversations now with political opposition, Syrian political opposition, either abroad—expatriate community—or in Syria itself?

Ambassador WELCH. It's very difficult to talk to the Syrian opposition in Syria. Most of them are not either available, in a secure fashion, or able to speak to us. We try as best as we can to maintain contact in the society center. There are some very severe limitations on our ability to do so in Syria.

We are in contact with people outside, though perhaps not as robustly with some, as we are not comfortable with some members of the opposition because of their backgrounds and history. But, for those who have none of that baggage, we are in touch with them. We have some limited Middle East partnership activity with respect to Syria.

But, Senator, I'll be honest with you, this is not an easy thing to do in that particular place.

Senator SUNUNU. You talked a little bit about border security, trying to deal with the transshipment of arms across the Syria/Lebanon border. Could you expand on a few points here.

One, you mentioned an effort by the Germans to strengthen border patrol, particularly in the northern part of the country. What's the real scope of that effort? How many personnel are involved?

Second, you mentioned the use of 8,000 Lebanese Army forces to deal with this issue. They're only as good as the training and the equipment that they have. And, in this area, the United States has made a pretty big commitment. So, what is the status of our military assistance to the Lebanese Army forces? And are there any obstacles or problems in providing them with the support for which we've made a commitment?

Ambassador WELCH. The German program started initially, Senator Sununu, at the time of the war, in summer of 2006, when one of the solutions to lifting the air and sea blockade was Germany's support into the airport and seaports of Lebanon to provide assurance that there wasn't any illegal traffic of weapons going on there. Because of that positive experience between Germany and Lebanon, the Germans offered a pilot program to look at border secu-

rity in the northern area. I'm sorry, sir, I don't know exactly the details of the personnel and the cost, but this is a pilot program, not a full-blown initiative to cover the entire border.

It's had its growing pains. We've been supportive of it. We would like to see it extended. We've encouraged other potential European partners to join in. We think the Germans are doing a good thing here. And we're constantly in dialogue with them about it.

In terms of security assistance, of course, we—in addition to the normal law enforcement and intelligence relationships we have with a friendly country like Lebanon, we have ongoing security relationships with the army and the ISF, both of which work in those areas. They have some specialized equipment that they would like to apply to border surveillance missions, and we're looking at that possibility. Although I can't tell you exactly the numbers now, I would think that, all else being equal, that we would devote a large part of our assistance to that mission.

Senator SUNUNU. But, that aside, there haven't been any obstacles or limitations on our ability to deliver the assistance to the Lebanese Army that we've committed to, both through the action of the administration and through appropriations we've provided in Congress.

Ambassador WELCH. On the contrary, sir, the congressional appropriations have been generous and have afforded us extraordinary flexibility to meet some very difficult problems there.

Senator SUNUNU. I wasn't fishing for a compliment, I was just—I just wanted to, you know, make sure that there was nothing additional—

Ambassador WELCH. No—

Senator SUNUNU [continuing]. That we could or needed to be doing.

Ambassador WELCH. Not that I can think of, but I appreciate the offer. It's rare.

There are, from time to time, releasability issues on our side. I'm convinced we can work through those, Senator. And where we have a question or a concern, there are various measures we can take; for example, leasing equipment that might be returned later. We did that for the Nahr al-Bared fight. And, generally speaking, the Lebanese Army has been a trustworthy recipient of American military assistance. So, I think our record is pretty good.

Senator SUNUNU. How does the administration intend to deal with the issue, the question, or the potential of inviting Syria to participate in the Annapolis meeting? It's my sense that Prime Minister Olmert has been somewhat receptive to that idea. Is that likely to happen?

Ambassador WELCH. Well, as you know, we're engaged in a very intensive process right now to try and move the Israelis and the Palestinians from where they have been eventually into negotiations. Annapolis is the future of that. We haven't announced a date for it, and we haven't issued invitations yet, but the President decided, some time ago, almost 2 months ago, that there would be certain natural participants. Of course, the two parties, Israel and the Palestinians, the members of the Quartet, and he decided that in order to give the right cast and comprehensiveness to the participation, we would invite the Arab followup committee to the

Arab Peace Initiative. That's 23 countries and the Arab League's Secretary General. Syria is one of those countries. And Lebanon is also one.

That said, we have not invited anybody yet, and so, they've not been called upon to answer an invitation. I don't perceive that the invitation, per se, will be the difficulty, Senator.

Senator SUNUNU. Have you been pleased with the level of support that our allies within the Arab League have provided and the path leading to a potential meeting in Annapolis? Has their participation been constructive? Are they as engaged in the timeliness or the importance of timeliness and action at this particular time, or has there been a divergence in what they're saying privately versus what they're saying publicly?

Ambassador WELCH. We are encouraged. And I think you will have seen, from some of the public remarks from countries to which you refer, so are they. That said, this process is not yet mature to the point where we can make a judgment about: Will they be there or not?

We believe that the Arab States have an important responsibility to support moves to peace. Jordan and Egypt, who already have peace treaties with Israel, have been particularly influential in trying to move this process along, and have been very helpful to the effort to try and broaden the consensus within the area.

That said, Senator, this is a very difficult problem, and I have to tell you, in all honesty, that there's quite a bit of skepticism, not just in the Arab countries, but elsewhere, about whether this will work and whether the two parties, in particular, are prepared and ready to do things. We believe we can address that, but the job's not yet done.

Senator SUNUNU. I apologize for going over, Mr. Chairman. I have one more brief question.

It's my understanding that the Syrian Government has asked its allies in Lebanon to prepare to foment some internal disruptions and unrest in Lebanon, beginning on November 12. Do you have any confirmation of that? Is it your sense that they have, in fact, done that?

Ambassador WELCH. I can't answer that, specifically, but my sense is that, since November 12 marks the next nominal opening date for the Parliament to select the President, there is a high risk of something happening internally to signal that the place is a mess and parliamentarians can't take the risk of voting as they should. As you know, the Syrians are particularly influential in the Palestinian camps in Lebanon. That's a separate but parallel risk.

And in Syria's own statements, they don't say, "We're doing anything," of course, but they do point to the vulnerabilities and weaknesses in Lebanon, the need for stability there—as we say here, "yadda, yadda, yadda."

Senator SUNUNU. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator KERRY. Thank you.

Senator Cardin.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, thank you for being here.

It seems to me that, regardless of what happens on the Presidential elections—and we certainly hope that they'll be held in a fair manner, that we get an effective leader as President, who can be independent of Syria—but, unless there is more peace on the ground, unless we can deal with the external threats from Syria as to the stability within Lebanon, then it's going to be very difficult to make any type of progress toward a stable regime in Lebanon. You can't operate a government out of a hotel. I mean, you need to have free passage.

I was in Lebanon a couple of months ago, and I can't tell you I saw much of the country, because we were pretty well restricted on anything we could do, because of fear of safety, and not because of the Lebanese Government.

So, I guess my first question to you is—I want you to talk a little bit more about the status of the special investigation by the Security Council. And let me preface that by saying, you know, we've set up international criminal courts, and we're still awaiting those results. Seems to me that we always seem to, internationally—not the United States, but internationally—place a lower priority on holding people accountable for atrocities than we do on an agenda that appears to be looking forward, when, in reality, if you can't make closure in the past, you never really make progress in the future. And we need to find out, objectively, what happened in the assassination of the Prime Minister.

I was very encouraged by the passage of the Security Council resolution for a special investigation. I think there was some doubt as to whether that could be done. It was done. And now, I think time is of the essence, and it needs to be done objectively, and we need to find out, and it could very well help us get the type of international credibility to the influence of Syria in the Government of Lebanon, that could very well help us, not only bring closure, but for future stability within Lebanon.

So, could you give us a little bit more information how that's proceeding?

Ambassador WELCH. I hope so, sir. Let me divide my response into three parts.

First, the investigation itself is managed by an international team—a very substantial one—of investigators. The United States participates in that with some specialized law enforcement support, but we're not the primary players. The lead investigator, Serge Brammertz, is an experienced person from Belgium, and he's doing, we think, a creditable job. In all honesty, sir, we don't know the status of the investigation. It's very carefully and tightly controlled by that team, which I think is proper under the circumstances. It's a serious and honest effort. He has reported from time to time to the Security Council that he's getting close to concluding his investigation, that he's uncovered important information, but he's really said very little else—a commendably discreet approach.

And, second, there is the international tribunal itself. Because of the political crisis in Lebanon, the government was unable to pass this through its own system and agree, as Lebanon, to establish an international tribunal. So, unfortunately for Prime Minister Siniora, he was forced to refer the matter to the Security Council. At that point, the Security Council decided to act, and assumed on

its part the role of Lebanon, essentially, in exercising this part of its sovereignty to set up the special tribunal.

Now, it doesn't exist yet, sir, but it will. Already, they've agreed on a location. The Netherlands has offered to support the location. They've agreed on a budget, and the United Nations is raising money for it. The United States has contributed \$5 million, as the first tranche of our budgetary support to the tribunal. France has given a higher amount of money. There are several other countries chipping in, too. And I would expect countries in the region to do so, as well. Importantly, so has Lebanon, already matching our own and France's, and soon to put in more.

The third element that they're doing to set up the tribunal itself is to select those who would do the work of the tribunal. And that process, again, is commendably discreet, and it is underway.

That's, sort of, on a law enforcement calendar. It's not on a political calendar. And I believe that's a good thing, because this brings me to my third point. The most important thing here is to end the sense of impunity for political murder. And you need international vigilance to help the Lebanese do that. The investigation is irreplaceable. I don't think this investigation could have progressed as far as it has without international support. And ideally, sir, one day there will be a prosecution of those responsible. In conclusion, I can't tell you who will be prosecuted, because I just don't know, at this point.

Senator CARDIN. I would just ask that this be a very high priority for the United States in trying to move forward with Lebanon in that region. Clearly, we need accountability. Will that court have jurisdiction beyond just Hariri's assassination? Will it be all the political assassinations in the country, or is there a scope issue here?

Ambassador WELCH. There is a scope issue. You know, to be honest with you, I'm not entirely sure of the parameters, how far back it reaches. I can provide you an answer for the record on that, because it was established to deal with the Hariri crime and beyond, but that's a very technical legal question that was worked out between the United Nations and Lebanon, and, rather than mislead you, I'd like to provide the answer for the record.

[The written response from Assistant Secretary Welch follows:]

You are right about the importance of U.S. support for the establishment of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. The United States has worked closely with the United Nations to establish the Tribunal as quickly as possible, to signal that the era of impunity for political assassinations in Lebanon is at an end. The United States has already contributed \$5 million to establish the Tribunal, and with the support of the Congress, we plan to make additional contributions throughout the life of the Tribunal.

The statute of the Tribunal, incorporated in UNSCR 1757, provides the Tribunal with jurisdiction over persons responsible for the attack of February 14, 2005, resulting in the death of Former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and the death or injury of others. The Tribunal also has jurisdiction over persons responsible for other attacks that occurred in Lebanon between October 1, 2004, and December 12, 2005 (or any later date if decided by the U.N. and Lebanon with the consent of the Security Council) if the Tribunal determines that such attacks are connected and are of a nature and gravity similar to the Hariri assassination. This connection includes but is not limited to a combination of the following elements: Criminal intent (motive), the nature of the victims targeted, the pattern of the attacks (modus operandi) and the perpetrators.

Senator CARDIN. And also as to: What is the capacity of Lebanon today to pursue current threats that are being made against parlia-

mentarians, and actions that are being taken, whether they have the capacity to pursue that, or whether they will need the support of the United Nations also in that regard.

Ambassador WELCH. Well, that's a tougher question for Lebanon, sir. And, you know, sadly, if you want to murder somebody, you can do it. And that has happened with sad regularity in Lebanon. There are 40 parliamentarians sequestered in a hotel in West Beirut now, under Lebanese Army and internal security forces protection. The government's doing its best to try and operate under this environment of threat. I think many of you know some Lebanese politicians personally. They live with this reality every single day.

Senator CARDIN. I would just urge—

Ambassador WELCH. Senator Kerry mentioned meeting one who's still having operations. I presume that was the Defense Minister. What amazes me is that, in the face of this threat, these people go to work every single day, determined to stand up as patriots for their country in the face of it.

Senator CARDIN. My only point was that I don't know how the results of the election will change the circumstances in Lebanon unless they can get control of the safety of the—of their elected officials—of their population, including those who may be in opposition to the relationship with Syria.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator KERRY. Thank you, Senator Cardin.

Senator Casey.

Senator CASEY. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much.

And, Mr. Secretary, we appreciate your presence here today, and your service.

One question that I think you've addressed in your testimony and some of the questions is the United States posture with regard to how we engage a nation like Syria, in light of their track record. And one of the concerns that I have with regard to the Middle East or with regard to Iraq, in particular—and I think it's also a concern that we have, even with a nation like Syria—is there doesn't always seem to be a strategy with this administration. There seems to be episodic or tactical moves that are made, but there doesn't seem to be a strategy. And I wanted to have you, as you have already, but I'd ask you to restate it or reformulate it, in summary fashion—if someone walked up to you on the street and said, "Tell me, in a few minutes, what the United States strategy is with regard to Syria?" how would you enunciate that—or, articulate that, I should say?

Ambassador WELCH. We would have hoped for a better relationship with this country. Syria, conceivably, could be a key player, a positive force for peace and stability in the area. It's an interesting country. I've worked there, Senator, and it's got a very interesting culture and history. Damascus is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, and an object of some pride for Arabs, generally.

Unfortunately, in the last 25 or so years, for a variety of reasons, Syria has estranged itself from the international community, an isolation that I think has grown in recent years.

Earlier, the remark was made, "You know, the United States pulled its Ambassador out of Syria, but no one else did." Well, actu-

ally, the history is a bit different. For their own reasons, Arab countries have withdrawn their diplomatic representation from Syria from time to time. Egypt did, after Camp David. Iraq did, because of acts of terrorism between Syria and Iraq in the Saddam Hussein days. The Palestinians have had a very tempestuous relationship over time with Damascus. Certain European embassies were attacked by Syrian mobs violently in recent years, for real and imagined affronts to Syrian dignity, and their personnel had to be removed. The United Kingdom removed its Ambassador and all of its diplomatic representation in the mid-1980s over an attempted terrorist incident, in planting a bomb on an airliner in London. So, this is not only our experience, it's that of others.

What is the positive thing that we would like to see? There are certain areas of effort where we believe the government in Damascus could do things and make a difference. We wouldn't have the problems we see today in Lebanon if Syria were deciding to take a different role. Plain and simple.

Syria has got a long and difficult border with Iraq. It has managed to let a lot of people in, and, very recently, to curb that number. Well, they could do a lot more to control the number of foreign fighters going through Syrian territory into Iraq.

No. 3, they could control these extremists groups, terrorist groups that are operating from Damascus and conducting terrorism elsewhere in the area, principally Palestinian groups. You know, these are not representative of the Palestinian mainstream, which is now headed in a very different direction, but they can be controlled. There is not a single thing that goes on in Damascus that the Syrian Government couldn't shut down in a heartbeat if it wanted to.

So, they have to answer us on these things. And, if they did, and in a convincing way, we would know it. And if we knew it, we would be able to respond appropriately. It's their choice.

Senator CASEY. I wanted to ask you also about the question that looms over a lot of our discussions when it comes to the Middle East. We're having a vigorous debate in this country about Iran and its intentions, its nuclear intentions, real concern about Pakistan, obviously, not just in light of the recent activity there in the destabilized situation which appears to be unfolding there, but also the same could be asked of you with regard to Syria. What can you tell us about the Syrian Government's intentions with regard to obtaining or moving in the direction of obtaining a nuclear weapon? What do you know? What can you tell us? And if they are, what do you think are the steps that we must take and what the administration plans to take?

Ambassador WELCH. Because of this record of Syrian behavior that I think we all understand, I think there's a need for very special vigilance about Syria's intentions with respect to any kind of weaponry, conventional or otherwise. We have a high concern, even about the conventional armament of Syria, and it's an element in our diplomatic approaches to other countries that they not engage in arms sales to Syria. For their own reasons, they do, and we've been unable to deter that.

With respect to their unconventional weapons, Senator, if you don't mind, that's a subject that's not appropriate for an open hear-

ing. I'm not trying to duck the question. Obviously, there's a need for special vigilance there. But that's not something I can address in open session.

Senator CASEY. And then, also, I guess, finally—and I think I'm out of time, maybe I'll wait for the next round, if Senator Coleman has questions. Maybe I'll come back to it.

Thank you.

Senator KERRY. Senator Coleman.

Senator COLEMAN. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador, let me first raise a—just a human rights issue, because I believe I saw this in your written testimony, but I don't believe you addressed it in your statement, the issue about the Syrian Government refusing medical treatment for prisoners of conscience, in particular. And there are a number of cases, one that—certainly, that I have been watching, and, I think, others in the Senate, is Riyadh Seif, waiting—we're awaiting action to—whether he's going to be allowed any opportunity to travel outside of Syria to receive medical care. I know there's been a call by the administration, the European Union, to lift the travel ban, not only for Mr. Seif, but for all Syrians who have the courage to voice support for reform. Can you give me an update as to whether, in fact, Syria has—the Syrian Government is allowing Mr. Seif to get appropriate medical care outside of Syria?

Ambassador WELCH. My understanding is that he has some very serious chronic health conditions, and that his medical situation is of grave concern to his family. The Syrian Government has been unresponsive to our entreaties on him and on others. I regret to say I have very little information about his condition right now, sir.

Senator COLEMAN. I would appreciate if you would keep us informed as to whether there's any change in that status.

Ambassador, let me get to an issue that Senator Cardin had—has raised. Used the phrase, talking about “end the sense of impunity for political murder.” You have political murder going on in Lebanon. Right now, I think there is a sense of impunity. We don't have the full report regarding the Hariri investigation. I think everything that I have seen is pretty clear that Syria was involved in that assassination. You then have a series of six other pro-sovereignty elected officials assassinated. I thought Chairman Lugar raised the question to you as to: What information do you have about Syrian involvement? I don't think you ever answered that part of the question. I'd raise it again. Can you tell me what information we have, at this time, regarding Syrian involvement in the six pro-sovereignty assassinations that have taken place subsequent to the Hariri assassination?

Ambassador WELCH. You're right, Senator, I didn't answer it directly, and I didn't answer it directly in the case of the status of the investigation into the Hariri murder, either. There's an international investigation into that one and some of the others, and the Lebanese, of course, are conducting their own inquiries, as well.

Some people have been jailed for some of these crimes. I don't know how far the evidentiary trail goes. My observation would be, I think, as I said earlier, the fact is that those who have been targeted all appear to have one set of common beliefs, and thus, the hypothesis to be defeated, as economists would say, is that there

has been one hand behind it. But I honestly don't know, Senator Coleman. The truth is that in Lebanon, far too often, these murders have not been investigated, there hasn't been a serious effort at that, and they haven't uncovered who's been behind the crimes.

When they tried to resolve the civil war, there was an amnesty. And, at the time, we, as the U.S. Government, had to judge, "Well, how do we handle crimes that might have been committed against Americans during that period?" And we carved out an exception in the amnesty, in cooperation with the Lebanese Government, for that. This time around, we've tried to provide every investigatory resource that was requested of us by the Lebanese authorities, and to add in these other special arrangements, like the international investigation and the tribunal.

At the end of the day, you know, like in all laws, sir, you want to create a barrier, a deterrence to this action. Sometimes it's easier to do that than it is actually to conclude a satisfactory investigation.

I can't tell you today that, for some of the more prominent of these murders, that I know exactly who was behind it.

Senator COLEMAN. I mean, the challenge we have is: How do you engage Syria without undermining the success of the 2005 Cedar Revolution? How do you engage them without some belief, some sense that, you know, political assassination is off limits, recognizing democratically elected government is a precondition, stopping the flow of arms and support from Iran through Syria to Hezbollah is a precondition? And, for me, what I struggle with is: How do you believe, even if the answer is yes—what is it that you can see? How do you measure—there are two parts to the question—one: What kind of commitments do you have to have—basic commitments? And then: How do you measure whether they're believable?

Ambassador WELCH. Well, I think, in this case, we are going to be distrustful, to be candid, first. It's not an instance of "trust, but verify." The fact is, there is a poor record of Syrian effort and cooperation on these issues that concern us. So, the burden is on them to overcome that. We will do our best to verify it when they commit to something.

And I'll give you an example of what I mean. Senator Kerry was asking: Did they take any action at all against some of the people identified as persons of concern to us in the past? Sure they did. But it was a minor subset of the larger group that we turned over to them for investigation and action.

In the last few months, the Iraqi Government has come to us to say, "You know, we have a big difficulty with the Syrians, because they're hosting opposition conferences in Syria of people who we know are involved in actions inside Iraq."

One of the things we've tried to do is support the Iraqis in going in—since they can do this now, they're fully sovereign, and have a relationship with Syria—and putting their case right out there in front.

Finally, Senator, I don't think the United States should trade or balance off any of these issues. These are things that all the other responsible countries in the region are not doing. So, why would we

trade the interests of Lebanon against Syria's misbehavior in Iraq? That's just not going to happen.

Senator COLEMAN. I mean, is it fair to say that the sovereignty of Lebanon is not negotiable?

Ambassador WELCH. That's correct. And the tribunal and the investigation are not negotiable, either. That investigation should be allowed to proceed where it will go, without any interference by the United States or by anybody else, including, of course, Syria.

Senator COLEMAN. Thank you, Ambassador.

Senator KERRY. Thank you very much, Senator Coleman.

This has been a long panel. We have another panel, too, of experts who can help shed some light on this, so we want to get to that. But, just a couple of quick things before we wrap up this panel. And, Mr. Secretary, you've been generous with your time. We appreciate it.

First question. On the flow of arms coming through Syria and coming from Iran, to what degree—if any—has that impeded the activities of UNIFIL in the south? Has it had a negative impact on the UNIFIL efforts?

Ambassador WELCH. There is no armed Hezbollah presence that UNIFIL has detected in its area of operations. Someone, I don't know if it was you, Senator, mentioned Hezbollah flags flying in—

Senator KERRY. Yes; I did.

Ambassador WELCH [continuing]. Certain places—

Senator KERRY. Correct.

Ambassador WELCH. As you know, flags in Lebanon and many places in the Middle East are political banners, and that may be—

Senator KERRY. No, no; this was a very specific effort that took place immediately after the war with Israel.

Ambassador WELCH. I see.

Senator KERRY. And the bombings that took place, and before families had even returned, in an effort to win favor with the families, there was a real campaign out there to, sort of, stake a claim and then to be engaged in very generous rebuilding and relocation efforts.

Ambassador WELCH. Right, I see. Well, to the best of my knowledge, there is no armed Hezbollah presence. UNIFIL is not reporting that there is. They are a very capable organization, however, Senator, and I cannot say that they are not able to infiltrate into that area. They have a good deal of local support.

Senator KERRY. No; which is why, obviously, they are infiltrating, and all evidence we have is, that weapons are coming in and they are rearming. We understand that. And that's—

Ambassador WELCH. And—

Senator KERRY [continuing]. Part of the—

Ambassador WELCH. And—

Senator KERRY [continuing]. Dilemma. But the question I had is whether that's interfered or affected any of the UNIFIL activities.

Ambassador WELCH. Not yet, sir. The attack against Spanish peacekeepers, that occurred and resulted in several fatalities, was denounced by Hezbollah. I'm not entirely sure who was responsible for that, but it does not seem they were. There have been some

rocket firings also from that area, from the UNIFIL area against Israel, just one that I recall, and I believe that was by an extremist Palestinian group.

The worrisome thing about Hezbollah is that it's not comforting that they aren't there, because, even beyond the Litani, beyond the UNIFIL area of operations, they're able to launch longer range weapons against Israel.

Senator KERRY. And with respect to President Assad's meddling in Iraq and the support for Sunni insurgents, which we also know is taking place, is there any evidence, or any potential, that that could spill back over into Syria and have an impact on the Sunni majority of Syria with respect to the Alawite sort of division? Do you have any sense of that?

Ambassador WELCH. I think the Syrians have reason to be concerned about Sunni extremist groups and Kurdish extremist groups, as well. As you know, there's a big population of Kurds in Syria. I believe that there have been confrontations between the Syrian Government's internal security forces and some groups in Syria. It's not entirely clear to us why that's happened, but there have been incidents there. And, given the history of the minority regime in Syria, which, as you know, faced great pressure, including violent pressure, from the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1970s and early 1980s, I would not be at all surprised if they were to have a difficulty from spillover from the al-Qaeda influenced elements in Iraq.

Senator, just an editorial comment on that; that ought to be even more reason for them to begin to control this problem, in cooperation with others.

Senator KERRY. I would think so. One would think so, at least.

Well, I appreciate that. I don't know if my colleagues had any followup question.

One thing I will note in the conversations that—Senator Dodd and I had over about 2 hours with President Assad, I think as recently as this January, and we've discussed the Hariri investigation, and, frankly, neither of us detected any hint that it ought to be on the table, that it was a point of negotiation. In fact, he was very clear that it should go forward, and that was at least the represented position. I don't know if there's some back-channel effort there. One can imagine all the speculation and reasons why they wouldn't want it to. But, at least in those conversations, there was plenty on the table, and that was never part of it. So, we did relay to the Department those things that we thought were opportunities to follow up on.

That said, we all know that Syria has long had its tentacles deeply reaching into Lebanon, and we also know that this dangerous process of assassinating the majority is, in the view of every Member of this Congress, an abhorrent and unacceptable approach. And I think those legislators, who are unbelievably courageous—I met with, you know, Raoul Hariri when he was here just the other day, and with other members in the last weeks. And they are courageous. They live an extraordinary life of day-to-day risk. And I think it's very important for us in Congress to make clear to them how much we admire their effort to practice democracy and to stand up for their values, which we share, and how deeply com-

mitted we are to seeing them succeed and to seeing this election process respected. And the Syrians need to know that the Congress is looking at this with every ounce of vigilance we can, and that, in whatever ways this Congress can find a bipartisan approach to deal with it, we will look for it. And I hope that this message is heard in whatever ways it can be.

With that said, we thank you, Mr. Secretary. We thank you for the work you're doing, and thank you for spending this time with us. We appreciate it very much.

If I could ask for a quick and seamless transition to the second panel, we'd like to get you up here as quick as possible.

Thank you.

[Pause.]

Senator KERRY. Well, thank you very much for your patience. If we could ask each of you to perhaps summarize your full testimony, it will be placed in the record as if spoken in full. And we certainly appreciate your being here with us today.

Mr. Malley, why don't you lead off, and then Mr. Lesch, and then Mr. El-Hokayem.

STATEMENT OF ROBERT MALLEY, MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA PROGRAM DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. MALLEY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee.

I think we're having this hearing at a very—

Senator KERRY. Go ahead, you can—you want to remove—she's going to make you not be Secretary Welch. [Laughter.]

Mr. MALLEY. No problem for me.

Senator KERRY. There you go.

Mr. MALLEY. It's an honor.

This hearing takes place at a time of unprecedented challenges for our country in the Middle East, and you mentioned some of those crises, all of which are interconnected virtually in an unprecedented way—Iran, Iraq—

Senator KERRY. Why don't you just identify yourself, for the record, so everybody knows your background, quickly.

Mr. MALLEY. Robert Malley. I'm the Middle East Program director at the International Crisis Group.

Crisis in Iran, crisis in Iraq, crisis in Lebanon, in Palestine, the growing sectarianism—and all this at a time when United States credibility is suffering, and at a time when there's an absence of an overarching security framework that sets the rules of the game.

Syria is not necessarily central or decisive to all of these crises, but it plays a role in each and every one of them. It hosts, as we just heard, Palestinian militant groups. It provides aid and a transit point for weapons to Hezbollah. It has very deep tentacles into Lebanon, as you just mentioned. It is the only Arab country that has special ties to Iran. And it borders Iraq and has close ties with a number of groups and actors in Iraq. In other words, they can do something about every issue we care about. And, in those circumstances, they could assume a spoiling role or they could assume a stabilizing one.

Now, with all due respect to David Welch and to the administration, what we've been doing over the last 2 years is not engagement, it's not the kind of genuine engagement that tries to see whether Syria can play a positive role. What it is, is a list of demands that we put, periodically, to the Syrians, without follow-through, without putting it in a global comprehensive context, and doing it at a time when the Syrians are persuaded, rightly or wrongly, that our goal is to destabilize their regime, overthrow their regime, remodel the region in a way that is inimical to their interests.

Engagement doesn't mean surrendering our principles, surrendering our values, giving up on the tribunal, giving up on Lebanon's sovereignty, as you all rightly commented. It means having a frank discussion with the Syrians about whether there is an end state for the region that is compatible with our interests and that also meets their minimum needs.

French President Sarkozy, who was here yesterday, as we speak, has sent emissaries to Syria to discuss the issue of Lebanon and the Presidential election. I don't think anyone here suspects that he is about to betray his commitment to Lebanon's sovereignty or to give up on the tribunal. But he reached the commonsensical conclusion that Syria plays an important role in Lebanon and that it's better to try to engage with them than to keep them isolated and being able—and giving them every incentive to play a spoiling role.

Now, I know we know the arguments against that kind of engagement, but let me just go through some of the opportunities, I think, that exist, and some of which you mentioned on all of the issues that we have, opportunities that I think are not being seized.

On the issue of Israel and the groups that Syria harbors, President Assad has said, multiple times, that he's prepared to have unconditional negotiations with Israel. One could question the motivation, one can question the sincerity, and there certainly is plenty of reason to do so. But why not test him? What do we lose by having President Assad send somebody to negotiate with Israel? In fact, even if his intention is simply to gain time, the simple fact of having Syrians and Israelis sitting at a table together at a time when so many in the region are denying Israel's right to exist, don't want to have a two-state solution, at a time when all of Syria's main allies—Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas—are against a negotiated solution with Israel, that itself will send a powerful message to the region and to those groups who would have to read the signals on the wall and understand that their days, if this negotiation succeeds, are going to be numbered, in terms of the activities that they're engaged in right now. So, it would have a moderating impact on Hezbollah, on Hamas, on Islamic jihad.

Now, let's think—turn to Iran. As was mentioned earlier by Assistant Secretary Welch, it is an odd couple, but it's a couple that really is a function of the regional context. There's an opportunity, I believe, today to try not to split them off. Syria has 25 years of the only country who really has had a close relationship with—it's been Iran, and it's been a stable, continuous, trustworthy relationship. But there are very, very real tensions and contradictions in that relationship, on every issue of importance. On Israel, as I just

mentioned, Ahmadinejad says that Israel should be wiped out—off the face of the Earth. President Assad said, in response to that, “We want to have recognition and normalization once we’re at peace.”

On the issue of Iraq, Iran is supporting the Shiite government, is supporting the Shiite militias, at the same time as we have President Assad in Syria that has close ties with the Sunni insurgency. They have different goals for Iraq right now.

On the issue of Lebanon, there also are tensions, because, whereas one—Syria’s main objective is to get rid of the tribunal. That’s not Iran’s objective. It’s to strengthen Hezbollah as its instrument in Lebanon.

So, on all these three, there are tensions that, rather than ignore, we should be exploiting.

We also know that, at this time, the relationship with Iran is quite unpopular in Syria, certainly at the mass Sunni level at a time of great sectarian polarization in the region, but also at the elite level, when they question whether this is the kind of relationship they want to be stuck with, this monogamous relationship with Iran.

On Iraq. On Iraq, again, there are so many objective reasons why we should be working hand in hand with Syria. Syria has changed its policy toward Iraq, not in response to what we asked them to do, but because of their own self—the threat perception. They used to be afraid of 150,000 American troops in Iraq. They no longer truly fear that they’re going to turn around and go fight them. Their fear is now what’s happening in Iraq; a break in Iraq could spill over, Kurdish independence which could inspire their Kurds, the Sunni jihadists, who you mentioned earlier, who may come back in—who are already coming into Syria, provoking real security difficulties, the refugees, the sectarian polarization in Iraq, which has implications for a minority Alawite regime in Syria.

So, on all these issues, the Syrians have, in fact, taken some steps. Over the last several months, since 2006, they’ve recognized the Iraqi Government. They’re dealing with it. They’ve made greater effort at the border. I think even General Petraeus acknowledged that. They have canceled the meeting of the armed opposition in Damascus, even though it had been planned. They’ve arrested some people. They’ve helped some of the tribes that are fighting against al-Qaeda. They’re not doing this in a coordinated way. They’re not doing this in conjunction with us. And they’re not doing this in a sustained manner. But that’s what we could get if we spoke to them and we dealt with them and tried to listen to their legitimate interests, and refused whatever illegitimate interests or means they’re pursuing.

The most difficult case, the one—the last one, is Lebanon. And I think it’s difficult, for the reasons we’ve explored over the last hour. On that one, it appears that Syria’s goals and the United States goals are clearly antagonistic. Lebanon—Syria wants to interfere in Lebanese affairs. And Syria wants to do away with the tribunal. No doubt in my mind about those two things. But is our current strategy of erratic engagement with Syria, and threats and sanctions only, is that achieving any of our goals, vis-a-vis Lebanon? Is it protecting Lebanon from interference? I don’t think so.

And, again, I think our discussion—your discussion over the last hour made that point. Is it stabilizing Lebanon? Is it getting us any closer to a different kind of relationship between Syria and Lebanon, normal relationship between neighbors that have a lot of common interests? I don't see that, either. And, in terms of the tribunal, are—does anyone think that, at this rate, Syria's going to turn over any suspects, or, if the tribunal finds that they're guilty, turn over any culprits? Do they—do we think that the tribunal, which is both about accountability and about deterrence and turning a page in the relationship between Lebanon and Syria, does anyone think that, at this point, when the tribunal is viewed by Syria as a matter of life or death, when they believe that either they surrender to the tribunal, in which case they're afraid of the consequences, or they have nothing else to look forward to, because nobody's giving them any incentives, does anyone believe that Syria's going to act constructively, that this is leading to the goals we all share, in terms of Lebanon's sovereignty, independence, and pursuit of the tribunal?

Another tack would be to tell the Syrians, and make clear by our deeds, "We're continuing with the tribunal. No; that's an independent path, and we're taking it, and we're going to support it, but we're not trying to overthrow you or to destabilize your regime, and, in fact, we're going to engage with you, which will prove to you that we treat you as a legitimate interlocutor, we're going to put some assets on the table, in terms of possibly resuming negotiations on the Golan," in terms of talking about what they would have to do to lift the sanctions, so that we put Syria in the position; No. 1, where it is more confident that we're not trying to overthrow them; No. 2, where they see that the tribunal is not an instrument of destabilization, but, rather, is an instrument of trying to get Syria to turn the page in its relationship with Lebanon. We give them something to lose if, in fact, they continue to try to undermine the tribunal, which is whatever they would have gotten through engagement with us and the rest of the world. That would—seems to me, would be a better tack to try than what we're doing right now.

Now, having said all that, I'd conclude with this thought. We now have, I believe, a real opportunity with Syria, and it is a critical—not "the," but "a" critical actor in the region. For anyone who travels to Damascus, it's quite clear that they are in a very odd and paradoxical situation. They're quite confident, because they see that we, the United States, are losing, in their view, in Iraq, in Palestine, in Lebanon. So, they feel quite confident.

But, at the same time, they know they're in a very uncomfortable box. Some of the things I mentioned earlier, the civil strife in Iraq and Lebanon, with very heavy sectarian overtones, is hurting them, because they have a majority Sunni population, a minority Alawite regime. It's affecting the legitimacy of the leadership. You have a young leader who's presiding over a very old sclerotic system. He knows that it is losing steam. He knows it's losing legitimacy. He needs something to regain that legitimacy, and he needs something to break out of the box he's in right now.

The economic problems are very acute. The refugee presence—the presence of Iraqi refugees only added to it. But you have, as

I said, a sclerotic system, which has not been able to reform. You have the oil revenues—Syrian oil revenues that will come to an end in about 5 years. You have the loss of external subsidies, Arab or otherwise. And all that means that here you have somebody who's looking for a different lease on life.

And, finally, you have these regional contradictions that I mentioned, that, on every single front, if he supports—by supporting Hezbollah in Lebanon, he's alienating his Sunni base; if he supports the Sunni insurgency in Iraq, he alienates Iran; if he reached out to the Shiite-led government in Baghdad, it angers his allies in Iraq, and it angers his Sunni population.

It's an uncomfortable box. We should seize the opportunity by engaging with them in a frank discussion, being true to our principles, but also trying to take into account their legitimate needs.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Malley follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ROBERT MALLEY, MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA
PROGRAM DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. Chairman, first, let me express my deep appreciation for the invitation to testify before this subcommittee. The question of how to deal with Syria is of high importance to U.S. interests at a time when we face a dangerous and virtually unprecedented situation in the Middle East. We should no more underestimate the gravity of regional circumstances than we should overrate our Nation's current capacity to address them alone. Simultaneous and interconnected crises in Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, and Palestine, increased sectarian polarization throughout the region, the absence of an overarching security framework or of robust American diplomacy together with diminished U.S. influence and credibility threaten to unleash a far wider and unmanageable conflagration.

Syria is not a central or decisive actor in all of these crises. But it undoubtedly can have a significant impact on each. It may do so by taking on a spoiling role or a stabilizing one. How Washington deals with Damascus will go a long way toward determining which part the Syrian regime ultimately chooses to play.

To be sure, there is no guarantee that a change of course by the U.S. administration and a decision to genuinely engage the Syrian regime will succeed in altering its behavior. Reasons for skepticism abound, related to the nature of the regime, the regional balance of power, the depth of mutual distrust, as well as fundamental differences on several important matters. But a sober analysis, rooted in the International Crisis Group's presence and unique access in Syria, suggests there is far more potential than the administration believes and a far more promising approach than the one it has adopted.

Mr. Chairman, at the outset it is important to accurately assess Syria's capacity to influence regional events. On the Israeli-Palestinian front, the process that will be launched at the forthcoming Annapolis meeting is fraught with both opportunity and risk. For the first time since 2000, the parties have agreed to negotiate permanent status issues; there is also greater confidence between the respective political leaderships than at any time since the early days of Oslo. That said, divisions among Palestinians threaten to undermine any progress; while Hamas may be weakened, it remains strong and retains the ability to torpedo the process. This could take the shape of escalating violence from the West Bank or from Gaza, either of which would overwhelm any political achievement, increase the political cost of compromises for both sides and negate Israel's willingness or capacity to relax security restrictions.

The notion that Hamas or Islamic Jihad blindly follows Syria's lead is simplistic and highly misleading; nonetheless there is little doubt that Damascus exercises important influence given how few allies the Islamists enjoy. Syria is unlikely to cut its Palestinian allies off, let alone expel their exiled leadership, in exchange for renewed engagement or a revived peace process. But it can almost certainly moderate their behavior; what is more, the Islamists are adept at deciphering the regional map and would have to adapt their policies to signs of shifting regional and international dynamics.

Similar dynamics apply to Hezbollah which depends on Syria for arms transfers and territorial depth. In the event of renewed Syrian-Israeli or Syrian-U.S. talks,

Damascus will not wish to jeopardize either and therefore is likely to restrain the Shiite movement's activity at the southern border. Conversely, and in both instances, Syria could encourage its Palestinian or Lebanese allies to intensify or renew their attacks against Israel.

Finally, the fact that Syria did not instigate the Iraqi crisis does not mean it is unable to sustain it if it so desired nor that it can be resolved without its help. The absence of an effective Iraqi central state, coupled with the country's growing fragmentation and the increased power of autonomous groups and militias, has enhanced the role of outside actors both as potential spoilers and as needed partners in any effort to stabilize the country. Given how dire the situation has become, it will now take active cooperation by all foreign stakeholders—Syria included—to have any chance of redressing the situation.

In this context, Syria would bring important assets to the table. Unlike virtually all other involved actors—whether the U.S., Turkey, Iran, or other Arab states—Damascus is perceived as being relatively neutral by the full range of Iraqi actors; it has old ties with ex-Baathists and tribes that straddle the Iraqi-Syrian border as well as new ones with Sunni insurgent groups; it has significantly deepened its relationship with the Maliki government; and it enjoys a good relationship with Moqtada al-Sadr. Sadr's office in Damascus faces that of a Shiite foe, Grand Ayatollah Sistani, and fiery anti-Iranian speeches by Sunni representatives are delivered uncensored even as Damascus' ties with Tehran continue to grow. Well positioned to act as a mediator, Syria could—if given proper incentives—play a more helpful role by enhancing border control; use its extensive intelligence on and lines of communication with insurgent groups to facilitate negotiations; draw on its wide-ranging tribal networks to reach out to Sunni Arabs in the context of such negotiations; and serve as an intermediary with Iran.

Powerful arguments typically are made against renewed engagement. These are offered not only by the Bush administration, but also by a number of Lebanese as well as (more privately) several of the United States' closest Arab allies. Because they are serious, and because they clearly have resonance in this country, they deserve being addressed in turn.

At its core, the case against engaging Syria at this time is based on the conviction that the regime merely is seeking a respite from international pressure rather than a genuine change in its regional posture. Syria is seen as committed to its old ideological alliance with Iran, raising doubts as to whether such a long-term relationship can be easily reversed. In this context, the U.S. administration considers any overture by President Bashar—and particularly his calls for renewed Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations—as disingenuous attempts to break out of increased isolation, cover up greater intrusion in Lebanese affairs, and shift focus away from the investigation into former Prime Minister Hariri's assassination. Engagement with Syria is seen as futile or, worse, damaging, an escape hatch for a regime that only responds—if at all—to sustained pressure.

Many also dismiss the argument that Syria would moderate its policies if return of the Golan were on the table. As U.S. officials put it, Damascus may like to recover the Golan, but its core interests lie elsewhere: Resuming its hegemony over Lebanon and scuttling the international tribunal. Since Washington is not prepared to concede on either, there is little to be gained by discussions. Some go further and maintain that occupation of the Golan has become the lifeline of a regime that has lost legitimacy; the occupation provides justification for maintaining the state of emergency, postponing domestic reforms and silencing opposition. The mere initiation of a high-level dialogue would send a signal to worried U.S. allies in Lebanon (the March 14 forces) that a deal was being cooked behind their backs. In like manner, engagement would threaten the unprecedented consensus that currently exists between the U.S., major European and Arab (Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan) countries on the issue of Lebanon and the tribunal.

Finally, U.S. officials question how important a role Syria can play in assisting efforts in Iraq: The conflict has become self-sustaining, and Damascus purportedly enjoys only very limited leverage on the parties. Insofar as Iraq's breakdown is of concern to the regime, it will do what little it can out of self-interest, not to please the U.S.

As their strongest piece of evidence, administration officials state that engagement was tried, tried again, and failed. In successive visits, then-Secretary of State Powell and Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage made clear what was expected of Syria: To halt any support for the Iraqi insurgency; cease interfering in Lebanese affairs; and stop supporting violent organizations such as Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah. More recently, a parade of foreign (essentially European) visitors to Damascus is said to have produced nothing but greater Syrian self-confidence that their strategy was working. Anything other than very limited and cir-

cumscribed discussions with the U.S. (chiefly on the question of Iraq) merely would validate the regime's conviction that it can play these cards in order to extract valuable concessions.

Although the arguments have some merit, the conclusion does not stand up to scrutiny.

1. *Syria's sincerity about wanting to recover the Golan should be tested rather than dismissed out of hand.* For some time, President Bashar has conveyed a willingness to resume negotiations with Israel. In interviews, he offered a vision of the two countries living side by side in peace; claimed that negotiations could resume without preconditions and that a deal could be reached within 6 months; and stated that normalization under the terms of the Arab Peace Initiative would result.

Interpretations of the Syrian President's motivations differ. Some see a genuine desire to recover the Golan. Some believe it is an attempt to break out of isolation. Others are persuaded he wants to distract attention from the investigation into Prime Minister Hariri's assassination. Whatever the intent may be—and there is reason to believe it is a combination of the three—the signals are worthy of note. Indeed, that Bashar may be prompted by multiple reasons and see more than one benefit accruing from a reinvigorated peace process makes it all the more important to pursue.

The argument that the occupation serves the regime's interests overlooks what it stands to gain by recovering the Golan. While there is widespread agreement that President Bashar's position has been bolstered as a result of both the 2006 Lebanon war and personnel changes he has been initiating over the years, he contemplates an uncertain future. The regime faces sectarian polarization in the region, a decline in its political legitimacy and, most of all, acute economic problems linked to the loss of external subsidies, the expected drying up of its oil resources within the next few years and the sclerosis of its system. Although in his early forties, he has inherited an aging regime for whom cautiousness increasingly is akin to inertia. Confronted with the real possibility of regime stagnation and gradual decline, President Bashar needs a major achievement of his own to revive its legitimacy. Regaining the Golan, with all the attendant diplomatic and economic benefits—most notably normalization with the West—could be critically important in that respect. Indeed, the President has confided to various interlocutors that recovery of the Golan—thereby achieving what his father could not—would make him a hero in his citizens' eyes.

Even assuming that Syria is more interested in the process than the outcome—a debatable proposition—the mere picture of Syrians negotiating with Israelis would have a ripple effect in a region where rejection of Israel's right to exist is gaining ground and where Syria's allies (Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas) are on record as opposing a negotiated settlement. Moreover, the onset of peace talks would affect the behavior of militant groups close to Syria. In other words, whatever Bashar's intent, his offer of direct talks with Israel should be seized. Even if the U.S. is leery of direct engagement, for it to express doubts about the prospect of direct talks between an Arab nation and Israel is both unprecedented and short-sighted. The onset of the Annapolis process is one more opportunity to jump-start Israeli-Syrian talks.

2. *Lebanon's sovereignty should not be sacrificed; rather, the challenge is to assess whether Syria is prepared to pursue its interests differently, consistent with Lebanon's independence.* Syria's relationship with Lebanon has long been highly problematic. Historically and ideologically, it still views its neighbor as part of Greater Syria and the notion of "two countries for one people" continues to resonate widely. Damascus also sees Lebanon exclusively through the prism of its national security interests: It perceives Hezbollah as a critical asset in its struggle with Israel; the Bekaa Valley as its strategic soft belly from where Israel has launched attacks; Lebanon as inevitably falling under Israel's influence if it escapes its own; and a pro-Western government (such as the current one) as a mere American tool designed to destabilize the regime. During the 1990s, the relationship became one of wholesale domination. Syria mastered and manipulated Lebanon's politics, plundered its economic resources, and arrested and detained its citizens at will.

This hegemonic relationship ended after Hariri's assassination, but not without exacting a heavy price: Syria was forced to a precipitous and humiliating withdrawal; it has endured considerable international pressure and isolation; and it has witnessed an alarming deterioration in the two nations' relations. Many Syrian officials most closely identified with the experience of the 1990s have since been either removed or marginalized. All in all, a growing number of Syrians now challenge the assumption that the benefits of domination were worth its cost. In their eyes, although a handful of officials enriched themselves thanks to their corrupt activities, they were promoting personal rather than regime or national interests. In fact, their actions are now considered to have endangered the country as a whole.

The question many Syrians now ask is whether their country could defend its core interests through legitimate means (for example its strong ties to Lebanese allies and Lebanon's dependence on Syria for trade example) while forsaking direct political, security, or military interference and normalizing ties with its neighbor. It is the question serious U.S. engagement with Syria should be designed to elucidate.

3. *The international tribunal should continue unimpeded but in a manner that protects rather than threatens Lebanon.* The question of the international tribunal arguably looms as the most difficult obstacle to improved U.S./Syrian relations. The Syrian regime undoubtedly considers it a mortal threat and will go to great lengths to eliminate it. That outcome is just as plainly unacceptable to the U.S.

The purpose behind the tribunal should be clear: To offer justice and accountability but also, and no less decisively, ensure that Syria turns a page in its relationship with Lebanon. Given current U.S./Syrian relations, the tribunal will do nothing of the sort. Even if Syria's implication in Hariri's murder were firmly established, under existing circumstances Damascus would refuse to hand over any culprit. At best, it would handpick its own suspects—or scapegoats—before trying and convicting them for high treason. At that point, Syria would face calls for greater sanctions and isolation; some in Lebanon and the U.S. would renew pleas for forcible regime change.

And then what? Such an outcome would not serve any parties' interests. A tighter embargo would hurt Lebanon more than Syria, given Beirut's economic frailty and dependence on its neighbor for trade and commerce. Seeking regime change would leave Lebanon more vulnerable than ever, as Syria is far from having fully exploited its destabilizing potential. A successful effort to oust the regime would represent a mortal threat to a fragile and multiconfessional Lebanon. In short, pursuit of the current course of action will not deliver the guilty, protect Lebanon, or lead to the kinds of changes in Syria the U.S. would like to see.

The tribunal should continue and might even become a useful tool in altering Syria's behavior toward Lebanon, but only by avoiding a head-on confrontation with Damascus which inevitably would come at Lebanon's expense. The key in this respect is to demonstrate that its purpose is not to overthrow or destabilize the Syrian regime, but rather to alter its Lebanon policy. Empty rhetorical pledges will not do; rather, concrete indications that the U.S. harbors no such intent are needed. Even as the tribunal proceeds, adopting a policy of careful but serious U.S. engagement with Syria, putting the Golan and improved economic ties on the table, and cooperating on Iraq-related issues, such as the refugee inflow, could achieve three important results.

First, it would send the message that Washington considers the regime a legitimate interlocutor. Second, it would provide the regime with significant political and economic resources, allowing it to absorb the consequence of a putative guilty verdict—and to turn over culprits—without risking delegitimizing at home. Third, it would heighten the cost to the regime of resisting the tribunal's verdict, since Syria would stand to lose whatever benefits derived from engagement. Conversely, to make the tribunal a question of life or death for regime is the surest way to destroy Lebanon.

4. *Ties to Iran are strong, but are neither tension-free nor inalterable. For the past quarter century, Iran has been Syria's most loyal, most dependable and, at some points, only ally.* Damascus will not abandon this relationship for the sake of renewed dialogue with the U.S. or as an entry fare for negotiations with Israel.

That said, Syrian officials are equally clear that different relations with the U.S. or a peace agreement with Israel would change the regional picture—the country's alliances and policies—and that relations with Iran are fraught with tensions. These contradictions run deep and are at play in all major regional theatres. Whereas Iran has ruled out any dealings with Israel and openly calls for its destruction, Syria repeatedly asserts its willingness to negotiate and, should a deal be reached, normalize relations. Since the Iraq war, Iran has heavily supported Shiite groups and militias; Syria, though it recently has strengthened ties with the central government, has provided aid to Sunni insurgent groups and former Baathists for whom Tehran is the principal foe. Finally, the two countries have divergent priorities in Lebanon. Syria, intent on stopping the tribunal at virtually any cost, appears willing to destabilize its neighbor even if it means greater polarization and, therefore, Hezbollah's further identification as a sectarian party. Iran's aspiration to pan-Islamic leadership along with its desire to salvage its years-long investment in Hezbollah requires avoiding a dangerous domestic, confessionally based confrontation.

Reports of a deepening strategic alliance have led to various reports on Syria's so-called Shiitisation. Some are true but exaggerated (Iran has engaged in more active proselytizing but it is narrowly focused on poorer Syrians and is far less wide-

spread than claimed); much is pure fabrication (the Syrian regime has not promoted recent Shiite converts to positions of responsibility in the security apparatus). Most of the promised Iranian investments have yet to materialize and pale in comparison to the billions spent by the gulf. Perhaps most importantly, the relationship is largely unpopular among average Syrians, prompting outright hostility among Sunnis and relative discomfort within the regime. In one indication of how low Iran's standing dropped in response to heightened sectarian polarization throughout the region, posters of Bashar flanked by Nasrallah and Ahmadinejad which were put up after the 2006 Lebanon war have largely disappeared.

The question, for now unanswered, is whether the relationship would survive if and when vital interests were to clash, for instance in the event of an Israeli-Syrian peace agreement. Far less uncertain is that their ties—from the outset a function of the regional context—will strengthen in the context of greater regional tension.

5. *There is significant common ground between the U.S. and Syria on Iraq, but common action will require a change in bilateral ties.* That Syria does not wish to rescue the U.S. under existing circumstances is self-evident. The Iraq war was conceived from the outset as part of a broader effort by the administration to remake the region at Syria's (and Iran's) expense. To this day, U.S. strategy is viewed by Damascus as inherently hostile, seeking to isolate, impose sanctions, curtail its regional role, and prevent resumption of Israeli-Syrian negotiations.

This helps explain, in part, what Syria is not doing, like detaining Iraqis the U.S. specifically asks it to detain. The regime is convinced any such gesture would be viewed as a sign of weakness and would intensify rather than diminish American pressure. That said, there already are abundant signs of a shift in Syrian policies. During the early stages of the war, Syria overtly backed Iraqi militants as buses carrying armed militants were openly chartered by the regime. This stopped long ago in response to U.S. pressure, only to be replaced by a phase of covert support.

A more profound transformation took place in 2006 as Syria's threat perceptions changed. Whereas 150,000 American troops at the border once were considered an existential threat, they came to be seen as harmless; due to the Iraqi quagmire, their presence in Iraq became an insurance policy against regime change rather than a tool to promote it. Instead, the regime saw Iraq's collapse as the graver menace.

The country's breakup and Kurdish independence could destabilize Syria; already, in 2005, the experience in Iraq emboldened Syria's Kurdish population, leading to sharp confrontations with security services. A full scale Iraqi civil war would deepen sectarian tensions throughout the region, threatening to undercut the Syrian regime's domestic legitimacy, heighten popular dissatisfaction with its Hezbollah and Iranian alliance and bring to the fore contradictions inherent in Syrian foreign policy—claiming a pan-Arab mantle, yet strongly allied with Persian Iran. The extraordinary inflow of Iraqi refugees confronts the regime with severe economic and security problems, leading the regime to wish for their prompt return. The war has bolstered salafi jihadists who cross over from Iraq, a generation of more experienced, organized and better armed fighters who engage in almost daily (albeit unreported) clashes with Syrian security services. More broadly, the war places the regime in an increasingly uncomfortable bind: It cannot abandon Sunni insurgents, lest it anger its Sunni majority; cannot side against the Shiite-led government, lest it alienate Iran; and does not wish to oppose Iraq's Kurds lest it inflame its own Kurdish population.

All this has led to an undeniable policy reappraisal. The regime recognized and dealt with the Iraqi Government; tightened border surveillance; arrested a number of important insurgency-linked figures; postponed a planned conference of the armed opposition; and offered support for tribal elements fighting against al-Qaeda in Iraq.

Such steps remain cautious, improvised and at times erratic; if accepted as a genuine partner by the U.S., the regime could do more and better. Syrian officials acknowledge Iraq offers the most promising arena for improved bilateral relations. But as long as the administration's paradigm remains fixated around regime change or remodeling the Middle East, Damascus will not be willing to offer genuine assistance.

Of all the administration's arguments, the claim that Syria knows precisely what to do to improve relations is the most powerful and most disingenuous. Sitting down with Syrian officials and handing them a list of demands will not alter their behavior. The belief that mere engagement is the ultimate reward the U.S. can offer its foes is the flip side of that other costly myth—that isolation is the decisive penalty that the U.S. can inflict on them.

Syria will not cut its links to Hamas or Hezbollah before resolution of its conflict with Israel is in sight. It will not abruptly sever ties to Iran nor stop interfering in Lebanon's affairs, at least as long as it believes the only alternative to a subordi-

nate, pro-Syrian government is an assertive, anti-Syrian one. And it will not help the U.S. in Iraq under circumstances where it is convinced the U.S. is seeking to destabilize it.

The question, in short, is not whether to engage but how and to what end. Another attempt to reopen dialogue devoid of substance risks putting off the Syrian regime and convincing it that the context is not yet ripe for real negotiations. Conversely, U.S. advocates of engagement are likely to be discouraged by Syria's response, which will only validate the view that Syria is not serious in its calls for a new relationship.

The alternative is to begin genuine U.S./Syrian discussions focusing on interests and potential reciprocal steps. The goal would be to define a possible regional end state acceptable to both, which might include:

- A multilateral effort, including Syria, to bring about a more equitable and inclusive Iraqi compact leading to a united, federal country that respects the rights of all constituents, is nonaligned, devoid of U.S. bases and enjoys normal relations with all its neighbors;
- A genuinely sovereign, independent Lebanon whose government is nonaligned, neither dominated by nor hostile to Syria and agreement by Damascus to forsake direct military or political interference, open an embassy, demarcate final borders and provide information on the fate of the many Lebanese disappeared;
- Continuation of the Hariri investigation to ascertain responsibility and achieve accountability but with an understanding that the ultimate objective is not to destabilize the current regime but to ensure Syrian hegemony is a thing of the past;
- Support for renewed Israeli-Syrian negotiations under U.S. and Quartet auspices;
- Syrian pressure on Hamas and Hezbollah to maintain calm, avoid provocations and, in Hamas's case, allow President Abbas to conduct negotiations with Israel, submit any accord to a referendum, and abide by its results.

Mr. Chairman, engagement with Syria undoubtedly would be a difficult endeavor, and should be undertaken with eyes wide open. The regime is confident, convinced that the regional tide is turning against the U.S. and believes that any hope to oust it has ended.

But as anyone visiting Damascus these days doubtless will notice, the regime's supreme confidence coexists with outright anxiety. Sandwiched between civil strife in Iraq and Lebanon, facing increasing sectarian polarization throughout the region, losing political legitimacy at home and confronted with acute economic problems, the regime is eager for renewed domestic popularity and international investment.

It also is facing increasingly complex regional contradictions. By supporting Hezbollah in Lebanon at a time of confessional tensions, it alienates its own Sunni majority; by providing support to Sunni insurgents in Iraq, it places itself on a collision course with Iran; by reaching out to the Shiite-led government in Baghdad, it angers some of its allies in Iraq as well as segments of its own Sunni population. And of course, hovering over it all is the investigation which, should it implicate high-level Syrian officials, would put the regime in a very difficult spot.

Syria will not give in to U.S. demands but it just as surely is seeking a way out. This creates a real and important opportunity for the United States. Yet, hobbled by the view that engagement is a sign of weakness and doubting its ability to make pragmatic compromises while protecting core principles, it is an opportunity the administration has been loathe to seize. Given the perils the U.S. faces in the Middle East, there is no conceivable justification not to try.

Senator KERRY. Thank you very much.

Dr. Lesch.

STATEMENT OF DR. DAVID W. LESCH, PROFESSOR OF MIDDLE EAST HISTORY, TRINITY UNIVERSITY, SAN ANTONIO, TX

Dr. LESCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for inviting me here.

I think my value added here today is not to reiterate a lot of what Rob said, but to provide some insight into President Bashar al-Assad, with whom I've met on a regular basis since early 2004, and met with this past Sunday. In fact, I arrived quite late last night from the Middle East, so if I appear incoherent, then I hope you'll understand—also to provide some insight to the Syrian regime, as well as the perspective from Syria.

I think a positive Syrian role can be transformational, in terms of United States interests and regional stability in the Middle East, one that could lead to a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, the diminution of Iranian influence, the rapid dissipation of rampant anti-Americanism in the region, which, as we all know, is fertile ground for terrorist organizations, and the exertion of positive Syrian influence on Iraq, where, as Rob stated, the threat perception has changed, and where their interests coincide much more with United States interests now, and where there are markedly different interests with Iran, as well. So, there's fertile ground for cooperation, I think, in Iraq. Also, the exertion of positive influence in Lebanon and the war against global terrorism, in general.

Syria, in my opinion, is the—is a key to this, because of its unique ability in the Arab world to play both sides of the fence, so to speak. It has been the traditional beacon of Arab nationalism and the vanguard of the anti-Israeli front, yet it is also a member, as we all know, of the 1991 Gulf War Coalition, and participated seriously in bilateral negotiation with Israel throughout the nineties.

As a result of the post-9/11 United States foreign policy shift and circumstances surrounding the war in Iraq, the Bush administration essentially said to Syria, “You have to choose which side of the fence you want to be on. And if you want to be on our side, you have to give up everything on the other side.” President Bashar essentially said no to this. Syria is a relatively weak country, with few strategic arrows in its quiver. And Bashar was not about to give up these arrows before any negotiations. And it all—it is all about strategic assets to Bashar, as it was with his father. As he told me on one occasion regarding Iraq, about a year ago, he said, “It is not”—excuse me, Iran—he said, “It is not about our—not about ideology, our close relationship with Iran, it is about interests. Whoever is better for Syria's interests will be its friend.”

Now, Bashar is securely in power, and I am 100 percent sure of that, and will continue to be so for the foreseeable future, in my estimation. It is a shame that our image of him was so skewed and unrealistic at the beginning of his tenure in power simply because he was a computer nerd/ophthalmologist who liked Phil Collins music. There was no way he could meet the expectations, given the dilapidated, broken-down country he inherited and the regional and international baptism by fire he immediately encountered. Therefore, he and some of his successes were dismissed much too quickly by many, and certainly he feels this way.

Much of the congressional testimony regarding Bashar surrounding the Syrian Accountability Act in 2002–2003, was grossly uninformed—ill-informed and unfortunate. He's been fighting that image ever since.

Unfortunately, Bashar doesn't help matters at times, with his own less-than-prudent comments, which were made for domestic and regional consumption, but fed into the construction and confirmation of the negative image of Bashar and policy against Syria that was going on at the same time in Washington. Bashar didn't adequately adjust to the shifts in United States foreign policy, and also, Syria is just pretty bad at public diplomacy. Although Bashar

has done a better job at this than his father, the Syrians still have a long way to go.

Although Bashar has a progressive and modernizing outlook, we must remember that he is Hafez al-Assad's son. He spent all of 18 months in London with advanced study in ophthalmology, and he is a child of the Arab-Israeli conflict and a child of the superpower cold war. Therefore, he felt compelled to defend traditional Syrian interests. Now, he's no longer the untested, inexperienced leader. He has been in power 7 years. And one doesn't do that in Syria without having some level of capability. And I have seen him grow into the position with more confidence and more of a comfort level since I've been meeting with him.

He has been on the upswing, politically, domestically, and even regionally, since surviving the intense pressure of the Mehlis report in fall 2005, the investigation into the Hariri assassination, in part by default because of mounting U.S. problems in the region, and also partly due to his own maneuvering. I think the makeup of the February 2006 Cabinet shuffle, reshuffling in Damascus, was a clear reflection of his—of this upswing.

Now, Bashar has built up a reservoir of popularity, domestically and even in the region, for keeping the country together, despite the external pressures and also the instability in neighboring countries, and for being perceived as not having caved in to the United States or, as they say in the region, for having refused to give into the American project. He has effectively funneled the expected nationalist response and need for resistance into support for the regime, that has also give the regime something of a pass, unfortunately, in terms of quelling signs of internal dissent.

Now, having said this, Bashar does not have absolute authority. It would be wrong to see the Syrian regime, or Syrian security, as a tightly knit, well-oiled, hierarchical machine, particularly Syrian security. In fact, here I was seeing President Bashar, when I landed at the airport in Damascus last Friday, I was detained and told I was blacklisted from the country because of some other projects in which I am involved—rather innocuous cultural tourist projects—security in Syria obsessed with control, they had some concerns about this project. One hand, the right hand, of security doesn't know what the left hand is doing. They don't know that I meet regularly with President Bashar. And they were very upset and apologetic when they found out.

Now, Bashar has to reach consensus, negotiate, bargain, and manipulate the system. Implementation regarding domestic issues is a serious problem in Syria. He is fighting against systemic institutional, bureaucratic, and cultural inertia that seriously retards any reform progress. There is also an array of Faustian bargains erected under his father—i.e., unswerving loyalty in return for casting a blind eye toward personal enrichment and corruption—that sometimes has the regime sincerely and—saying and wanting to do one thing, while actions by important groups connected to the regime, or actually in the regime, do something quite contrary to this. There's really not much Bashar can do about it without undercutting his support base, especially in a threatening regional environment.

Bashar has, however, acquired control over foreign policy decision, although the decisionmaking process still relies too—on too much ad-hocism—what I call “ad-hocism.” There’s no national security council coordinating policy. Instead, there seem to be informal committees that focus on various foreign policy issues. But Bashar, in my opinion, is the prime decisionmaker now. This hasn’t always been the case.

Now, despite this ad-hocism, Syrian officials have a way to getting in line with regime policy, mimicking declarations and pronouncements, often word by word. As such, I am confident an agreement with Syria, Syrian-Israeli Peace Treaty, whatever, would be assiduously maintained, as they have been in the past.

Finally, in my opinion, and echoing a little bit what Rob was saying, while many see Syria’s ties with Iran, Hezbollah, and various Palestinian factions, such as Hamas, as a liability, I actually see them as a potential asset in the current environment and state of things for the United States. If Syria is given a real seat at the diplomatic table, certainly with the Golan on the agenda, which it very much wants, whether it be at this proposed conference in Annapolis or some other setting, it can certainly be utilized as a conduit and a positive-influence process. This is definitely how Bashar is trying to position Syria. He has touted, and rightly so, the crucial Syrian role in orchestrating the Meccan agreement, earlier this year, between Fatah and Hamas, in the role in mediating with Iran for the release of the British sailors captured in the Persian Gulf, and in steering Hezbollah toward political compromise in Lebanon, particularly with the Barry initiative recently, although Barry has met with Hezbollah, but the Shiite response.

Now, Bashar has repeatedly stated that the Palestinian track—he reiterated this on Sunday—can go out in front of the Syrian one, which I thought was quite clever. And Bashar and Syrian officials have repeated held out an olive branch, as Rob mentioned, to Israel, unconditionally calling for the resumption of negotiations, albeit with United States involvement. In fact, as many have pointed out, including many Israelis, it is unprecedented that Israel is refusing to take up the unconditional offer of an Arab State with which it is not at peace. Indeed, the Israelis are the ones making the conditions in line with United States policy.

Now, again, the ineptitude, sometimes, of Syrian public diplomacy makes this an awkward process at times, in terms of communicating their positions to the West and certainly to the Israeli public.

Finally, in closing, the United States has a history of negotiating with countries with whom it has a clear disagreement. It is unfathomable to me, knowing what the Syrians want and the role that they can play, why we continue to refuse to engage in a sincere dialogue with Damascus. The missed opportunities of the 1990s led directly and indirectly, the Madrid peace process, to, among other things, the al-Aqsa intifada, the war in Iraq, the 2006 Hezbollah-Israel war—in fact, Hezbollah probably would have been totally emasculated by now if there was a Israeli-Syrian peace treaty, and there should have been—a historic missed opportunity in the late 1990s—and, some might even argue, 9/11, I fear would happen if this opportunity is missed.

Now, if the United States says “jump,” Syria will not say, “how high?” It will be cautious, primarily because of the tremendous level of distrust that has built up between Washington and Damascus in recent years. But, with hard work and serious intent, the relationship can move forward.

I do want to mention two things in reaction to what Assistant Secretary of State Welch said. One of the members of the committee asked a question about the meeting between Rice—Secretary of State Rice and Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Moallem that occurred—was it in May?—this past year—or this year in Sharm el-Sheikh, regarding the situation in Iraq. The Syrians tend to discount Secretary of State Rice, rightly or wrongly. They consistently tell me, both Bashar, as well as Syrian Foreign Ministry, that, after that particular meeting, Arab officials, probably Foreign Ministers, informed the Syrians that Vice President Dick Cheney’s office, or him, himself, had called these Foreign Ministers, saying to dismiss everything that Rice had said, because she does not speak for the administration. I have no idea whether this is true or not. The Syrians seem to believe it is true, and they’re acting accordingly, in terms of discounting the initiatives of Secretary Rice.

Also, on one last thing, on the Lebanese assassinations, Syria certainly is a suspect, and I agree with Syria being a suspect. But, inter- and intrasectional rivalries are so antagonistic in Lebanon that it is difficult to pinpoint who is doing what. In the Middle East there’s a tendency to have conspiracy theories about the CIA. There are CIA conspiracy theories galore, which, of course, is ludicrous. And we need to make sure that we don’t do the same thing and ascribe similar capabilities to Syrian security. They do some things well, but overall, it’s a pretty inept group.

Thank you for your time.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Lesch follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DR. DAVID W. LESCH, PROFESSOR OF MIDDLE EAST HISTORY, TRINITY UNIVERSITY, SAN ANTONIO, TX

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, I have long and ardently believed that the inability to consummate a Syrian-Israeli peace treaty during the 1990s Madrid peace process was a failure of historic proportions. An agreement would have been transformational in a number of ways.

Although the repercussions today of an agreement would, perhaps, be less dramatic in an immediate sense, one predicated upon the reestablishment of a high-level U.S.-Syrian dialogue would nonetheless still be transformational in terms of U.S. interests and regional stability. It would lead toward: (1) A comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace; (2) the diminution of Iranian influence; (3) the rapid dissipation of the rampant anti-Americanism in the region which, as we all know, is fertile ground for terrorist organizations; and (4) the exertion of positive Syrian influence in Iraq, Lebanon, and the war against global terrorism.

Syria, in my opinion, is the key to this because of its unique ability in the Arab world to play both sides of the fence: It has been the traditional beacon of Arab nationalism and the vanguard of the anti-Israeli front, yet it was also a member of the 1991 gulf war coalition and participated seriously in direct bilateral talks with Israel throughout the 1990s.

As a result of the post-9/11 U.S. foreign policy shift and circumstances surrounding the war in Iraq, the Bush administration essentially told Syria to choose which side of the fence it wanted to be on, and if it was on our side, it had to first give up all of those things on the other side.

President Bashar said, “No,” to this. Syria is a relatively weak country with few strategic arrows in its quiver, and Bashar was not about to give these up prior to negotiations—and it is all about strategic assets with Bashar, as it was with his fa-

ther. As he told me on one occasion regarding Iran: "It is not about ideology, it is about interests; whoever is better for Syria's interests will be its friend."

Bashar is securely in power, and will continue to be so for the foreseeable future in my estimation. It is a shame that our image of him was so skewed and unrealistic at the beginning of his tenure in power simply because he was a computer-nerd/ophthalmologist who liked Phil Collins music. There was no way he could meet these expectations given the dilapidated, broken-down country he inherited and the regional and international baptism by fire he immediately encountered; therefore he—and some of his successes—were dismissed too quickly by many. Much of the congressional testimony regarding Bashar surrounding the Syrian Accountability Act in 2002–2003 was grossly ill-informed and unfortunate, and he has been fighting that image ever since. Unfortunately, Bashar did not help matters at times with his own less-than-prudent comments, which were made for domestic and regional consumption but fed into the construction and confirmation of the negative image of Bashar and policy against Syria going on at the same time in Washington. Bashar did not adequately adjust to the shifts in U.S. foreign policy. Syria is also horrible at public diplomacy. Although Bashar has done a better job at this than his father, the Syrians still have a long way to go.

Although he does have a progressive and modernizing outlook, we must remember that he is Hafiz al-Assad's son, spent all of 18 months in London, and is a child of the Arab-Israeli conflict and superpower cold war. He felt compelled to defend traditional Syrian interests. He is no longer the untested, inexperienced leader. He has been in power 7 years, and one does not do that in a place like Syria without being capable. And I have seen him grow into the position with more confidence and more of a comfort level since I began meeting him on a regular basis since early 2004—and, of course, I just met with him this past Sunday (November 4, 2007).

He has been on the upswing since surviving the intense pressure produced by the Mehlis report in fall 2005, in part by default because of mounting U.S. problems in the region and partly due to his own maneuvering. The makeup of the February 2006 Cabinet reshuffling was a clear reflection of this.

Bashar has built up a reservoir of popularity domestically—and even in the region—for keeping the country together despite the external pressures and instability in neighboring countries—and for being perceived as not having caved in to the U.S., or as they say in the region, for having refused the American project. He has effectively funneled the expected nationalistic response and need for resistance into support for the regime that has also given the regime something of a pass in terms of quelling signs of internal dissent.

Now, having said this, Bashar does not have absolute authority. It would be wrong to see the Syrian regime (or Syrian security) as a tightly knit, well-oiled, hierarchical machine. Bashar has to reach consensus, negotiate, bargain, and manipulate the system. Implementation regarding domestic issues is a serious problem in Syria. He is fighting against systemic institutional, bureaucratic, and cultural inertia that seriously retards any reform process.

There is also an array of Faustian bargains erected under his father, i.e., unswerving loyalty in return for casting a blind eye toward personal enrichment and corruption, that sometimes has the regime sincerely saying and wanting one thing while actions by important groups connected to or even in the regime do something contrary to this, and there is not much Bashar can do without undercutting his support base, especially in a threatening regional environment.

Bashar has, however, acquired control over important foreign policy decisions although the decisionmaking process still relies on too much ad-hocism. There is no national security council coordinating policy; instead, there seem to be informal committees that focus on various foreign policy issues, but Bashar, in my opinion, is the prime decisionmaker. Despite this ad-hocism, Syrian officials have a way of getting in line with regime policy, mimicking declarations and pronouncements often word for word. As such, I am confident an agreement with Syria would be assiduously maintained.

Finally, in my opinion, while many see Syria's ties with Iran, Hezbollah, and various Palestinian factions such as Hamas as a liability, I see them as a potential asset for the U.S. If Syria is given a real seat at the diplomatic table—which it very much wants—whether it be at the proposed Middle East peace conference or in some other setting, it could certainly be utilized as a conduit in a positive influence process. This is definitely how Bashar is trying to position Syria: He has touted, and rightly so, the crucial Syrian role in orchestrating the Meccan agreement earlier this year; in mediating with Iran for the release of the British sailors captured in the Persian Gulf; and in steering Hezbollah toward political compromise in Lebanon.

Bashar has repeatedly stated that the Palestinian track can go out in front of the Syria one, which, I thought, was clever, and Bashar and Syrian officials have re-

peatedly held out an olive branch to Israel, unconditionally calling for a resumption of negotiations—albeit with U.S. involvement. The ineptitude of Syrian public diplomacy makes this an awkward process at times.

The United States has a history of negotiating with countries with whom it has clear disagreement. It is unfathomable to me, knowing what the Syrians want and the role they can play, why we continue to refuse to engage in a sincere dialogue with Damascus. The missed opportunity of the 1990s led directly and indirectly to, among other things, the al-Aqsa intifada, the war in Iraq, the 2006 Hezbollah-Israeli war (in fact, Hezbollah probably would have been totally emasculated by now if there was a peace treaty), and some would even argue 9/11. I fear what might happen if this opportunity is missed.

Senator COLEMAN. Thank you.
Mr. El-Hokayem.

**STATEMENT OF EMILE EL-HOKAYEM, RESEARCH FELLOW,
SOUTHWEST ASIA/GULF PROGRAM, THE HENRY L. STIMSON
CENTER, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. EL-HOKAYEM. Thank you. Emile El-Hokayem, research fellow, Henry L. Stimson Center.

First, thanks for this honor and opportunity to testify on Syria today.

The challenge posed by Syria to regional stability in the Middle East is very complex and multifaceted. Until a few years ago, Syria was a partner of the United States in the search for peace. Now it is entangled in all the conflicts in the region.

Syria is certainly not the ultimate threat to either the region or United States interests, nor does it pose the kind of ideological, political, strategic challenge that Iran does. However, it has proven intransigent and belligerent on a number of key issues for the international community.

For the sake of time and because a lot has been covered earlier, I will focus on the Lebanon-Syria relationship.

Nowhere has Syrian heavy-handedness and problematic as in Lebanon. Syrian heavy-handedness and mismanagement of Lebanese politics has created very deep resentment against Syria and Lebanon, which cuts across sectarian lines. Lebanon's transition from Syrian rule to full independence, sovereignty, and stability has been very strenuous for Lebanese society and Lebanese politics.

The upcoming Lebanese Presidential elections will be a momentous test for the future of Syrian-Lebanese relations. These elections could open a new face, not only in bilateral relations between those two countries, but also between Syria and the rest of the world. But the prospects for such a positive outcome are very dim, because Syria perceives these elections as an opportunity to defeat its Lebanese and foreign foes, and Syria fears that a victory of these foes will further weaken its hand next door.

Critics of the current policy argue that it hasn't worked; that United States interests with regard to Syria go beyond Lebanon, and that sidelining Syria invites more interference and destabilization. The problem with this argument are manifold. First, the United States and Europe engaged Syria for very many years, with no reciprocation from Damascus on any of the issues raised. Notably, during the 1990s, it's very difficult to pinpoint at—what Syria has given Lebanon during, you know, the height of the peace process. Syria was also allowed to set Lebanon's security and domestic

politics for 15 years, ultimately overplaying its hand. Syria was also given many opportunities to shape more favorable outcomes for itself, but chose, instead, to provoke an escalation. It's not a lack of engagement, but Syria's maximalist and unresponsive posture, that has precipitated the current crisis.

Critics must also acknowledge that United States policy toward Syria is not unilateral or even controversial with America's allies. It is a mainstream, multilateral policy endorsed by the European Union and key Arab States and formalized through U.N. Security Council resolutions.

In those circumstances, what to obtain from Syria in return for unconditional engagement is very unclear. It will take a long and arduous process of dialogue to start seeing the benefits of the strategy, if any.

A main concern is that all the progress made on the Lebanese front since 2005 could be reversed in the meantime. This will not happen unless a dual process of United States engagement of Syria and of Israeli-Syrian peace talks becomes more important to Washington and Tel Aviv than to Damascus. Then, even modest Syrian cooperation on Iraq and Israel could become reason enough not to challenge Syrian behavior in Lebanon.

While there is no doubt that Syria is legitimately adamant in its desire to recover the Golan Heights, it is my judgment that it also wants a dominant say in all matters Lebanese, which amounts to very serious breaches of Lebanese sovereignty and a de facto rights over Lebanese affairs.

So long as Syria refused to normalize relations with Lebanon by delineating the borders, exchanging embassies, and ending its interference in Lebanese affairs, it will be very difficult to overcome Lebanese fears and suspicions over Syria's real intentions or the substance of a bilateral United States-Syrian dialogue.

The continued importance of Lebanon to Syria has many dimensions. But, let me be clear, much of the daily interaction between the two countries is legitimate, the product of strong and old societal ties, and that both countries are bound to have privileged relations in the future. But Syria's current approach to Lebanon is dictated by regime interest in Damascus rather than a healthy long-term vision of the relationship. Lebanon needs not be a threat to Syria's stability, but this is Damascus's call.

Bashar al-Assad, the Syrian President, repeats to his foreign visitors that Syria is not a charity. Should Syria—or should the—should Syria cooperate with the United States, he expects full United States engagement. But this route could lead to sacrificing a number of important processes. The international tribunal and the Hariri assassination—investigation could halt. U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701, which ended last year's war, could be transformed into a conflict-management mechanism in which Syria would have a major say, going back to the situation of 1996, where Syria became a recognized actor in managing escalation between Lebanon, Hezbollah, and Israel. And it also could jeopardize the U.N.-led process to normalize relations between the two countries.

In examining whether the United States should engage Syria, the Senate should consider why Syria has failed to cooperate with every attempt to obtain Syria—Syrian cooperation on Lebanon.

And some countries have offered very attractive incentives to Syria. One only needs to look at the delighted reaction of the Syrian leadership following the visits of American congressional delegations and European Foreign Ministers over the last years, and invitations to participate in Arab League meetings, and the utter lack of Syrian responsiveness afterward.

Syria continues to await renewed international recognition, or at least acquiescence to a central role in Lebanese affairs. Syria calculates that, in due time, international fatigue with the Lebanese political crisis, new leaderships in the United States and Europe, necessity over Iraq, the capacity of its Lebanese allies to sustain pressure on the Siniora government, and sheer steadfastness will reward its obstinacy. In the short term, this means that the power vacuum and even instability in Lebanon are seen as more harmful to the governing coalition and its foreign allies than to Syria and its allies in Lebanon.

This is why unconditionally reengaging Syria is tantamount to subordinating the sovereignty and future of Lebanon to the fortunes of the peace process, Syria's cooperation on Iraq, or the fluctuation in the Persian Gulf. And this, after more than a million people turned out in the streets of Beirut to peacefully demand the end of Syrian hegemony in Lebanon.

Let me end by saying that keeping Syria in the cold is not a long-term solution to Lebanon's or the region's problem, nor is a threat of further coercion. If Syria still considers peace with Israel and normalization with the West as strategic choices because of the very tangible political and economic benefits that would then flow, then it could demonstrate its seriousness by putting an end to its destructive role in Lebanon.

There is a path ahead that involves restarting the peace process between Syria and Israel, and it will require United States diplomatic leadership after the Annapolis conference. Simultaneously with a United States-Israel initiative to restart peace negotiations with Israel, Syria should commit to the Quartet and the United Nations to demarcate its borders with Lebanon, exchange Embassies, and abide by U.N. Security—resolutions regarding Lebanon. In exchange, the Quartet would endorse a resumption of peace talks, the United States would agree to suspend sanctions and send back its Ambassador to Damascus, and the European Union would commit to press ahead with economic and trade discussions.

Syria's refusal of such a deal would be only construed as a desire to continue using Lebanon as a negotiating card and an asset. More worryingly, Syrian obstruction could simply reflect a continued desire for hegemony in Lebanon, validating the worst fears of a very deeply insecure Lebanese population. This is why dissociating Syria's foreign affairs from its obligation toward Lebanon is a very serious mistake. It's ironical, but only fair, for Lebanon to constrain Syria's policy options after Syria did so for so long.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. El-Hokayem follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF EMILE EL-HOKAYEM, RESEARCH FELLOW, SOUTHWEST ASIA/GULF PROGRAM, THE HENRY L. STIMSON CENTER, WASHINGTON, DC

First, let me express my appreciation for the opportunity to testify today on the pressing matter of Syria.

1. OVERVIEW OF THE SYRIAN CHALLENGE

The challenge posed by Syria to regional stability in the Middle East is complex and multifaceted. Until a few years ago Syria was a partner of the United States in the search for peace. Now, thanks to its policy choices, alliances, geographic location and spoiler capacity, Syria is enmeshed in all the current and potential conflicts in the Middle East: Lebanon, Israel-Palestine, Iraq, and Iran. Syria is not the ultimate threat to either the region or U.S. interests, nor does it pose the kind of ideological, strategic, and political challenge that Iran does. But it has proven intransigent and belligerent on a number of issues of great importance to the international community.

Nowhere has Syrian influence been as visible and disruptive as in Lebanon. After occupying (and stabilizing) Lebanon for 15 years with an international cover, Syrian heavy-handedness and mismanagement of Lebanese politics has created deep resentment against Syria which cuts across sectarian lines. Lebanon's transition from Syrian domination to full independence, sovereignty, and stability has been strenuous for its society and politics. Since 2005, Lebanon has experienced political paralysis, economic regression, a devastating war with Israel, various grave security incidents, including a campaign of political assassination and intimidation and a 3.5 month-long miniwar against Sunni jihadists. Syria's contribution to this instability is difficult to overstate, even if it is often murky.

The upcoming Lebanese Presidential elections will be a momentous test for the future of Syrian-Lebanese relations. Depending on Syrian behavior (i.e., whether Syria will recognize a President acceptable to all Lebanese factions who also upholds Lebanon's responsibilities toward the international community and protects its full sovereignty or even a President who enjoys the support of a majority of parliamentarians), these elections could open a new phase not only in bilateral relations between Syria and Lebanon but also between Syria and the rest of the world. But the prospects for such a positive outcome are dim, partly because of Syria, which perceives these elections as an opportunity to defeat its Lebanese and foreign opponents with the support of its Lebanese allies and which fears that a victory of its foes will further weaken its hand.

2. ASSESSING U.S. POLICY TOWARD SYRIA AND SYRIA'S REGIONAL ROLE

Critics of the current policy of isolation argue that it hasn't worked, that U.S. interests with regards to Syria go beyond Lebanon and that sidelining Syria invites more interference and destabilization on Syria's part. The problems with this argument are manifold: High-level delegations from the U.S. and Europe engaged Syria for many years, without reciprocation from Damascus on any of the issues raised; Syria was allowed to set Lebanon's foreign and domestic policies for 15 years, ultimately overplaying its hand; Syria was given many opportunities to shape more favorable outcomes for itself, but, feeling besieged, chose instead to provoke an escalation in Lebanon that eventually backfired. It is not a lack of engagement but Syria's maximalist and unresponsive posture that has precipitated the current crisis, driving the U.S. administration and other countries to even consider, then wisely reject regime change as an option.

Critics must also acknowledge that U.S. policy toward Syria is not unilateral or even controversial with America's allies. It is a mainstream, multilateral policy endorsed by the European Union and key Arab states, and formalized through U.N. Security Council resolutions.

Critics, however, are right to stress that U.S. interests regarding Syria are not limited to Lebanon. Iraq is the most prominent issue to come to mind. If the United States decides to stabilize Iraq through serious regional cooperation, it will need the help of all of Iraq's neighbors, including Syria. But if one were to gather all of Iraq's neighbors around a table, it would be Syria that would have the least to offer in terms of positive incentives. Indeed, Syria's supposedly good relations with Iraqi factions don't translate into constructive leverage. In terms of tribal, political, or financial power, Syria is not part of the major league. Although it does not have the capacity to deliver what the U.S. needs most in Iraq, it does and will maintain the capacity to derail any domestic or regional consensus it deems contrary to its interests. Syria's hosting of 1.5 million Iraqi refugees must be commended and that burden acknowledged and shared, but Syria should not be allowed to leverage this crisis to promote more mischief in Iraq. Indeed, there is increasing evidence that Syria is attempting to organize proxies in Iraq, essentially former regime elements who found a base in Syria since 2003. The Iraqi Government's repeated pleas for the extradition of many of these figures have been rejected. But given the fragmented nature of the Iraqi insurgency and its autonomous political calculations, Syria has

been less successful than it hoped in determining the political agenda of any of the Iraqi factions and will find it difficult to position itself as a key power broker.

The other set of interests pertains to the perennial Syrian support and hosting of rejectionist Palestinian factions. Little was obtained from Damascus at the height of the peace process in the 1990s, so it is difficult to imagine a dramatic reversal when Syria is under so much pressure. Palestinian politics and progress in the peace process will be the determining factors, not unlikely Syrian cooperation.

Finally, there is Iran, whose alliance with Syria (and Hezbollah) makes it a key player in Levantine politics. The declared hope of many, including Israeli officials, is to drive a wedge between the two countries by restarting the peace process. But the nature and strength of the Syrian-Iranian alliance prevent such a scenario from unfolding. In fact, Syria is not likely to give up an alliance that brings everyone to its doorstep.

In these circumstances, what to obtain from Syria in return for unconditional engagement is unclear. It will take a long and arduous process of dialogue to start seeing the benefits, if any, of such a strategy. A main concern is that all the progress made on the Lebanese front since 2005 could be reversed in the meantime. This will not happen unless a dual process of U.S. engagement of Syria and of Israel-Syria peace talks becomes more important to Washington and Tel Aviv than to Damascus. Even modest Syrian cooperation on Iraq and Israel could then become reason enough not to challenge Syrian behavior in Lebanon.

3. SYRIAN CALCULATIONS REGARDING LEBANON

Is Syria's interest in Lebanon uniquely motivated by the desire to recover the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights? Or is there a more complex calculation driving Syria's attempts to reassert its role in Lebanon? While there is no doubt that Syria is legitimately adamant in its desire to recover the Golan, it is my judgment that it also wants a dominant say in all matters Lebanese, which amounts to serious breaches to Lebanon's sovereignty and a de facto veto right on Lebanese affairs. So long as Syria refuses to normalize relations with Lebanon by delineating the border, exchanging embassies and ending its interference in Lebanese affairs, it will be difficult to overcome Lebanese fears and suspicions over Syria's real intentions and the substance of a bilateral U.S.-Syrian dialogue. There is still a vivid memory in Lebanon of U.S. acquiescence to Syrian rule that resulted from Syria's support of the United States against Saddam Hussein in 1990.

The continued importance of Lebanon to Syria has many dimensions. Let's be clear that much of the daily interaction between Syria and Lebanon is legitimate, the product of strong and old societal ties, and that both countries are bound to have privileged relations in the future. But Syria's current approach to Lebanon is dictated by regime interests in Damascus rather than a healthy long-term vision of the relationship. Lebanon needs not be a threat to Syria's stability, but this is Damascus' call.

Syria sees Lebanon as a convenient battlefield for its conflict with a number of foes, including the United States, France, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. Lebanon is also seen as a source of threat to Syria's regime because it is no longer in Syria's orbit, now has an autonomous foreign policy, is solidifying relations with Syria's foes, allows the airing of anti-Syrian views, and has allowed the international community to pose, through the international tribunal looking into the Hariri assassination, a possibly existential threat to the regime. In Lebanon, Syria sees a lost source of economic benefits, critical strategic depth that needs to be regained and secured at all costs, and an important negotiating asset.

Bashar al-Assad repeats to his foreign visitors that Syria is not a charity—should Syria cooperate with the U.S., he expects full U.S. engagement. But this route could lead to sacrificing a number of important processes: The international tribunal and the Hariri investigation could halt, U.N. resolution 1701 could be transformed into a conflict management mechanism in which Syria will have a major say, and the U.N.-led process to normalize relations between the two countries would likely fail, among other casualties of engagement.

In examining whether the U.S. should engage Syria, the Senate should consider why Syria has failed to cooperate with every attempt to obtain Syrian cooperation on Lebanon—some of which have offered attractive incentives. Saudi Arabia and other Arab states offered Syria reintegration into the Arab fold and much-needed investments; France has promised “spectacular returns” in exchange for a hands-off approach to Lebanon; the European Union has offered economic assistance and cooperation; and countless European officials have promised to support relaunching the peace process with Israel. Damascus has rebuffed all offers because it is still hoping for a complete reversal of fortunes in Lebanon. One needs only to look at

the delighted reaction of the Syrian leadership following the visits of American congressional delegations and European foreign ministers over the last year, or invitations to participate in Arab League meetings, and the utter lack of Syrian responsiveness afterward.

Syria continues to await renewed international recognition of or at least acquiescence to its central role in Lebanese affairs. Syria calculates that in due time, international fatigue with the Lebanese crisis, new leaderships in the U.S. and Europe, necessity over Iraq, the capacity of its allies to sustain pressure on the Lebanese Government and sheer steadfastness will reward its obstinacy. In the short term, it means that a power vacuum and even instability in Lebanon are seen as more harmful to the governing coalition and its foreign allies than to Syria and its allies in Lebanon.

The logic of unconditional reengagement carries other risks and costs that its proponents dismiss too easily. U.S. engagement without Syrian concessions on Lebanon will hurt further U.S. credibility in the region, jeopardize multilateral processes, alienate Arab allies worried about Syria's alignment with Iran, and comfort Syria's image as a tough resister that can force the United States to come to terms on Syrian terms.

Unconditionally reengaging Syria is tantamount to subordinating the sovereignty and future of Lebanon to the fortunes of the peace process, Syria's cooperation on Iraq, or the fluctuations in the Persian Gulf, and this is after more than a million people turned out in the center of Beirut on March 14, 2005, to peacefully demand and obtain the end of Syria's hegemony over Lebanon.

4. A WAY FORWARD

Keeping Syria in the cold is not a long-term solution to Lebanon's or the region's problems, nor is the threat of further coercion. If Syria still considers peace with Israel and normalization with the West strategic choices because of the tangible political and economic benefits that would then flow, then it could demonstrate its seriousness by putting an end to its disruptive role in Lebanon.

There is a path ahead that involves restarting the peace process between Syria and Israel, and it will require U.S. diplomatic leadership after the Annapolis conference. Simultaneously with a U.S.-Israeli initiative to restart peace negotiations with Israel, Syria should commit to the Quartet to demarcate its border with Lebanon, exchange embassies, and abide by U.N. resolutions 1559 and 1701. In exchange, the Quartet would endorse the resumption of peace talks, the United States would agree to suspend sanctions under the Syria Accountability Act and send back its Ambassador to Damascus, and the European Union would commit to press ahead with economic and trade discussions. Syria's refusal to do so would only be construed as a desire to continue using Lebanon as a negotiating card with Israel, even as Syria today can no longer guarantee the disarmament of Hezbollah as it could in the 1990s. More worryingly, Syrian obstruction could simply reflect a continued desire for hegemony in Lebanon, validating the worst fears of a deeply insecure Lebanese population. This is why dissociating Syria's foreign affairs from its obligations toward Lebanon is a serious mistake. It is ironical but only fair for Lebanon to constrain Syria's policy options after Syria did so for so long.

Senator KERRY. Thank you very much, Mr. El-Hokayem. I think your testimony is important. It helps us really, kind of, draw the lines here and engage. So, I appreciate it.

The one distinction that I would draw, if I may, is that I wouldn't measure a congressional visit and, sort of, suggest, "Gee, because the people went there, and it, you know, didn't elicit anything"—I was one of those people who went there, and I had no anticipation that it, per se, would elicit something, because we can't negotiate, and we have nothing to offer; we're there to learn and, sort of, glean what opportunities may be. But there's no way that an administration in another country, with an administration here that they view as—in any of number of different lights, potentially even as wanting the regime change, until they get assurances, is going to give anything. So, I have no surprise there. I mean, that's not a measurement to me. But it is interesting for you to suggest, as you have, that their intransigence and behavior is sort of a per se negation of some of the other suggestions that have been made

here. And what I want to do is get both Dr. Lesch and Mr. Malley to, sort of, respond to that, see if we can get you all engaged a little bit. I think it'll be helpful.

So, listening to what you've just heard, Dr. Lesch—you've just come back, and you're—you've been a student of this, of both the individual side, Bashar Assad, as well as the governance, what is your reaction as you listen to this sort of hard, very restrictive approach that you've heard, which is essentially the status quo and, sort of, where we are?

Dr. LESCH. Well, Mr. Chairman, I am distressed by it. As I mentioned in my testimony, Syria presents, I believe, under current conditions, a great deal of opportunity. Bashar al-Assad wants good relations with the United States. He has been consistent with that ever since he came to power. He has expressed anger, frustration, at times, with me regarding U.S. policy, and—

Senator KERRY. Does he want them with a preparedness to give up what he views as a long, historical, and cultural right with respect to Lebanon?

Dr. LESCH. He's not going to give that up. Syrians are not going to give that up. Lebanon is important to Syria—

Senator KERRY. So, then how do you have a good relationship with the United States if you're not willing to respect sovereignty and democracy in Lebanon?

Dr. LESCH. He has said he—he has said to me, this past Sunday, they're willing to establish diplomatic relations with Lebanon; meaning, draw borders, exchange embassies, recognize borders, et cetera. In fact, he had agreed to a Saudi-Egyptian initiative, it's my understanding, a year or year and a half, 2 years ago, where such things would occur in exchange for some role for Syria, in terms of a say in national security in Lebanon—Lebanese foreign policy for a period of time.

Senator KERRY. Now, is that a statement that's made with an assumption that, if things continue as they are, he'll be dealing with a government that he has essentially planted in place and can count on to be subservient to him?

Dr. LESCH. He wasn't that specific, and he's not going to be that specific.

Senator KERRY. Well, I mean, I'm trying to—you know—

Dr. LESCH. Yes.

Senator KERRY [continuing]. Let's read through the—

Dr. LESCH. Yes. I mean, one of the things—the Syrians see Lebanon strategically, as well as economically. You know, they see—they saw the Israeli invasion in 1982 as an attempt to outflank Syria. And it was. And they saw American attempts afterward as a way to do what the—through diplomacy, what the Israelis couldn't do militarily. The current situation—they see the current situation in similar terms, where they see the United States trying to do, through diplomacy, what the Israelis couldn't do militarily, in terms of the Israeli-Hezbollah war. So, they're fearful of Lebanon becoming a source of instability inside Syria, a source of subversion. They don't want it to be, you know, a host country for what they view as this American project for transforming the Middle East, which would transform the regime in Syria. Again, that's the way they see it.

Senator KERRY. But doesn't that make them, therefore, an inalterable enemy of democracy? I mean, opposed to the capacity for Lebanon to actually be a full-fledged—

Dr. LESCH. No—

Senator KERRY [continuing]. Sovereign democracy.

Dr. LESCH [continuing]. I don't think you can look at it that—in that Manichean fashion. I think there is room for compromise. I mean, Syria obviously would like a regime in power that's not against Syria. I think they are resigned to the fact that their relationship, as it existed in the past, is not going to be there anymore—when the troops were there. They have said, across the line from Bashar on down, "We are never sending troops back into Lebanon. That is a thing of the past." But, obviously, being such an important neighbor when there's such economic interdependence, they would want a positive relationship and a regime in power that is not bent, from their point of view, on—

Senator KERRY. So, how do you and Mr. Malley define "engagement" in a way that doesn't, in effect, fall into this trap of rewarding and giving something for nothing, and so forth, as defined? Both of you. Why don't you go ahead, Mr. Malley.

Mr. MALLEY. Let me make three points on that.

First, maybe I just have more confidence in our diplomacy to be able to talk to somebody without surrendering on our basic values. I think we've done that in the past, and I think—I don't—I just don't understand the logic of saying that if we spoke and engaged with Syria, and tried to get things from Syria, whether it's on Iraq, on Israel, on the Hamas, on Hezbollah, that that would be tantamount to surrender.

Senator KERRY. Well, Mr. El-Hokayem suggests that they've had a number of years, through the nineties and others, to show some evidence on any of these things, and they haven't.

Mr. MALLEY. Well, the main point—

Senator KERRY. What's your response to that?

Mr. MALLEY. The big difference in the nineties—in the nineties, we not only turned a blind eye, we had no problem whatsoever—and I'm sorry to say I was a member of the administration that had no problem whatsoever—in Syria's behavior in Lebanon. I mean, we gave them the green light to intervene, and we had no problem with their policies. It may well have been a mistake, but that's—that was not the proper test. The test came when the—when things changed in Lebanon.

And that brings me to my second point. I think it's fair to say we have to be firm on Lebanese sovereignty, Lebanese independence. They should be red lines. I don't see how the strategy today is achieving those goals. We've all spent the last 2 hours talking about Syrian interference, so certainly a policy of pressure and sanctions is not achieving that goal, because Syria today feels it has far more to lose by "giving up," on Lebanon than by acquiescing on the demands that are made, because it doesn't see an incentive on the other side of the ledger, at least.

So, I would fear that, if we take this position, we may risk destroying Lebanon, because that's what Syria is capable of doing in the name of trying to protect it.

Now, that brings me to my third point, which is, I think the really fair question we need to address: Is there a relationship between Syria and Lebanon that is acceptable to the Syrian regime and acceptable to us? That, I think—that's, of course—I mean, the one thing we know that we can't accept is Syria intrusion and violation of Lebanese sovereignty. The one thing we know Syria can't accept is a hostile regime in Lebanon. But is there something in between that we could accept? Frankly, I don't know. I think we have to check that and test that.

What I do sense from talking—

Senator KERRY. I'm going to let you finish, but do you agree with that formulation?

Dr. LESCH. Yes, Mr. Chairman, I do. And I think there is some room to compromise, and certainly we should explore these things, because I think Syria and Bashar al-Assad is willing to explore them, as well.

Senator KERRY. Go ahead, Mr. Malley, finish up.

Mr. MALLEY. What do we—we know that—I mean, what we want to do—there's been a period of Syrian hegemony over Lebanon in the nineties, followed now by a period of very great intrusion and interference in political and military ways. We want to get to a point, if we can, where the relationship between the two will be the relationship between two neighbors in which neither government is hostile to the other. I don't—as I said, I don't think Syria will accept that—and in which they have normal relations, and Syria's relationship with Lebanon, it has influence—I think, as Emile said, it's always going to have influence, family ties, the huge economic dependence that Lebanon has on Syria—I mean, the sanctions against Syria hurt Lebanon as much as they hurt Syria—and the fact that it has allies in Lebanon. Can we construct an end state in which Syria's comfortable with a nonaligned Lebanese regime that is independent, sovereign, that is not used as a platform to try to overthrow or destabilize the regime in Syria, as has happened many times in the past, in which there are—as Emile says, there's diplomatic relations, demarcated borders, where Syria gives information on the many Lebanese who have disappeared over the years as a result of Syrian actions? That's the test. I don't—I truly don't have the answer, but I think many Syrians today, when I speak to them, they recognize that, No. 1, the ways of the past are, no longer; No. 2, that they've paid such a high price for what they did for the benefit of the very few within the Syrian regime who enriched themselves through corruption, and who—many of whom have now had to pay the price of no longer being in the regime or no longer being in the country.

So, I think there's a realization among the elite—maybe not among the very elite in the regime, but among the Syrian elite—that the relationship with Lebanon, as it occurred over the nineties, was not entirely to their benefit, and they may be thinking of a different way to have a relationship that is more normal between two neighbors.

Senator KERRY. Mr. El-Hokayem, do you want to respond?

Mr. EL-HOKAYEM. Yes; thank you.

As usual, the trick is in the details. Dr. Lesch talked about President Bashar al-Assad mentioning his willingness to normalize rela-

tions. And actually, he made a statement about this 3 weeks ago. It's available in the public domain. It was conditional normalization. He basically said, "I will formalize relations with a government, not directed by—and a government that I consider friendly."

And which brings me to the point brought up by Rob Malley, which is that Syria can live with a mutual and nonhostile government in Lebanon. Well, let's look at the criteria's that such a Lebanese neutral, nonhostile government would have to fulfill in order to consider—be considered so by Syria.

Well, they include things like subordinating its security policy and foreign policy to Syria, things that would happen, probably, anyway, because Lebanon, for instance, is not going to start a peace process with Israel because of domestic considerations. But this would be clearly a Syrian redline.

Another thing, for instance, would be an end to security and defense cooperation and assistance between Lebanon and foreign allies. The list of—it would also include—

Senator KERRY. But you're making presumptions about those things. You don't—all of those things are, "negotiable," until they're not negotiable. And if you're not engaged in a discussion, you have no way of really beginning to push back, leverage other interests. I mean, you've got a major peace process with the Golan Heights on the line. You've got a lot of things here that are leveragable.

Mr. EL-HOKAYEM. I—

Senator KERRY. You may have this whole Sunni-Shia division that comes back to haunt President Assad in ways that—there may be longer term interests. I mean, there are a lot of different interests here. You seem to be unwilling to get face to face to actually explore those, rather than just say to them, "Here's what you've got to do. Goodbye."

Mr. EL-HOKAYEM. No; not at all. I—I'm—actually, I think that Syria needs to be talked to. And you mentioned earlier your visit, other congressional visits, to Syria. I personally welcome those. I don't see these as threats. When Secretary Rice meets with Foreign Minister Moallem—I think all these are good things.

The problem is that you have a number of processes, U.N. processes that have been started that could be jeopardized in the process. What matters more than the United States negotiating posture is how Syria interprets things. And when we see how they interpret some very small moves, like President Bashar al-Assad's handshake with King Abdullah, and, for the next 3, 4 months, we all heard about Syria and Saudi Arabia joining hands again, that all their—all the disagreements between the two were solved because of this—well, we realized, a few months later, that it wasn't the case, that Syrian-Saudi relations at—are at their worst.

I'm not worried about the international community not knowing what it wants from Syria. I'm worried about Syria interpreting moves by the international community the way it wants to. I worry also about Syria defining redlines that would be then adopted by its Lebanese allies. If it—if Lebanese parties have problems, have issues they want to rise with the current governing majority, that's fair. This is part of the normal—a normal political process. The problem is when suddenly you internalize the redlines of your patron.

Senator KERRY. Senator Coleman.

Senator COLEMAN. First, Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for this hearing. This has been as good a discussion in a complex area of the world as I think I've participated in, where you've really laid out both sides and had this kind of cross-exchange. And it's very, very helpful.

And it is complex. And I don't know if we're that far apart, but we are, because the devil is in the details. Yes; should there be discussion. But, on the other hand, be careful of how that discussion is set up, understand the consequences of it.

The fundamental question I would have—let me just step back a little bit, because—Mr. El-Hokayem, in your testimony you talked about there being others who have had the discussion with Syria. And what's interesting here is that it's—you know, if we're not talking to them, then perhaps it isn't going on. But would Mr. Lesch or Mr. Malley disagree with the statements by Mr. El-Hokayem, that the Saudis, the other Arab States, the French, and others, have all engaged Lebanon—Syria in trying to step back with Lebanon, but have not had—seen anything productive come out of that?

Mr. MALLEY. I think many countries have had the discussion. I think we are uniquely positioned, because what Syria wants, it wants mainly from us, and what—and we can give what nobody else can, in terms of engagements with Syria. It's the reason why, even though I find it somewhat odd, the Syrians insist that the United States be at the table if they're going to talk to Israel. I mean, the crisis that Syria feels it has is less with the rest of the world, when with the United States. It may be a wrong perception, but I think the real test is in the discussions with us. To a lesser degree, but still important, with France. And that's why the discussions that are taking place as we speak between President Sarkozy's envoys and President Assad's team are one test of how far Syria is prepared to go.

Dr. LESCH. I agree with that. For Syria, the United States role is pivotal regarding any sort of negotiation over the Golan, simply because it's only the United States that can act as a guarantor of any agreement between Syria and Israel, in addition to the fact it's through United States involvement that Syria can hopefully reach an accommodation regarding Lebanon and also Iraq and other issues in the region.

Senator COLEMAN. And, clearly, Syria is in a unique position. There would be an opportunity—there is—I agree, as I look back at the, kind of, mutual interest that we have, and the role that it can play. The question is, you know: Are there preconditions to sitting down with somebody who has not demonstrated a willingness to be a constructive partner at all? And so, my concern would be, if others—the French, the Europeans—put something on the table, will we continue to see Syria intent in reasserting its central role in Lebanese affairs? Don't you think you should see something before—

But, I guess my question is: Do—either Dr. Lesch or Mr. Malley—do you question Syria's desire to reassert its central role in Lebanese affairs?

Dr. LESCH. Do I question Syria's—

Senator COLEMAN. Yeah.

Dr. LESCH [continuing]. Syria's desire to reestablish? Well, one of the fundamental things that—what you've just said—is that the relationship that Syria had regarding any sort of Arab-Israeli peace process, regarding Lebanon, is that, you know, these things—its relationship with Hezbollah, its presence in Lebanon, its relationship with groups such as Hamas, and on and on and on, that these—that this—that this relationship would be altered or changed after a peace agreement between Israel and the United—and Syria, that that—a treaty would come prior to these things. That changed during the Bush administration, where Syria now has to do, as Senator Kerry said, A, B, C, and D before, even, negotiations begin. And Bashar al-Assad is not going to do that.

So, I don't—I—Syria, as Rob and I have both stated, has vital interests in Lebanon. I don't doubt their sincerity in maintaining that level—a level of influence in Lebanon. But I think there's also room for compromise. And, obviously, we need to test it. We need to explore it. And I don't see any harm in that.

Mr. MALLEY. I'll answer you very directly, Senator. I have no doubt that Syria has the aspiration and the desire to control Lebanon. For me, that's not a matter of any doubt. I think Syria's track record proves it. The role of a diplomatic engagement—with carrots, with sticks, with incentives, and with disincentives—is to contain those aspirations. Many countries have aspirations that we—that hopefully are not—are never going to be expressed and put into practice. We've come from a period, as I said, where Syria went from hegemony, now to interference, and we want to get them to the point where they feel their, what we consider, legitimate needs are met, but not through illegitimate ends, and certainly not for the purpose of illegitimate goals. That, for me, is the challenge of a diplomatic engagement.

Senator COLEMAN. I was with a noted author of learned and Middle East affairs this morning with some of my colleagues, and he made the comment that in this country we say things in public, but the real deal is in that one-to-one conversation. In the Middle East, it is—when you say things in private, what you really have to ask is, “OK, now say that in your language, publicly.” And, you know, Dr. Lesch, you come back and say there's a conversation in private. And I guess my question is, is to say this publicly without preconditions, publicly, that this is what we intend to do, and perhaps—and I'd say—you know, I don't need to see A, B, C, and D. I'd just like to see A. I'd like to see B. I'd like to see a couple of steps that would demonstrate what I've heard privately. I've had those discussions with representatives of Syrian Government. But I'm looking for the, you know, “show me,” rather than just “tell me.”

Mr. El-Hokayem.

Mr. EL-HOKAYEM. This is exactly my point, is that, until 2005, Lebanon served as a negotiating asset for Syria. It served as a convenient battlefield. The list of the many uses of Lebanon for Syria is pretty long. Syria has withdrawn since 2005. The question is whether it still should be a card of Syria in any of its regional deals and moves.

I strongly believe that it shouldn't be the case anymore. At the end of the day, domestic Lebanese dynamics will prevent Lebanon from doing things against Syria that Syria has a—is afraid of, as long as Syria agrees to normalize relations.

One question. Syria is—says it's ready to delineate borders, as Bashar al-Assad said a few weeks ago, should there be a friendly government in Beirut. The question is: Would Syria agree to delineate the borders in the region of the Shebaa Farms, which continues to serve as a pretext of tension for Hezbollah between—for Hezbollah against Israel? Up until now, Syria has not done anything positive to solve the Shebaa Farms issue.

Of course, Syria shouldn't have to do A, B, C, and D. The problem is when it hasn't done A, then A has happened, and then you allow A to be a card in Syria's hand again.

Senator COLEMAN. My last question, Mr. Chairman, because I'm concerned about this definition of "friendly government," and how it may be a self-fulfilling prophecy if we continue to see what we've seen with the series of pro-sovereignty officials being assassinated. And I look forward to the results of the investigation into the Hariri assassination.

I'd simply ask Dr. Lesch and Mr. Malley if it were, in fact, demonstrated that Syrian officials were involved in both the Hariri assassination and the assassinate—the other pro-sovereignty assassinations, would that change your perspectives?

Dr. LESCH. I think it would—quite frankly, could Syria be involved in all of these things? Yes. And I think, on the other hand, realistically, in looking at foreign policy as a pragmatic venture, in terms of United States interests and gained—and pursuing United States interests in the region, not, obviously, that we should ignore any verdicts, but I think, at this time, we can't let the investigation of the tribunal hamper or act as a roadblock or use it as an excuse to engage with Syria. I think, from our perspective, we should engage with Syria in a very active way, and adopt a very active posture, separate the tribunal from trying to reestablish a dialogue with Syria, say, "We are going to return the Ambassador to Damascus to test the willingness to do what it says it wants to do," and to set up a process for dialogue and maybe—that may lead and create the foundation for negotiations toward peace. And we're going to see if the Syrians are willing to, you know, back up what they have said.

Senator COLEMAN. Mr. Malley.

Mr. MALLEY. I said in my testimony I think the tribunal should go forward, no matter what. And I think that if Syrians are found to be guilty, they need to be brought to account. And I think that that should be U.S. policy, it should be the international community and the United Nations policy.

The question is that we have—there's some time before the tribunal gets to that point. And, I think, between now and then, we need to be engaged in the kind of policy of conditional, or at least of careful, engagement with the Syrians, for two reasons.

One, for all the reasons I mentioned earlier; I think it's to our benefit, in terms of Israel, in terms of Iraq, in terms of Iran, et cetera; but also because, I think, if you come to the point, a year, 2 years from now, when the guilty verdicts come down, and if Syr-

ians are found to be guilty, we want the Syrian regime to know that it will have a price to pay if it doesn't comply with the orders of the court. And the best price to pay would be for it to lose whatever it got out of engagement, whether it's economic benefits, whether it's political benefits, whatever they may be. We want them to be in a position to know that they can pay that price, because they have other assets that they could live with, but also that they would be found to pay a very heavy price if they try to obstruct the work of the tribunal at that point. There's some time—the tribunal has not even been set up, as Assistant Secretary Welch said. And we don't have any time to lose, because there's so many other crises going on the region. Let's pursue the tribunal, but let's not wait for it to be completed to decide what we're going to do about Syria.

Senator COLEMAN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator KERRY. If I can just respond to a couple of those things. You know, the reality is that—and I think one of the witnesses said it earlier—that President Bashar Assad is going to respond to what he perceives to be in his and in Syria's interests. And right now, regrettably, for a host of reasons, our foreign policy has lost leverage and credibility in the region. We're not exactly in the leverage seat here. And so, it's very difficult to sit here and, sort of, define, in this context, what all the plays can be.

The fact is that if we were in a better position, vis-a-vis Iran, so that our saber-rattling and threats could actually have some legitimacy in anybody's eyes, or we were in a stronger position with respect to the Mideast peace process of these last years, and we have, in fact, by indifference, in my judgment, actually empowered Hamas, to some degree, to be stronger, because we didn't help President Abbas and others to develop into, you know, sort of a cogent partnership—I mean, there are a whole bunch of reasons that you can't exactly make the full judgment here. And I personally think it's going to be very difficult to get much out of that region until there's a huge shift in this administration.

But, on the other side of the coin, this notion of not engaging, not being involved, and, sort of, reacting to how you measure everything that has happened in the past, therefore that's what's going to happen in the future, I resist that.

And I'm going to tell you a story. I was at Admiral Bill Crowe's funeral the other day in Annapolis. Admiral Crowe, as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a four-star admiral, took it on himself to invite the Russian marshal—the field marshal of the Russian forces to the United States to visit our military installations. And the military hated the idea. And, of course, you can imagine what some people in the right wing did in America. The people on the right just vilified him for doing it, "It was a terrible idea."

Well, lo and behold, he came over here, and he went to many of our different installations, and, in fact, Admiral Crowe told him, one day at Fort Myer—took him over to Fort Myer, and had told everybody on the base, "This is what I'm going to do." The people knew. He said, "You go walk around for the day, and you ask anybody anything you want to ask them." And he did. Well, later he became the adviser to Gorbachev on proliferation issues, nuclear

weapons, et cetera. And he was at Reykjavik when Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan made their decisions. And he was a principal adviser, because he had learned what the Russian military, you know, didn't understand, which was the power of the United States, the real power, the real strength of our country, because he came over here and saw it, and didn't just operate from their slogans and from their stereotypes and presumptions. I think that's a great lesson about how you define interests and get people to see things that they don't see today.

And, in my judgment we have no illusions—I have no illusions about the historical imperative that President Assad feels and Syrians feel with respect to Lebanon. And we are, all of us, dealing with a part of the world that has been defined by Winston Churchill and the British and the French and mandates and a lot of other things. And you've got these tribal, almost feudal interests, that are trying to be managed in a very modern and complex world. It's not easy. We don't do a very good job of thinking about it, understanding it, of playing some of those interests.

I think, from what I've heard from people in the region and from the interests of the people in these countries, we ought to be sophisticated enough to be able to play to the ability to define something out of this. If you looked at the Balkans a few years ago, you'd have never thought you'd have 10 years of NATO managing a peace system in which not one troop has been killed, nor even a bunch of other parts of the world, where you make things happen that are different from what you perceive, because that is the art of diplomacy. And you have to engage in diplomacy. And it seems to me that there's so much opportunity staring us in the face here to, sort of, begin to explore these kinds of things, without any naivete or illusions about the difficulties or the complications of getting people to change those interests that are centuries old, or aspirations that are current and modern.

But, I'll tell you this, I think if you can continue down the road we're going—I mean, by any measurement, how is Lebanon safer? How have we strengthened our position in the region? I mean, these are very legitimate questions to be asked. And if you want the Lebanese Government to survive, as we do, the status quo appears to be stacking up against them.

You want to respond, I can tell.

Mr. EL-HOKAYEM. Well, I fully agree with you on the need for, you know, more U.S. leadership engagement in the region. I hope—it should have happened yesterday, if not before. The issue for me here is—or—and for Lebanon, as a whole, is—relates to the experience of the nineties, relates to the international acquiescence to Syrian domination in 1990 because of the need to bring Syria onboard against Iraq. It's—it also relates to the fact that Lebanon was not allowed to have an independent, even semi-independent, foreign policy for 15 years during the peace negotiations.

The issue today for the million Lebanese who demonstrated on the streets on March 14, 2005, is whether this was worth it, whether it was worth it to demonstrate peacefully, to turn to the international community and say, "We agree with the multilateral processes." These people would not have showed up in the streets of Beirut in a violent encounter against the Syrians. They waited.

And then the time was ripe. The question is whether the international community can sustain its effort to restore sovereignty and stability to the country and formalize normalized relations with Lebanon's most important neighbor.

U.S. leadership will be needed. Progress on the Palestinian front will be needed. Progress on the Iranian front will be needed. Progress on the Syrian front will be needed, of course. The question is: How do you insulate Lebanon from other large calculations that it has already paid the price for?

Thank you.

Senator KERRY. Senator Coleman, any—you all set?

Senator COLEMAN. I think, actually, Mr. El-Hokayem summed up what I was going to say. I think that is the—that is the issue right now. And I am one who has always believed that we need to discuss and we need to meet, and—but I just think we always have to be realistic as to expectations, and we have to be careful of the consequences of—certainly in this part of the world—of what we do, publicly. And, Mr. Chairman, I would just hope that there would be—this opportunity is out there, and, if we could see some very real movement—again, not A, B, C, and D, but just some concrete steps that demonstrate the sincerity of what, you know, Dr. Lesch and Mr. Malley are talking about, I think we could move to another phase.

Senator KERRY. You can, Senator, but you've got to have an overall strategy that you're actually trying to implement. And it won't work if the conversation is, "You've got to do A, B, and C before you even get somewhere." You've got to—it's a process—and it's hard to describe completely, but it's missing. And I think people who have been engaged in this understand that it's missing. I think that Mr. El-Hokayem, thinks it's missing. And so, I don't—I mean, I—we have to take steps that guarantee those courageous people who went out in the street, who voted overwhelmingly, who elected a democratic government, that that's sustained. But just measure the outrage that existed in the wake of the Hariri assassination. It moved a whole army out of Lebanon. The world came united to there. It's the absence of our engagement and maintaining that credibility that's allowed us to drift backward from that kind of point. We know what we can achieve. And, I believe, if we got back into that game in a serious way, we could retap into that same kind of energy. And, I'll tell you, the decision to move that army was a decision for survival, self-interest. There's no reason for us not to create that same kind of compelling force for self-interest again.

But I don't think—but you've got to have clean hands to do it. You've got to come at it in a way that you're able to leverage the situation, not be on the defensive. And I think we're excessively on the defensive right now.

Any—you want to add anything? Then we're going to close up, here.

Dr. LESCH. Sure. I think there is more that the Syrians can do, not severing the relationship with the Palestinian groups or Hezbollah or Iran prior to any engagement or any process or any peace process, but there is more that they can do. They—as I've said repeatedly, they are bad at public diplomacy. They don't even

know what the term means, at times. But they also see public diplomacy now, after what they feel as having been rebuffed to many peace overtures to Israel and openings to the United States, they see it as a sign of desperation, an appearance of being weak. They see what's happened before with those Arab leaders who have engaged in public diplomacy with Anwar Sadat, Arafat, and Bashar has no desire to mimic that and their fates.

They also have a history of playing their cards close to the vest, perhaps too close to the vest. I've always—I've been telling President Bashar, "You know, you really need to hire a public relations firm to be able to communicate your vision and your views to the West, and especially to the Israeli public, in order to turn things around without having to do a Sadat and go to Jerusalem."

Senator KERRY. Well, I understand that. And I must say, in my experience here in this committee, dealing with some things, I've learned that. And when I was chairman of the POW-MIA Committee, and I had the—I was engaged in negotiating with the Vietnamese during that period of time, and we were trying to open up prisons and historical centers and all kinds of things, that the stereotypes and the preconceived notions and the clumsiness with which people would respond had nothing to do with their real intent, and often was just—you know, I remember once literally flying within 1 month, on two weekends for 12 hours on the ground both times in Hanoi, just to clarify those things and to work through them. And, by doing that, we managed to keep a process on track that was about to be lost for the misconceptions and clumsiness, and, in the end, allowed President George Herbert Walker Bush to lift an embargo, and President Bill Clinton to normalize relations, and here we are today.

So, I believe in these things. You can do it, but you've got to, kind of, have that basic sense of direction, which, unfortunately, I'm not sure we're on today.

Enough said.

Thank you all very much. Very informative, very helpful.

We will leave the record open for—we'll leave the record open for 24 hours, in the event that there are any questions to be submitted, and then we'll leave it open for the period to have those answered.

Senator KERRY. Thank you. Appreciate it.

We stand adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 5:20 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. CHRISTOPHER J. DODD, U.S. SENATOR FROM
CONNECTICUT

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this important hearing to explore U.S. policy options regarding Syria, a country which can and does play an important role, whether spoiler or stabilizer, in a host of increasingly unstable regional conflicts in Lebanon, Israel, and Iraq.

At the outset I'd like to commend Rob Mally for his lucid and forceful testimony in support of American diplomatic engagement with Syria. One of the administration's key failures in this region has been its inexcusable and counterproductive shunning of diplomacy. Secretary Baker testified before this committee nearly a year ago regarding the Baker-Hamilton Commission and bluntly declared that "we

have missed the boat on Syria.” I agreed with him then, as I do now, and I worry that we are witnessing the consequences of such diplomatic neglect.

I am under no illusion that the Syrian regime is currently acting as anything but a spoiler, especially in Lebanon. Nor do I believe that simply engaging with Syria will necessarily change the behavior of the Assad regime. But I do believe that sitting on the sidelines while Syria continues to assert its hegemony over Lebanon, supply Hezbollah and Hamas with economic, military and political support, and continue to act as a spoiler in Iraq, guarantees instability.

More than that though, the Bush administration has done little to stabilize the Seniora Government, or to help the Lebanese people rebuild their economy and their country after the devastation of the Israel-Lebanon war in August 2006. The resulting vacuum was quickly filled by Hezbollah, aided by Syria and Iran, and since that time, Lebanon has been nearly crippled by political violence.

The United States and the wider international community must vigorously support Lebanese sovereignty, and must work to end unwanted Syrian influence in Lebanese political affairs. Syria must cease its attempts to prevent the international community from fully investigating and bringing to justice those responsible for the February 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Harari. Syria and Lebanon have a historic relationship, and there is no reason to end close economic and cultural ties between the two countries. If Syria wants to maintain a political relationship with Lebanon, then it should do so in accordance with international norms: Establish an Embassy in Beirut, and create a proper and normal border operation with Lebanon. But its political interference in and destabilizing of Lebanese politics must end.

It is my hope that Syria attends the upcoming Arab-Israeli peace conference in Annapolis and participates in good faith and without ulterior motives. But I worry that because of the 5 years of near total abandonment by the United States of the Arab-Israeli conflict, we are now faced with even more difficult challenges in brining these parties to the table to begin the negotiating process.

Simply issuing demands and ultimatums to Syria is no longer an option; we have tried that approach for years and have little to show for it. Instead, we must renew a serious and level-headed approach to engaging Syria. With realistic expectations and with the backing of the international community, we must change our course.

RESPONSES OF ASSISTANT SECRETARY DAVID WELCH TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR
THE RECORD BY SENATOR JOSEPH BIDEN

SYRIA

Questions 1–3. You stated in your written testimony, “Our concerns are well known and well documented. The Syrian Government knows very well what the United States and the international community expect.”

- Could you elucidate the specific concerns?
- Have these concerns remained constant or have they evolved over time? When were they first communicated to the Syrians? How recently were they reiterated?
- If these concerns were positively addressed by the Syrians, has the State Department made it clear to Syria what reciprocal steps would be taken by the United States? What are those steps?

Answer. Syrian activities continue to undermine prospects for peace and stability throughout the region. Issues of concern to the U.S. include: The Syrian Government’s failure to prevent Syria from being a transit point for foreign fighters entering Iraq; refusal to deport from Syria former Saddam regime elements who actively support the insurgency in Iraq; the ongoing interference in internal Lebanese affairs, such as Lebanon’s current Presidential election; and active support for the terrorist organization Hezbollah; the safe-haven Syria provides to Palestinian terrorist groups such as Hamas; and its deplorable human rights record as demonstrated by the harsh prison sentences against civil society activists Kamal Labwani, Michel Kilo, Mahmoud Issa, and Anwar al-Bunni, and by leading regime oppositionist Riad Seif’s inability to travel to seek much-needed medical care.

These concerns have remained consistent and have been raised on a number of occasions, most recently during Secretary Rice’s meeting with Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallam on November 3 on the margins of the Expanded Iraq Neighbors ministerial in Istanbul. Secretary Rice previously met with her Syrian counterpart in May 2007 at the Expanded Iraq Neighbors ministerial in Sharm el-Sheikh. Both of these meetings aimed to bolster Iraqi security and stability. During both meetings Foreign Minister Muallam asserted his country’s desire for a stable and

prosperous Iraq and pledged Syria's support. We will have to see if sustained actions match the Syrian Government's statements.

Our Embassy in Damascus continues to impress our concerns upon the Syrian Government. Senior Department of State officials have also met with senior Syrian Government officials to discuss our concerns in the past. These meetings include a January 2005 meeting between then-Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus; a November 2004 meeting between Secretary of State Powell and then-Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Shara'a in Sharm el-Sheikh; a September 2004 meeting between Secretary Powell and Foreign Minister al-Shara'a in New York; and a May 2003 meeting between Secretary Powell and President al-Assad in Damascus. Additionally, in September 2004 Department of State Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs Bill Burns and Department of Defense Assistant Secretary Peter Rodman, along with NSC and CIA officials, met with President al-Assad in Damascus. In August 2003 Assistant Secretary Burns met with President al-Assad in Damascus. Finally, our Embassy in Damascus remains open, providing a mechanism should the Syrian Government desire a serious dialogue on any of these issues.

In each of these engagements, the U.S. told the Syrians that we would judge their intentions on deeds, not words. In each instance the Syrian officials pledged to end their interference in Lebanon, to expel Palestinian terrorist leaders from Damascus, and to end Syrian state sponsorship of terrorism.

More than 3½ years after our engagement on these issues we continue to await demonstrable action. Only when the Syrian regime takes concrete measures to address these issues will the U.S. be able to discuss next steps.

LEBANON

Questions 4-7. You testified about Secretary Rice's recent meeting on Lebanon and the margins of the Iraq Neighbors Conference, in Istanbul with the Foreign Ministers of France, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Jordan, as well as the Secretary General of the Arab League.

- What, if any, concrete actions did the attendees of this meeting agree upon with respect to Lebanon and Syria?
- What, if any, followup to this meeting is planned?
- What steps are being taken to ensure that there is not undue Syrian manipulation into the Lebanese Presidential election process?
- What steps are being taken to assure the safety of Lebanese lawmakers?

Answer. The Secretary's meeting in Istanbul with the Foreign Ministers of France, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Jordan, and Egypt, as well as Secretary General of the Arab League Amre Moussa reaffirmed the international community's desire for successful Lebanese Presidential elections resulting in a new President who represents an independent and sovereign Lebanon and who is committed to upholding relevant international resolutions. Elections must occur without intimidation or interference. Together, the attendees at the meeting, agreed on a statement that foreign interference in the elections would not be tolerated; this statement was delivered to the Syrians.

Following the Istanbul conference we have continued to work closely with our partners pressing this message during travel to Lebanon and Syria. In addition to intense diplomatic cooperation, the United States has used unilateral tools to maintain pressure on Syrian and others who would undermine Lebanon's democratic processes. We have instituted travel and financial sanctions against Syrian and Lebanese individuals who are undermining Lebanon's democracy. Financial sanctions were placed on four new individuals on November 5.

The safety and security of Lebanese lawmakers remains a top priority. As you know, many are currently residing in a Beirut hotel where strict security measures deter those who would use violence to affect an outcome in Lebanon's elections. We continue to press for rapid establishment of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, which will try those accused of the assassination of former PM Rafiq Hariri. The Tribunal may help deter future politically motivated assassinations by sending a clear message that the era of impunity for such political attacks is over.

Question 8. Do you expect Syrian participation at the Annapolis meeting, tentatively scheduled for later this month?

Answer. Secretary Rice has been clear that while the key participants at Annapolis will be the Israelis and Palestinians, we view the Quartet and members of the Arab League Follow Up Committee on the Arab Peace Initiative as natural participants. Syria is a member of the follow up committee. This will ultimately be a decision for the Syrian Government.

Question 9. Is engagement with Syria in Annapolis subject to the same preconditions referenced in question 1, above?

Answer. The United States remains committed to comprehensive peace in the Middle East. We are committed to engaging with countries that are committed to the two state solution and that reject violence. The focus of Annapolis, however, will be Israel and the Palestinians.

Question 10. In the event of Syrian participation at Annapolis, will Secretary Rice seek to facilitate bilateral discussions between the Syrian and Israeli delegations?

Answer. The United States remains committed to comprehensive peace in the Middle East. However, the focus of this Annapolis will be on the Israeli-Palestinian track because we believe that is the track that is ripe.

Question 11. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 calls upon Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all levels for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict. To what degree, and in what manner, are you seeking the participation of women leaders and women's organizations both in the consultative process in preparation for talks in Annapolis, and to be part of the official negotiations?

Answer. Engaging civil society is a critical component of our foreign policy strategies. On November 1, 2007, the Secretary met with the International Women's Commission, an organization that has a longstanding record of constructive engagement of Israeli and Palestinian women to progress the cause of peace. We believe that organizations such as the IWC can play a critical role in supporting peace and building confidence between the Israeli and Palestinian people.

RESPONSES OF ASSISTANT SECRETARY DAVID WELCH TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY SENATOR ROBERT CASEY

Question. What can you tell us about the Israeli airstrike on a Syrian site on September 6? Can you confirm that this site housed components of an illicit Syrian nuclear program? If not, are you prepared to provide this information to members of this committee in a classified format?

Answer. We have seen press reports speculating that the Syrian site targeted by a September 6 Israeli airstrike housed components of a possible Syrian nuclear program. We have no further comment to provide in either an unclassified or classified setting.

Question. What is the current assessment of the administration as to whether the Syrian regime is pursuing a nuclear weapon? If so, how advanced was Syria in its efforts to produce a nuclear weapon?

Answer. We remain concerned about the Syrian regime's desire to pursue non-conventional weapons. Our concerns are heightened by Syria's continued support of Hezbollah and Hamas, the presence of other terrorist organizations in Syria and their ability to move weapons across Syria's borders for use in countries such as Lebanon, and Syria's relationship with states known to have nuclear ambitions, such as Iran.

Question. What can you tell us about any coordination and/or sharing of information between the United States and Israel prior to the September 6th airstrike?

Answer. We are unable to comment on this issue.

Question. Was there any discussion of bringing information on an illicit Syrian nuclear weapons program to the International Atomic Energy Agency for further investigation and onsite inspections? If not, why not?

Answer. We continue to support the International Atomic Energy Agency's efforts to investigate all claims of illicit nuclear weapons programs.

Question. What impact, if any, does the Israeli airstrike have on Western efforts to dissuade Iran from pursuing a nuclear weapons program?

Answer. Our message to Tehran remains: Abandon the quest for nuclear weapons; establish a full and verifiable suspension of all proliferation-sensitive nuclear activities; and commit to good faith negotiations. The United States has joined other members of the P5+1 (U.K., France, China, Russia, and Germany) to offer a generous incentives package—providing Iran assistance in the fields of nuclear energy, medicine, transportation, agriculture, etc.—to encourage Tehran's cooperation. Secretary Rice has additionally and repeatedly noted that she will meet with the Ira-

nians at any time and any place to discuss the nuclear issue and other matters, once they have suspended enrichment and reprocessing.

