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U.S. POLICY TOWARD LEBANON

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BEFORE THE

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THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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U.S. POLICY TOWARD LEBANON

THURSDAY, APRIL 28, 2016

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 2 p.m., in room 2138 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. The subcommittee will come to order.

After recognizing myself and my friend, Ranking Member Ted Deutch, for 5 minutes each for our opening statements, I will then recognize other members seeking recognition for 1 minute each.

We will then hear from our witnesses. Without objection, the witnesses' prepared statements will be made a part of the record. Members may have 5 days to insert statements and questions for the record subject to the length limitation in the rules.

The chair now recognizes herself for 5 minutes. Two years ago this month, this subcommittee held a hearing on security challenges and U.S. interests in Lebanon with an administration panel represented by State's NEA Bureau and DoD's Middle East Policy Bureau.

I opened that hearing by stating that Lebanon is a country that is seemingly perpetually in a state of conflict or on the verge of breaking out into a conflict at any moment.

The same can be said about the country's political stability. Lebanon is a country that is seemingly perpetually in a state of political crisis or on the verge of breaking out in a political crisis at any moment.

We're now 2 years deeper into the political deadlock that has gripped Beirut. The presidency has remained unfilled for nearly 2 years while long-overdue legislative elections have been pushed even further back to 2017 at the very earliest. The more things change the more they stay the same in Lebanon.

Two years ago, Lebanon was struggling to cope with the economic strain of hosting over 1 million Syrian refugees who had fled to their neighbor, seeking refuge from the fighting between Assad, Hezbollah, ISIS and other terror entities.

These refugees would be the equivalent of roughly one-quarter of the Lebanese population. Estimates suggest that over 3.3 million people in Lebanon are now in need of assistance.

As has been the case throughout the region in response to the Syrian humanitarian crisis, the U.S. has stepped up and to date

has provided over $1.1 billion in humanitarian assistance for Lebanon to help it cope with the strain of its refugee influx.

However, as has also been the case throughout the region in response to the Syrian humanitarian crisis, appeals for assistance to Lebanon have gone drastically underfunded and many of our partners and allies have failed to step up as needed.

The American people are generous. They understand there is a real need to support some of these nations struggling to cope with this large influx of refugees. But their generosity and understanding is not unlimited.

The administration must do more to press other responsible nations to increase their contributions so that we don't bear the full brunt of the cost. Two years ago, Lebanon's stability was a great concern for the United States.

Hezbollah was fighting alongside Assad in Syria and the Syrian conflict threatened to spill over into Lebanon. Again, the more things change the more they stay the same for Lebanon's security instability.

However, now Lebanon has taken on an even greater strategic importance for the United States and for the entire region. This small country, trapped in a political stalemate for nearly 2 years now, has an increased significance and is one of the battlegrounds in the proxy battle between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

In the absence of any consensus on a way forward in the political deadlock, Hezbollah, aided and abetted by the Iranian regime, has moved to fill the leadership vacuum and increase its presence and influence in Lebanon.

In the aftermath of the weak and dangerous Iranian nuclear deal and even during the negotiations, Iran has increased its support to Hezbollah. Indeed, key to Iran's strategic objectives in supporting Assad in Syria was maintaining the supply route from Damascus to Lebanon, which they have successfully managed and reports even suggest that they may have accelerated the transfer of weapons including strategic weapons systems to Hezbollah through Syria.

More troubling still, it is apparent that Hezbollah has managed to gain sufficient influence in Lebanon to hinder its relationship with its Arab neighbors.

In fact, in February of this year the Lebanese justice minister resigned, explicitly citing Hezbollah's undue influence and the harm it was causing to Lebanon's relationships.

This same month—that same month, Saudi Arabia led the Gulf Corporation Council nations to designate Hezbollah as a terrorist organization with the Arab League shortly following suit.

The Saudis, taking aim at Hezbollah and Iran again, also announced they were halting $3 billion in military assistance to Lebanon. No doubt the Saudis recognize that it is not just in the political sphere that Iran and Hezbollah have gained undue influence.

Hezbollah has increased its presence within and partnership with the Lebanese Armed Forces. This synergy between the Lebanese Armed Forces and Hezbollah should really call into question then the administration's continued support for the LAF and the President's budget request that doubles the foreign military financing assistance we provide to Lebanon.

It is also worrisome that the commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces is now currently in Moscow and will meet with Russian military officials to discuss coordination on anti-terror operations.

A senior Russian official was quoted as saying that Moscow and Beirut are true partners in combating terrorism worldwide. This is on the heels of the Czech Republic recently releasing, after refusing an extradition request by the U.S., two members of Hezbollah wanted in America on charges of planning to murder U.S. Government officials and drugs and arms trafficking.

At least one of these individuals is known to have had close ties to a notorious Russian arms dealer and is Russia's link to Hezbollah.

So I'm interested in hearing the administration's assessment of the relationship between Iran and Lebanon and, more specifically, Hezbollah and the LAF as well as Lebanon's relations with its Arab neighbors, the nexus between Russia, Hezbollah and the LAF as well as the prospects for Lebanon's future stability.

I'll also like to hear how the administration's policy toward Lebanon fits in a larger picture with the fight against ISIS and the conflict in Syria, the Syrian humanitarian crisis and how we plan on ensuring that the spillover from Lebanon does not threaten our friend and ally, the democratic Jewish state of Israel.

And with that, I'm pleased to yield to the ranking member, my friend, Ted Deutch.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Madam Chairman. Thanks for calling this hearing. Thanks to our witnesses for appearing today. Welcome back, Ambassador Feierstein.

We are delighted to see you again before you retire and I am sure there is no place you'd rather be to celebrate your birthday than appearing before our committee. So happy birthday to you.

And Dr. Exum, it's a pleasure to welcome you to the committee as well. You're welcome to celebrate your birthdays here. It's a standing offer we make.

We tend to look at Lebanon in pieces in the context of other regional actors and conflicts. But today is going to give us the opportunity to look at the range of challenges facing Lebanon and how U.S. policy can best address those challenges.

Lebanon has been locked in a political stalemate that has all but frozen the country's ability to effectively govern its diverse population.

The Parliament has been unable to agree on a consensus President since 2014, struggled to face down its number-one internal threat, Hezbollah, while outside pressures from the Syrian conflict continue to mount.

Divisions within Lebanese society have long made it susceptible to outside influence. The ouster of the Syrian military 11 years ago yesterday unfortunately did not free the country from those looking to exploit it.

Iran has only sought to strengthen Hezbollah's grip on Lebanon. Moving weapons and money to the group to carry out its attacks on Israel and other targets worldwide, Iran turned Hezbollah into its own proxy terrorist organization.

This culminated in the deployment of somewhere between 6,000 and 8,000 Hezbollah fighters into Syria to fight alongside Assad's troops as Iran is desperate to save its Syrian lifeline to Hezbollah.

Conflict in Syria has devastated Lebanon's economy. Nearly a quarter of the population are now refugees. This has only intensified the economic turmoil already plaguing Lebanon and drawn deeper divisions between Sunnis and Shi'ites.

Hezbollah's power grip on Lebanon towns in the south remains tight as the group provides everything from protection to paychecks to basic social services. Hezbollah in effect functions as a state within a state.

And despite the government's desire to remain neutral in the Syrian conflict, it has unfortunately been unable to avoid attacks from Hezbollah's continued involvement on the ground. Bombings in Beirut in November 2015 by alleged ISIS recruiters unfortunately killed 43.

U.S. policy toward Lebanon has long sought to counter Hezbollah by focusing on building up the capabilities of the Lebanese Armed Forces to act as the sole legitimate guarantor of security in the country.

But despite gains made in counter terrorism and border control, gaps exist in the LAF's ability to control the security of its country. Particularly concerning is the LAF's ability to control the flow of weapons in and out of its territory.

In recent years, the U.S. has consistently increased assistance and cooperation to the LAF to counter both the threats emanating from Syria and Hezbollah. Dr. Exum, I look to you today to provide us with an updated assessment of LAF's capabilities.

Further, how significant will the effect be of the withdrawal of $4 billion in aid from Saudi Arabia to the LAF and can we count on other like-minded partners who have an interest in seeing Lebanon succeed fill that gap.

Of great concern to many of us in Congress is the enforcement of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701, which, by all accounts, has been a dismal failure. With no one to enforce the resolution, Hezbollah has rebuilt its arsenal of rockets and now possesses over 100,000 capable of reaching every corner of Israel.

Fear over the transfer of advanced weaponry from Assad's stockpiles to Hezbollah has prompted numerous strikes on weapons convoys by Israel and with the prospect of additional weapons coming from Iran and Hezbollah, it's now more important than ever that Israel's qualitative military edge be strengthened.

And as talks over the new memorandum of understanding continue with Israel, every consideration must be given to the strength of Hezbollah's arsenal. As Lebanon grapples with its tenuous security situation, its state institutions, unfortunately, grow weaker.

Deputy Secretary Blinken said on his most recent visit to Lebanon unless and until a President is chosen, he said, the erosion of Lebanon's political institutions will only deepen.

To that end, the United States must continue to support Lebanon's legitimate state institutions and work with elements in the government to help prevent an economic crisis.

I am pleased to see the Lebanese banking sector working with the United States to implement the provisions of the Hezbollah

International Financing Prevention Act, which will help wall off Lebanese banks from Hezbollah's illicit activities.

If we want to see success and stability for the people of Lebanon we must focus attention on those communities hosting an extraordinary number of refugees. With no U.N.-run refugee camps in the country, many Syrians have sought shelter in parking garages and abandoned buildings.

The international community must provide Lebanon with the resources needed to expand access to education and health care for the hundreds of thousands of Syrian children there, and as I have mentioned many times in this subcommittee, I applaud the humanitarian efforts of the United States and I implore the department, Ambassador Feierstein, to remind our allies and friends around the world that they must meet this crisis head on. Contributing to the humanitarian crisis also contributes to security.

Madam Chairman, like all of us, the people of Lebanon deserve to live in peace and security free from the grip of terrorism. Lebanon is a tinderbox and U.S. policy must focus on continuing to prevent it from sparking.

Again, I thank the witnesses for appearing today and look forward to a productive discussion.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Congressman Deutch.

And now I would like to recognize members for their opening statements and we will begin with Mr. Chabot of Ohio.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you, Madam Chair, and as far as I'm concerned Lebanon is one of the key countries—one of the most important countries in the Middle East.

Regional powers have a long history of fighting for influence in Lebanon and unfortunately it continues to be the subject of coercive forces outside its borders. I'm deeply concerned that the tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia may further exacerbate the looming instability in Lebanon.

This is particularly troubling considering the Lebanese economy is facing serious strains caused by, among other things, hosting over 1 million Syrian refugees which now make up about a quarter of the population in Lebanon.

And while Lebanon has made some positive democratic shifts over the years, the fact remains there are still armed nonstate groups in Lebanon and this is reason enough to pay special attention to the situation there.

A long-term breakdown in leadership and governance in Lebanon would leave it susceptible to the same chaos that we've seen elsewhere in the region and that absolutely must not happen.

Finally, not only is Hezbollah hostile toward our traditional ally, Israel, but we are now hearing some argue that Hezbollah's political participation in the Lebanese Government is resulting in even greater strain of tensions between Lebanon and the other Arab nations.

And further breakdowns in diplomatic relations in the region could have a significant negative impact. So we appreciate the witnesses and look forward to hearing them today and I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Chabot.

Mr. Cicilline of Rhode Island.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Chairman Ros-Lehtinen and Ranking Member Deutch, for calling this hearing on U.S. policy toward Lebanon and thank you to our witnesses.

I look forward to hearing from you about the geostrategic importance of Lebanon, particularly in the context of the ongoing Syrian conflict and its related refugee crisis, the undue influence of Hezbollah and the threat of ISIL and other terrorist groups in the region and beyond.

Given sustained U.S. interests and support to Lebanon over the years, our strategic objective of supporting a viable, independent, sovereign and democratic Lebanon that is at peace with its neighbors is more important than ever.

It's imperative that we continue to support these goals and I want to ensure that U.S. resources are applied in the best and most effective way possible.

We cannot afford to let Lebanon slide into further disarray and Lebanon must help itself by providing good governance and security for its people.

I look forward to the witnesses' testimony today and to working with the administration and my colleagues to further strengthen our important relationship with Lebanon.

And I thank you, Madam Chair, and yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Cicilline.

And Mr. Meadows of North Carolina.

Mr. MEADOWS. Thank you, Madam Chairman. Thank you for your vision and your undying, unyielding effort to make sure that we address this issue.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. The gentleman can have 2 more minutes.

Mr. MEADOWS. I want to thank the witnesses for being here. For me, this is one that is not only a complex question but certainly one that we need to show resolve and make sure that those that are our friends, and by that I mean the Lebanese people, that they understand clearly what we stand for and what we won't stand for, and by addressing Hezbollah in a meaningful way through the tools that have been given the Department of Treasury and other areas.

We need to make sure that we do that. I think there are times that we are ambiguous about that, and having a communications director who is part Lebanese, having someone who cuts my hair every 4 weeks who is full Lebanese, I can assure you I'm going to follow up on it.

And with that, I'll yield back, Madam Chairman.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much. More information than we cared for. And I'll turn to another sharing kind of guy, Mr. Connolly of Virginia.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Madam Chair, if you could just tell the time—I just want to remind you I gave you chocolate.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. You did, and dark chocolate—the best.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And secondly, I didn't realize Dr. Exum gives haircuts. At any rate, thank you, Madam Chairman, and, you know, I first went to Lebanon with my friend, who's in the room, and it was a really revealing kind of trip that Graham exposed to me and I just got to say we can talk about Hezbollah as if it some-

how was created sui generis within Lebanon—who knows how or why.

But the dysfunction within Lebanon is what created Hezbollah, created a receptive climate for Hezbollah. And, you know, I'm a local government kind of guy.

When you can't even pick up the trash for 8 months it leads to mass riots. It leads to mass disaffection with the government and I think that, plus the government legislative paralysis, the inability to elect a President and so forth, I think has persuaded most Lebanese that it's terminally dysfunctional as a country. And that ought to concern us as well as the fact that we got 1.1 million refugees, the equivalent of 25 percent of the population. I think that would be, like, 70 million here in the United States, comparable.

So those two things are destabilizing in the extreme and I think we cannot afford to ignore them.

Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Connolly.

And seeing no further requests for time, I am pleased to introduce our excellent panel of experts.

First, it's our pleasure to welcome back Ambassador Gerald Feierstein, who is the principal deputy assistant secretary for the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs.

Previously, he served as our Ambassador to Yemen—yikes—from 2010 to 2013, has served in several different postings throughout the world including deputy chief of mission in Islamabad—another yikes—and deputy council general in Jerusalem—yeah. Thank you for your service. We look forward to your testimony, and as Mr. Deutch had pointed out, for those members who were not here, this is two special banner days for Ambassador Feierstein.

Number one, it's his birthday and, as Ted pointed out, he can think of no funner way for him to celebrate his birthday than to appear before a congressional panel, and number two, it is his last testimony in his position because he's going to retire in 4 weeks. So we wish you nothing but the best, Ambassador.

And next, we welcome for the first time Dr. Andrew Exum, deputy assistant secretary of defense for Middle East policy. He is the principal advisor to the secretary of defense and under secretary of defense for policy on international security strategy and policy for the Middle East.

In addition to his current service with the Defense Department, Dr. Exum has served our nation with distinction in both Afghanistan and Iraq as an officer in the U.S. Army. We thank you for your service there as well, and what is that lapel pin of service?

Mr. EXUM. This would be the Combat Scroll of the 1st Ranger Battalion.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Not bad. All right.

Thank you. We welcome both of you and Mr. Ambassador, we will begin with you, sir.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE GERALD M. FEIERSTEIN, PRINCIPAL DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Ambassador FEIERSTEIN. Thank you very much, Madam Chairman and Ranking Member Deutch, and before I say anything else

let me just say, if this is indeed the last time that I come up here, at least in this capacity, I want to thank all of you—all of the members of the committee for the many opportunities that we've had, as well as with your staff, to come up and discuss these issues, and to say that I've always found my experiences here to be rewarding and enjoyable even.

So thank you, and thank you for inviting me to discuss U.S. policy toward Lebanon today. I would like to request that my full opening statement——

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Without objection.

Ambassador FEIERSTEIN [continuing]. Be submitted for the record.

Promoting a Lebanon that is independent, sovereign, stable, prosperous and religiously diverse is crucial to advancing a range of U.S. interests in the Middle East.

Lebanon today faces three critical challenges. First are the spillover effects of the ongoing Syrian conflict, second are the activities of Hezbollah and third is the political crisis that has nearly paralyzed government decision making for nearly 2 years.

We are grateful to the Congress for passing the Hezbollah International Financing Prevention Act signed into law last December. This law provides us with critical new tools to dismantle Hezbollah's global financial network.

Our strategy for helping Lebanon address these three challenges is simple. To ensure that the Lebanese security forces have the tools that they need to prevent ISIL from destabilizing the country while helping build legitimate state institutions in order to deny Hezbollah what it seeks to avoid—a strong central government capable of providing services for the entire country.

The conflict in Syria has severely tested Lebanon's resilience. Our assistance to refugees from Syria and to the Lebanese communities that have graciously hosted them for nearly 5 years has helped alleviate the economic burden on the Lebanese people.

Lebanon faces a real threat from ISIL and the Nusra Front. This is why we support Lebanon's legitimate state security institutions and particularly the Lebanese Armed Forces and see that as a down payment on a long-term investment in regional stability.

Just today an LAF raid in the town of Arsal in Lebanon resulted in the death of a key ISIL operative. My Pentagon colleague, Dr. Exum, will discuss our relationship with Lebanon's security institutions in greater depth.

Our cooperation is not limited to counter terrorism. Combating trafficking in persons is one of our highest priorities. Lebanon has made important gains in targeting human traffickers, the slave traders of today.

In late March, the internal security forces raided a human trafficking ring, arresting 16 traffickers and rescuing 75 victims.

On the second challenge that threatens Lebanon and one I know that this committee tracks closely, Hezbollah. When Hezbollah first intervened in the Syrian civil war to prop up the Assad regime, the group showed its true colors to anyone who still doubted that Hezbollah put its own interests and those of its foreign backers ahead of those of the Lebanese people. When Hezbollah conducts terrorist activities abroad or drags Lebanon into the war in neigh-

boring Syria, it is ordinary Lebanese people who are paying the price.

The U.S. Government is actively implementing the Hezbollah International Financing Prevention Act. The Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Asset Control issued new HIFPA regulations on April 15th. We will use our full authority under HIFPA to target foreign financial institutions that knowingly facilitate significant transactions or engage in money laundering activities or other activities related to Hezbollah. When we have evidence we will build a case and we will take action. Before the passage of HIFPA we were already targeting the nodes of Hezbollah's international financing by designating over 100 Hezbollah-affiliated individuals and entities.

The third major challenge Lebanon faces is restoring effective government. We commend Prime Minister Tammam Salam for his courage and perseverance in addressing Lebanon's most pressing challenges. But he cannot do the job alone.

Next month will mark 2 years the Lebanese people have been without a President. Lebanon's leaders, particularly those who are blocking a quorum from convening in Parliament, must put the interests of the Lebanese people first by electing a President and restoring a fully functioning government.

Madam Chairman, in these and many other ways we are contributing to the stability, independence and security of Lebanon, which is as much a U.S. interest as it is a Lebanese one.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the subcommittee. I welcome the opportunity to answer your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Feierstein follows:]

Testimony

Before the House Foreign Affairs Committee

Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa

U.S. Policy Toward Lebanon

Statement of

Ambassador Gerald M. Feierstein,

Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs

April 28, 2016

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to discuss United States policy towards Lebanon. Promoting a Lebanon that is independent, sovereign, stable, prosperous, and religiously diverse is crucial to advancing a range of U.S. interests in the Middle East. Lebanon today faces three critical challenges: first, the spillover effects of the Syrian conflict, including refugee flows into Lebanon and security threats such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Nusra Front; second, the activities of Hizballah, a terrorist organization that puts its own interests and those of its foreign backers ahead of those of the Lebanese people; and third, a political crisis that has nearly paralyzed government decision-making and left the country without a president for almost two years. We are grateful to Congress for its strong support of U.S. assistance to Lebanon and for the Hizballah International Financing Prevention Act, signed into law last December. This legislation provides us with critical new tools to dismantle Hizballah's global financial network.

Our comprehensive strategy for helping Lebanon address these challenges is simple: ensure that the Lebanese security forces have the tools they need to prevent ISIL from destabilizing the country while helping build legitimate state institutions in order to deny Hizballah what it seeks to avoid: a strong central government capable of providing services for the entire country.

The conflict in Syria has severely tested Lebanon's resilience. There are over 145,000 refugee children from Syria in Lebanese public schools. Lebanon is now running a second school shift to make this happen. Our assistance to refugees from Syria – and to the Lebanese communities which have graciously hosted them for nearly five years – has helped alleviated the economic burden on the Lebanese

people. In February 2016 at the London Humanitarian Conference, Secretary Kerry announced over $133 million in new humanitarian aid, bringing the U.S. contribution to Lebanon to over $1.1 billion since the start of the crisis. At the London conference, Lebanon made significant new commitments to educate and employ Syrian refugees. We are looking to the Lebanese to fulfill those commitments as soon as possible. Our shared goal is to prevent a "lost generation" of Syrians with no resources, no education, and no hope.

Lebanon faces a real threat from ISIL and the Nusra Front. This is why support to Lebanon's legitimate state security institutions, in particular the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), is a down payment on a long-term investment in regional stability. The LAF, not Hizballah, is responsible for protecting the country from ISIL and Nusra. The international community must come together to increase, not decrease, assistance to the security forces to enhance their capabilities in defense of Lebanon's security.

Our strategy, which builds on U.S. security assistance programs launched after the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon in 2005, is bearing fruit. Lebanon is an active partner in the global coalition to combat ISIL and is now confronting them along the Lebanese-Syrian border. The brutal suicide bomb attack in the Burj al-Barajneh neighborhood of Beirut on November 12, 2015, which killed 43 civilians, served as a stark reminder that we are in the fight against ISIL together. We believe that international counter-terrorism cooperation with Lebanese authorities, however, has prevented other attacks.

In January 2016, in a briefing for Members and staff of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, the commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces, spoke to the

progress his troops have made in taking terrorists off the battlefield in northeastern Lebanon and preventing ISIL fighters from flowing into Lebanon. Using equipment provided under our Foreign Military Financing program – $150 million provided during FY 2015 – the LAF has prevented further attacks by ISIL launched from Syria, so that northeastern Lebanon is no longer in immediate danger from cross-border incursions by violent extremist groups. Lebanese aircraft use U.S.-supplied Hellfire missiles to pinpoint terrorists and take them out. The effectiveness of this firepower and U.S. training was on full display in the early hours of March 10, 2016. That morning, the Lebanese Forces executed a daring operation outside Ras Baalbek, which took out over a dozen ISIL fighters and destroyed ISIL vehicles, a command post, and a safe house. I will defer to my Pentagon colleague to discuss our relationship with Lebanon's security institutions in greater depth.

Our close counterterrorism cooperation with the Lebanese Armed Forces and Lebanon's Internal Security Forces (ISF) is also helping target threats to both Lebanon and the U.S. Homeland. For example, the FBI-trained ISF now conducts forensic investigations using the latest post-blast investigation techniques. These investigative skills make the ISF more effective partners and leaders in counterterrorism operations and major incident response. With State Department assistance, the ISF is transforming into a modern, capable force ready to conduct advanced counterterrorist operations and maintain safety and security throughout the country for all Lebanese people. We are helping the ISF better target organized crime nodes and investigate more efficiently in addition to providing training in human rights and community policing. Our assistance to the ISF also helps relieve the Lebanese Armed Forces from internal security matters and law enforcement

duties, enabling the military to devote its full attention to external threats such as ISIL and the Nusra Front.

However, our cooperation is not limited to counterterrorism. Combatting trafficking-in-persons is one of our highest priorities in Lebanon. Lebanon has made gains in targeting human traffickers, the slave traders of our day. The Internal Security Forces raided a human trafficking ring in late March, arresting 16 traffickers and rescuing 75 victims. The traffickers had lured the victims, almost all Syrian women and girls, to Lebanon under false pretenses and forced them into prostitution. More recently, on April 21, the Lebanese military arrested five individuals allegedly involved in a trafficking ring in the eastern Bekaa Valley and seized two vehicles used to smuggle their victims from Syria into Lebanon. Still, there is more the Lebanese Government can do to combat trafficking, including enacting legislation such as the National Action Plan and National Strategy to Combat Trafficking.

I want to stress that our assistance to Lebanon and its people is much broader than the security sector. We provided $65 million in Economic Support Funds for Lebanon in FY 2015. Through our USAID mission in Beirut, we are training teachers, rehabilitating school buildings, providing classroom equipment, repairing water pumping stations, and building up the capacity of civil society organizations by improving their financial management controls.

I want to turn to the second challenge that threatens Lebanon and one I know this Committee tracks closely, Hizballah. When Hizballah intervened in Syria beginning in 2012 to prop up the Asad regime, the group showed its true colors to anyone who still doubted Hizballah puts its own interests and those of its foreign

backers ahead of those of the Lebanese people. When Hizballah conducts terrorist attacks abroad or drags Lebanon into the war in neighboring Syria, it is ordinary Lebanese people who pay the price – in security threats, lost tourism and investment revenue, and reputation. These costs are, unfortunately, very tangible.

The U.S. government is actively implementing the Hizballah International Financing Prevention Act (HIFPA). The Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) issued new regulations, as required by HIFPA, on April 15. Simultaneously, OFAC identified approximately100 previously designated persons as agents, instrumentalities, and/or affiliates of Hizballah, or as persons designated for acting on behalf of or at the direction of, or being owned or controlled by, Hizballah. The governor of the Lebanese Central Bank immediately announced that Lebanon would comply with these regulations. We will use our full authority under HIFPA to target foreign financial institutions that knowingly facilitate significant transactions or engage in money-laundering activities or certain other activities related to Hizballah. If the U.S. government has the necessary evidence, we will build a case, and we will take action. Before the passage of HIFPA, we already targeted the nodes of Hizballah's international financing by designating over 100 Hizballah-affiliated individuals and entities. The world is rallying against Hizballah. We welcome decisions by the Arab League, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to treat Hizballah as a terrorist organization. Two weeks ago, the State Department, Justice Department, and the Department of the Treasury held a law enforcement workshop for GCC countries in Manama, Bahrain, to improve our partners' capacity to address Hizballah's activities.

As we go after Hizballah and its backers around the world, our target is not Lebanon or the Lebanese economy. On the contrary, we cooperate closely with the Central Bank and Lebanese banks on money-laundering and counterterrorist finance. Lebanese screen transactions against OFAC's Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List.

The third major challenge Lebanon faces is restoring effective governance. Providing for a country's security requires effective political leadership. We commend Prime Minister Tammam Salam for his courage and perseverance in addressing Lebanon's most pressing challenges. But he cannot do the job alone. Next month will mark two years the Lebanon people have been without a president. The price – political and economic – of this political dysfunction has been alarmingly high. The presidential vacancy has bred an ineffective cabinet and an absentee parliament, leading to forgone foreign investment, a garbage collection crisis, and worsening electricity coverage. Without an effective cabinet and parliament that meets regularly to make decisions and do the people's work, Prime Minister Salam alone cannot address these issues.

Now is the time for Lebanon to uphold its democratic principles and for the Lebanese parliament to meet and elect a president according to the constitution. Through the International Support Group for Lebanon, the United States has rallied the international community to speak with a united voice in calling for an end to the presidential vacancy. The Lebanese people deserve a government that can deliver basic services, promote economic prosperity, and address the country's most pressing security challenges. Some in Lebanon are tempted to lay the problem at the doorstep of the international community. But electing a president and ending the governance crisis is first and foremost a Lebanese responsibility.

They are the ones who have the greatest stake in their country's success. Lebanon's leaders – particularly those who are blocking a quorum from convening in parliament – must put the interests of the Lebanese people first by electing a president and restoring a fully functioning government. Lebanese political leaders can count on the international community's strong support as they do so.

I want to highlight the importance of nurturing people-to-people ties between our two countries. This often overlooked aspect of our diplomacy is a crucial ingredient in some of our biggest successes. In February, a multi-partisan delegation of Lebanese Members of Parliament visited Washington to meet with the Executive Branch and Members of Congress, including the House Lebanon Caucus. Impressed by the depth of knowledge on Lebanon they encountered in the U.S. Congress, the delegation returned to Beirut and decided to establish a "U.S. Caucus" in the Lebanese Parliament to strengthen ties with the United States.

Also in February, with the support of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, Primesouth, a Columbia, South Carolina-based company, won a five-year $339 million contract to operate two power plants in Lebanon. These are just a few examples of our close ties. In March, it was an Internal Security Forces officer who remembered his week in the United States participating in an anti-trafficking course under the State Department's International Visitors Leadership Program who alerted his superiors to what he rightly suspected was a major trafficking ring in Lebanon. The officer's actions led to the successful anti-trafficking operation I mentioned earlier in my statement. This month, the State Department sponsored a visit to Beirut by a West Palm Beach, Florida-based energy expert, Tom Henderson, to show the Lebanese how cutting-edge technology can turn solid waste into electricity.

Madame Chairman and, in these and many other ways, we are contributing to the stability, independence and security of Lebanon, which is as much in the U.S. interest as it is Lebanon's.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee. I welcome the opportunity answer your questions.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Ambassador.

Dr. Exum.

STATEMENT OF ANDREW EXUM, PH.D, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR MIDDLE EAST POLICY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Mr. EXUM. Madam Chairman, Ranking Member Deutch and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to discuss U.S. policy toward Lebanon.

I have taken note of the questions that the various members asked in their opening statements and I've also made a note for my staff about the dark chocolate. I will be better prepared for the next subcommittee appearance.

Ambassador Feierstein highlighted the array of interlocking challenges that Lebanon confronts and gave an overview of our comprehensive strategy in Lebanon. My own experience in Lebanon is personal as well as professional. I lived in Lebanon for 2 years while attending the American University of Beirut, of which I'm a proud graduate, and I returned to Lebanon for another 8 months in 2008 to conduct research for my doctoral dissertation.

If you had told me 5 years ago that Lebanon would be flooded with over 1 million refugees from a brutal sectarian civil war in Syria but would somehow remain an oasis of relative calm in the Middle East, I would not have believed you.

I would have explained probably with some academic condescension that I was an expert on Lebanon and that what you were describing to me was impossible given Lebanon's own difficult history of sectarian conflict.

Yet, I would have been wrong. So, so much for all that grad school. I would have undervalued the drivers of stability in Lebanon, choosing to focus on the more obvious drivers of instability, and I would have, most importantly, underestimated the role the Lebanese Armed Forces has played in keeping Lebanon cohesive and at peace with its neighbors and itself.

I'll focus my comments on our military cooperation with the LAF, which is the core pillar of our policy in Lebanon and something that we can all, from our taxpayers to our special operations soldiers to our policy makers, be proud of.

Amidst all the challenges that Lebanon confronts, the LAF remains the country's only highly functioning national institution. Our support has enabled the LAF to beat back the advances of the Islamic State and other extremist groups such as the Nusra Front, although not without some high degree of sacrifice from our Lebanese partners.

Strengthening the LAF also advances a range of U.S. interests in the Middle East and that includes not only countering the spread of ISIL and other violent extremists but also stemming the influence of Iran and Hezbollah in the region.

Since 2006, the United States has provided Lebanon more than $1.2 billion in military assistance that aims to build a LAF that, one, is capable of maintaining internal stability and security, two, is capable of securing Lebanon's borders and preventing ISIL and other foreign extremists from destabilizing the country, and three, is the preeminent military force in Lebanon, undermining the

claims of Hezbollah and other militias from maintaining their arms as well as the claim of Hezbollah to be acting in the defense of Lebanon's interests.

In October, the President announced that the United States would intensify its security assistance to Lebanon as part of the campaign to counter ISIL.

To execute the President's guidance, Lebanon will likely continue to be one of the Department of Defense's priority countries for our counter terrorism partnership funding in Fiscal Year 2016 to continue to bolster the LAF capability to counter ISIL and other extremists.

This week, I had the opportunity to meet with a delegation of senior general officers from the LAF during the DoD's annual U.S.-Lebanon Joint Staff talks.

Some of these general officers I've known for years, dating back to when I served as the desk officer for Lebanon at DoD and they are among our closest partners in the region.

But don't take my word for it. Ask any one of the hundreds of special operators who have served in Lebanon over the past 5 years. They will tell you the Lebanese are among the best partners we have in the region to work with. They train hard and they fight hard. We couldn't ask for more in a partner.

The LAF has taken a variety of bold measures to maintain stability in Lebanon and counter the destabilizing effects of the Syrian conflict. The LAF has increased its operational tempo and reinforced Lebanon's borders with additional border and special operations forces.

These forces have been highly active, engaging militants on a weekly basis by launching artillery and air strikes, by executing clearing operations in extremist-associated neighborhoods and conducting raids and arrests.

High-profile arrests by the LAF and other security services include the apprehension of radical Salafist cleric Ahmed al-Asir, ISIL operative Omar Miqati and the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing suspect Ahmed al-Mughassil.

The effectiveness of U.S. assistance and the LAF's willingness to exercise its role as the sole legitimate defense force in Lebanon was further underscored in March when the LAF executed the daring operation in Ras Baalbek that killed over a dozen ISIL fighters and destroyed ISIL vehicles, a command post and a safe house.

And as Ambassador Feierstein noted just today, an ISIL operative was killed in Arsal, the emir Abou Fouz was killed by Lebanese special operations forces just today.

In the face of these rising challenges the LAF has demonstrated considerable unity, fortitude and professionalism. The LAF has organized itself effectively to maintain a tremendously high operational tempo for many of its units and has demonstrated the ability to make appropriate requests for and use of the equipment we've given it as well as unity and professionalism in numerous operations.

Although the LAF has prevented ISIL from destabilizing the country to date, the stakes for LAF's failure are extremely high.

If the LAF falters in its fight against extremists, Hezbollah or even long-demilitarized Christian militias could decide to seek or

take direct military actions to protect their communities, resulting in an outbreak of sectarian fighting that could undermine the stability of Lebanon.

A LAF defeat, combined with a Hezbollah victory over extremists forces, risks strengthening Hezbollah and Iran inside of Lebanon and therefore undermining U.S. policy efforts to bolster Lebanese state institutions' ability to exert sovereign authority throughout Lebanon.

As the United States faces a strategic environment in the Middle East that is the most unstable it's been in 40 years, our positive relationship with and continued support to Lebanon and the LAF are more important than ever.

The LAF remains a critical pillar of Lebanon's stability and its commitment to curtailing sectarian fighting and terrorism has been a significant factor in preventing Lebanon from descending into greater violence and instability.

Madam Chairman and Representative Deutch, I thank you and other distinguished members of the subcommittee for calling this hearing and drawing attention to Lebanon's security challenges and the U.S. security interests in supporting Lebanon during this critical time.

With that, I'm open to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Exum follows:]

Testimony

Before the House Foreign Affairs Committee

Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa

U.S. Policy Towards Lebanon

Statement of

Andrew Exum

Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Middle East Policy

April 28, 2016

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to discuss U.S. policy towards Lebanon. Ambassador Feierstein highlighted the array of interlocking challenges that Lebanon confronts and gave an overview of our comprehensive strategy in Lebanon. My own experience in Lebanon is personal as well as professional. I lived in Lebanon for two years while attending the American University of Beirut, of which I am a proud graduate, and I returned to Lebanon for another eight months in 2008 to conduct research toward the completion of my doctoral dissertation.

If you had told me five years ago that Lebanon would be flooded with over one million refugees from a brutal, sectarian civil war in Syria but would somehow remain an oasis of relative calm in the Middle East, I would not have believed you. I would have explained – probably with no small amount of condescension – that I was an expert on Lebanon and that what you were describing to me was impossible given Lebanon's own difficult history of sectarian conflict.

Yet I would have been wrong. I would have undervalued the drivers of stability in Lebanon – choosing to focus on the more obvious drivers of instability – and I would have, most importantly, underestimated the role the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) has played in keeping Lebanon cohesive and at peace with its neighbors and itself.

I intend to focus my comments on our military cooperation with the LAF, which is a core pillar of our policy in Lebanon and something that we can all – from our tax-payers to our special operations soldiers to our policy-makers – be proud of. Amidst all of the challenges Lebanon confronts, the LAF remains one of

the country's only highly functioning national institutions. Our support has enabled the LAF to beat back the advances of ISIL and other extremist groups such as the Nusra Front, although not without some high degree of sacrifice from our Lebanese partners. Strengthening the LAF also advances a range of U.S. interests in the Middle East that includes not only countering the spread of ISIL and other violent extremists but also stemming the influence of Iran and Hizballah in the region.

U.S. Support to the Lebanese Armed Forces

In 2006, following the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon, the United States launched a security assistance program with our Lebanese partners focused on providing training and equipment designed to develop the capability of the LAF. Since that time, these efforts have constituted the backbone of U.S. policy to promote Lebanon's sovereignty and security. During my time as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Middle East Policy, my interactions with a range of political and military actors in Lebanon confirm that the United States' continued engagement and assistance to the LAF are more important now than ever. The brutal suicide bomb attack in the Burj al-Barajneh neighborhood of Beirut on November 12, 2015, which tragically killed 43 innocent civilians, underscores the importance of our assistance the LAF and other security services in Lebanon.

Since 2006, the United States has provided Lebanon more than $1.2 billion in military assistance that aims to build a LAF that: 1) is capable of maintaining internal stability and security in Lebanon; 2) is capable of securing Lebanon's borders and of preventing ISIL and other foreign extremists from destabilizing the

country; and 3) is the preeminent military force in Lebanon, undermining the claims of Hizballah and other militias for maintaining their arms as well as the claim of Hizballah to be acting in defense of Lebanon's interests.

More recently, with Lebanon's increased threats from ISIL and other extremists, we have significantly increased U.S. security assistance, which totaled over $200 million in fiscal year 2015. As you know, we have enabled Iraqi and Syria partners to make significant gains against ISIL over the past year. But our worry has always been that as we squeeze ISIL from the east and north that will create more pressure on Jordan to the south and Lebanon to the west. For that reason, we have concentrated our enhanced assistance on bolstering the capabilities that are crucial to the LAF's ability to counter groups like ISIL and Nusra. This has included providing the LAF with critically needed intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance platforms; air strike capabilities and munitions; arms and equipment for the Lebanese Special Operations Forces (LSOF); and border security enhancements. Specifically, in 2015 the Department of Defense delivered 92 Hellfire missiles, 12 Scan Eagle Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), and supported the uparming of the LAF's second Cessna aircraft, which gives the LAF the ability to strike ISIL militants with pinpoint precision.

During FY 2015, the Department of Defense provided $59 million in Counterterrorism Partnership Funds (CTPF) support for border security. The project is intended to build the capacity of the LAF to defend the borders of Lebanon against threat from ISIL and Nusra. Under this effort, DoD anticipates delivery of equipment in late spring, including vehicles, radios, night vision devices, small arms, ammunition, and medical supplies for the LAF.

U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) advisors continue to provide training and professionalization support of the LAF. The training – which, in my estimation, is the single most effective means to improving the LAF's capability to counter violent extremism in Lebanon – is designed to provide a full spectrum of instruction, concentrating not only on operational and tactical competencies, but also instructing the Lebanese Special Operations Forces on all the core aspects of a mission, from planning to execution.

To bolster the LAF's status as a stable institution in Lebanon, in addition to focusing U.S. assistance on building up the LAF's operational capability, we also seek to ensure that the LAF is trained as a highly professional military. As such, our International Military Education and Training (IMET) program – which is overseen by my colleagues at the Department of State – is the fifth largest IMET program in the world in FY 2016. IMET builds strong ties between the United States and Lebanon by bringing Lebanese military officers to the United States for professional development and to train alongside U.S. military and other international students. For example, in fiscal year 2015, the IMET program supported 119 Lebanese military students to attend education and training classes in the United States. Since 1985, the IMET program has brought more than 1,000 Lebanese military students to the United States for education and training. IMET builds relationships and good will between some of the most senior U.S. and Lebanese military officers – this program truly has a generational impact.

Finally, in October, the President announced that the United States would intensify security assistance to Lebanon as a part of the campaign to counter ISIL. To execute the President's guidance, Lebanon will likely continue to be one of the Department of Defense's priority countries for Counterterrorism Partnerships

Funding in fiscal year 2016 to continue to bolster the LAF capability to counter ISIL and other extremists.

Effectiveness of U.S. Policy with the LAF

This week, I had the opportunity to meet with a delegation of senior general officers from the LAF during DoD's annual U.S.-Lebanon Joint Staff Talks. Some of these general officers I have known for years dating back to when I served as the desk officer for Lebanon at DoD, and they are among our closest partners in the region. But don't take my word for it: ask any one of the hundreds of special operators who have served in Lebanon over the past five years. They will tell you the Lebanese are among the best partners we have in the region to work with. They train hard, and they fight hard. We can't ask for more.

This week's meetings underscored that our strategy in Lebanon is bearing fruit as the LAF continues to develop as a force, while simultaneously showing a strong willingness to successfully engage ISIL. Beginning in August 2014, in the first large-scale offensive inside Lebanon's border, the LAF repelled a combined force of hundreds of ISIL and Nusra fighters near the town of Arsal along Lebanon's border with Syria.

Since this battle, the LAF has taken a variety of bold measures to maintain stability in Lebanon and counter the destabilizing effects of the Syrian conflict. The LAF has increased its operational tempo and reinforced Lebanon's borders with additional border and special operations forces. These forces have been highly active, engaging militants on a weekly basis by launching artillery and air strikes, by executing clearing operations in extremist-associated neighborhoods,

and by conducting raids and arrests. High-profile arrests by the LAF and other security services include the apprehension of radical Salafist cleric Ahmed al-Asir, ISIL operative Omar Miqati, and the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing suspect Ahmed al-Mughassil. The effectiveness of U.S. assistance and the LAF's willingness to exercise its role as the sole legitimate defense force in Lebanon was further underscored on March 10, 2016, when the LAF executed the daring operation in Ras Baalbek that killed over a dozen ISIL fighters and destroyed ISIL vehicles, a command post, and a safe house.

In the face of these rising challenges, the LAF has demonstrated considerable unity, fortitude, and professionalism. The LAF has organized itself effectively to maintain a tremendously high operational tempo for many of its units, and has demonstrated the ability to make appropriate requests for and use of equipment, as well as unity and professionalism in numerous operations. Because of its continued success, the LAF now enjoys strong support across Lebanese sects with an approval rating over 90%, according to some recent polls in the open-source. This level of support is also derived from the truly multi-confessional nature of the LAF – which comprises approximately 35% Sunni, 27% Shia, 13% Maronite Christian, 6% Druze, 6% Greek Orthodox, and 4% Greek Catholic.

The High Cost of Failure

Although the LAF has prevented ISIL from destabilizing the country to date, the stakes for LAF failure are high. If the LAF falters in its fight against extremists, Hizballah or even long-demilitarized Christian militias could decide to seek to take the direct military actions to protect their communities, resulting in an outbreak of sectarian fighting that could undermine stability of Lebanon. A LAF

defeat, combined with a Hizballah victory over extremist forces, risks strengthening Hizballah and Iran inside Lebanon and therefore undermining U.S. policy efforts to bolster Lebanese state institutions' ability to exert sovereign authority throughout Lebanon.

Supporting Stability in Lebanon

As the United States faces a strategic environment in the Middle East that is the most unstable it has been in 40 years, our positive relationship with, and continued support to, Lebanon and the LAF are more important than ever. The LAF remains a critical pillar of Lebanon's stability, and its commitment to curtailing sectarian fighting and terrorism has been a significant factor in preventing Lebanon from descending into greater violence and instability.

Representative Ros-Lehtinen and Representative Deutch, I thank you and the other distinguished Members of the Subcommittee for calling this hearing and drawing attention to Lebanon's security challenges and the U.S. security interest in supporting Lebanon during this critical time.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Job well done. Thank you so much. In the interest of time, because we will have votes shortly, I would like to give my time to Congressman Chabot of Ohio.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Earlier this week, we heard that Hassan Nasrallah and a handful of senior members of Hezbollah met with both Iran's Vice President and Iran's Ambassador to Lebanon.

How concerned is the administration over Iran's influence in Lebanon? I have a very important part of my district that has the same name—it's Lebanon. We love you both. So how concerned is the administration about Iranian influence and what efforts are being made to counter Iran's influence there?

Ambassador FEIERSTEIN. Thank you, Mr. Chabot.

I would say, of course, we're extremely concerned for a variety of reasons. The most specific, currently, is the extent to which Iran is encouraging and pressing Hezbollah to interfere in the election of a new President and effectively to paralyze the Government of Lebanon.

And so this has been an issue and a concern for us for, in fact, many years that Iran has supported Hezbollah to the detriment, in our view, of the overall security and stability of the country.

In order to address it, of course, we have been extremely, heavily engaged in a variety of activities that we have laid out. So everything from trying to help counter Iranian influence and ensure that there is an election and ensure that the Government of Lebanon can function and can perform its duties and provide services to its people.

The support that we're providing to the LAF and the internal security forces in order to allow the security forces to maintain control over Lebanon's borders as well as the sovereignty of its territory—all of these are factors in pushing back against Iranian exploitation of the vulnerabilities in that society.

And, of course, the other part is what we're trying to do in order to build a broad international coalition of support for all of the activities that we are talking about, whether it's refugees, humanitarian relief or these other political and economic areas that we're working in. All of them will limit Iran's influence in Lebanon.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you.

Mr. Ambassador, according to the Hezbollah International Financing Prevention Act of 2015, the President is due to provide Congress with a number of reports including reports on countries that support Hezbollah, an assessment of whether a country's government is taking adequate measures to disrupt Hezbollah's networks and activities within that country, and methods that Hezbollah utilizes to raise or transfer funds. As of today, I don't believe we've received those reports. Can you please update us on the status of those reports and when we can expect to receive them?

Ambassador FEIERSTEIN. Yes, Mr. Chabot. I'm pleased to say that the State Department did submit the required reports several weeks ago. The other reports are in the hands of ODNI and I'll be happy to go back and seek from them some further information about when they might be prepared to submit those reports.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you. Dr. Exum, let me go to you. We always—as I know you're well aware—I've met with the Lebanese

Armed Forces generals over the years, and they're always making obvious requests for funding and the support they need and I'm inclined to support them. That being said, I, and I think a lot of my colleagues in Congress, are always concerned that some of those dollars don't end up in the hands of Hezbollah in some manner. Would you, once again, and I know you mentioned before the good things the LAF has been doing—could you make us more—tell me why I can be satisfied that that money isn't going where it shouldn't be going?

Mr. EXUM. Thank you for the opportunity to answer that question. I feel very proud to announce that the Lebanese Armed Forces—as you know when we provide weapons, especially when they're sensitive weapons, like night vision goggles and things like that, we have end use monitoring requirements. And the Lebanese Armed Forces have consistently had the best end use monitoring reporting of any military that we work with. Meaning that the equipment that we provide to the Lebanese Armed Forces, we can account for it at any given time. We have a pretty large OMC in the Embassy in the Lebanon as well as a forward presence there. So we feel pretty confident—we feel highly confident—given their end use monitoring rate that we can account for the equipment, Congressman.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much. Mr. Deutch.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thanks, Madam Chairman. I'd like to talk about the end of the Syrian conflict in light of the news reports just today, it's impossible right now to imagine. But, we spend a lot of time talking about what role, if any, Assad will play, but I'd like you both to focus on what results might lead to a weakening of Hezbollah that would in turn potentially lead to a strengthening of the government in Lebanon.

Ambassador FEIERSTEIN. Thank you Mr. Deutch. And of course all of this is highly speculative because we can't really see the shape of an outcome that would bring peace to Syria. But if we were able to achieve that in a way that provided for a political transition that brought in all of the elements of Syrian society that gave the Sunnis and the other minority groups inside of Syria full voice, that we believe, in and of itself, would weaken Hezbollah and certainly weaken the linkages between Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, and Lebanon. And so the kind of discussions—negotiations—that are going on now to fulfill the commitments that were made at Geneva I to allow for political transition would be in fact the end game, the end state that we believe achieve our broader regional objectives.

Mr. DEUTCH. Dr. Exum do you have thoughts on that?

Mr. EXUM. Congressman I think I'd approach this a couple of different ways. First off, you raised the interesting question about how this conflict in Syria has affected Hezbollah and in a different format and perhaps in a closed hearing of this subcommittee we could talk about the effect that conflict in Syria has had on Hezbollah for the positive and negative ways. I think what this conflict has done in the positive way, it has allowed the Lebanese Armed Forces to prove itself to the population and has certainly allowed the Lebanese Armed Forces to prove that it can defend Lebanon and that there is less of a need for these other armed groups.

If you remember, Hezbollah was allowed to keep its arms under the Taif accords that ended the Lebanese Civil War. But that was based on, you know, a threat against Israel.

I think that the Lebanese Armed Forces has been able to show that it's been quite effective in terms of fighting these nonstate actors and it has given us more time to build up these forces.

I think the question I have, Congressman, and I'll speak quite bluntly, is what happens when Hezbollah comes home—how do they see their role in Lebanon. Do they want to turn their attentions toward the instability of—or toward conflict with Israel?

My biggest fear, for all that we've accomplished in Lebanon, is that Hezbollah drags Lebanon and Israel into another war that's not in the interests of the Lebanese people, the Israeli people, or certainly the United States either.

Mr. DEUTCH. And just continuing that thought, what are the practical implications of the LAF without Saudi funding and is it going to be made up elsewhere? What does it mean?

Mr. EXUM. And thanks for raising that because I was just in the Gulf with Secretary Carter last week. He met with all the Gulf's defense ministers.

I also had the opportunity to meet bilaterally with Mohammad bin Salman and in Saudi Arabia Mohammed bin Zayed. I think there are two levels that this affects us. There's the pragmatic kind of immediate acquisitions level. This means that the Lebanese Armed Forces likely won't be able to acquire some of the weapons systems that we feel are necessary for them to me more effective against groups like Daesh and Nusra.

These include close air support platforms as well as kind of protected mobility, so advanced, you know, armored personnel carriers. That's the practical aspect.

The political aspect, and this is something that Secretary Carter—well, this is something that our department has certainly—I don't want to speak for him, but certainly our department has advanced is that, you know, in places like Baghdad and places like Beirut we need our Gulf partners to be on the ground with us. We need them to be engaged because when they're not engaged it cedes the ground to Iran.

So I think I worry that with the withdrawal—the apparent withdrawal of Saudi Arabia from Lebanon—I hope this is just a monetary thing because, quite frankly, we need our Gulf partners to be there. Otherwise, I fear that it only increases Iranian influence in Beirut just as the absence of a Gulf engagement in Baghdad increases Iranian influence there.

Mr. DEUTCH. Great. Thank you very much, Dr. Exum and Ambassador Feierstein. I just want to also add my best wishes for a peaceful and enjoyable retirement and thank you for your service.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Not in Yemen, not in Islamabad but Jerusalem maybe.

Mr. Weber.

Mr. WEBER. Thank you, Madam Chair.

And Ambassador, let me add my word of congratulations too but I must caution you that they say that retirement is not all that it's cracked up to be. The hours are long and the pay is low. So congratulations to you.

Dr. Exum, you said that the withdrawal of other—in regard to Congressman Deutch's question about the withdrawal of the Saudis—you said that we needed our other Gulf partners. Such as who?

Mr. EXUM. Such as the United Arab Emirates, in particular. On the one hand, we applaud the GCC countries for their strong stand against Hezbollah. It's aligned with ours. The designation of Hezbollah as a foreign terrorist organization—that's directly in line with us.

However, as we've just laid out, our strategy for Lebanon—our policy—is based around strengthening Lebanese national institutions and we need the Saudis, we need the Emiratis and the Kuwaitis to be with us in those efforts.

Mr. WEBER. Is there any indication that the Emiratis—well, the Saudis, obviously—or the Kuwaitis and others, are they going to withdraw their support?

Ambassador FEIERSTEIN. Mr. Weber, if I may, first of all, let me just say that we understand and appreciate the concerns that the Saudis had that led them to make this decision, that the Government of Lebanon, unlike nearly every other country in the international community including our own, was unwilling to condemn a purposeless attack on Saudi diplomatic facilities in Iran. So we don't want to suggest that we disagree or that we don't appreciate the rationale behind the Saudi position.

Having said that, we agree entirely with the view—the perception that Dr. Exum outlined—and that is that we all need to be working together in order to support Lebanese institutions, including more specifically the LAF, in order to stabilize the country and provide security.

When Secretary Kerry was in Hafr al Batin a few weeks ago, he did have conversations also with the Saudis and urged them to limit the extent of their actions against the Government of Lebanon and to look for ways to move back into a position where they would be more solidly supportive and be more consistent with the approach that we've taken and I believe that we've heard from the Saudi leadership that they are prepared to do that.

Mr. WEBER. Well, there's three really interesting things here—well, more than three but three that I'll ask about. In our notes here, in one of the comments, it says most of the Syrian refugees are housed actually in Lebanese neighborhoods. How do they do that?

Ambassador FEIERSTEIN. This is actually true throughout the region. It's true in Jordan and in Turkey as well and that is that most of the Syrians, when they came across, were able to find apartments.

Many of them, of course, have relatives who live in Lebanon and they were able to simply move in with their relatives. Many of the refugees when they first came across had savings and other kinds of financial ability.

Mr. WEBER. That makes sense. And then Dr. Exum, you said, you know, what was it, 3 years ago maybe—I forget your timing—that if someone had said this would be happening in Lebanon you'd puff up your academic chest, as it were, and say no way.

And our notes say that there are drivers of stability. What are those drivers of stability, in your opinion?

Mr. EXUM. So Congressman, I think, like I said, first and foremost the Lebanese Armed Forces. I'm very proud——

Mr. WEBER. But let me—let me give you my third question then because it ties in with this. And Doctor, pardon the interruption but——

Mr. EXUM. No, no.

Mr. WEBER [continuing]. One of our notes says that we had a witness in HFAC in March 2016, I think it was, who actually said that there are so many Hezbollah now in LAF that LAF has become an extension of the Hezbollah movement. I don't know if you're aware of that. Would you agree with that?

Mr. EXUM. I would not agree with that assessment. I think that the relationship between the Lebanese Armed Forces and Hezbollah is one that, obviously, we carefully study.

I believe Madam Chairman described it as a partnership or synergy. I think we'd describe it as deconfliction.

If there was ever a partnership or even cooperation between the two organizations that would be highly problematic, of course, for this department, especially since we have U.S. personnel who are working with the Lebanese Armed Forces.

Mr. WEBER. You said that the Lebanese Armed Forces are the number-one stabilizing influence in Lebanon.

Mr. EXUM. I think that would be the first among several drivers of stability. Others, Congressman, is bear in mind that for better or for worse much of Lebanon's political class lived through and were leaders during the Lebanese civil war.

So they remember what the abyss looks like and I think at times when we've seen sectarian tensions almost spiral out of control there's been a conscious step back and I think that has to do with, unfortunately, the difficult memories of Lebanon's own civil war.

Mr. WEBER. I got you. Thank you, Madam Chair. I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much.

Mr. Cicilline.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you very much.

Thank you again for your testimony. I'm particularly interested to know whether the Arab League's recent designation of Hezbollah as a terrorist group is impacting Hezbollah's ability to operate in the region and as a follow-on, considering Hezbollah's exacerbation of the humanitarian crisis and the significant loss of life, is there any sense that you have that there's growing support within the European community to fully designate Hezbollah as a terrorist organization?

Ambassador FEIERSTEIN. Mr. Cicilline, in regard to your first question, we do believe that the designation by the GCC and by the Arab League of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization is an important step in the right direction and we are moving to try to help build practical steps on the basis of that designation to increase the cooperation that we have.

So for example, Department of State, Treasury and Justice recently held a law enforcement coordination group meeting in Bahrain to try to increase the way that we can work together to limit Hezbollah's capacity to operate in the region.

We think that this is an important step and we'll continue to move forward on that. As for the Europeans, we believe that the level of cooperation that we're getting from Europe is very good, that in fact, the designation by the EU of the military wing of Hezbollah in 2013 was an important step in the right direction.

We are working with Europol and with others, again, in very close coordination to try to address the Hezbollah threat as it applies globally.

Mr. CICILLINE. And do the Gulf countries have the capabilities to enforce this designation and the willingness?

Ambassador FEIERSTEIN. We believe that GCC capabilities have grown over time. We are working with them as part of the President's Camp David summit with GCC leaders last year. We agreed that we are going to increase our cooperation and coordination with them on issues like terror finance, specifically applying to Hezbollah, and to look at other areas where we could increase our cooperation.

So the trend line is positive. Their capabilities are growing and we'll continue to work with them very closely to try to increase that.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Ambassador. I too wish you well on your retirement and thank you for your extraordinary service to our country.

Dr. Exum, you mentioned the apparent withdrawal of Saudi Arabia from its military assistance to Lebanon. So I'm, first, interested to know why you used the word apparent and whether or not it's more than it appears to us.

And also, the United States, obviously the U.K., the European Union and France have reaffirmed and in many cases increased their defense cooperation with Lebanon.

At the same time, Iran has also offered to fill in the funding gap and my question is really how has the Lebanese Government responded to this—what do you think the long-term effect of that is and if you could just discuss kind of the apparent withdrawal.

Mr. EXUM. Right. Congressman, first off, the donation itself was always somewhat ambiguous. It had been announced quite some time ago and maybe Mr. Ambassador——

Ambassador FEIERSTEIN. We're talking about the Saudis, not the Iranians.

Mr. EXUM. Exactly, the Saudi—right.

Ambassador FEIERSTEIN. You know, of course we have been working very closely with the Saudis and they were cooperating with us on the purchase of some U.S. articles, also with the French on the purchase of French articles.

That financing has been withdrawn. But we certainly do hope that the Saudis over time will restore much of that and will be able to continue.

Mr. EXUM. While we were in the discussions about that for that donation—it was ambiguous as far as where we stood in terms of that money actually landing in a bank account where it could be used.

So now that the announcement has been made we hope to continue to engage with our Saudi partners to reinvest in the Lebanese Armed Forces.

With respect to the—to any potential Iranian investment—I would defer to my State Department colleagues. But I will say that our British colleagues have been quite good partners, especially with Lebanon's border security program and we've partnered quite closely in terms of the border and regiments that we have trained and in terms of the checkpoints that we have created along Lebanon's border with Syria, and in terms of individual fighting positions that we've constructed. So the British have been tremendous partners for us in Lebanon.

Ambassador FEIERSTEIN. Right. And as for the Iranian offer, I think that the Government of Lebanon saw it for exactly what it was, which was a propaganda play and they said that they had no interest.

Mr. CICILLINE. Great. Thank you so much. I yield back, Madam Chairman.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Cicilline.

Dr. Yoho.

Mr. YOHO. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Gentlemen, I appreciate you being here. What is the current assessment of rockets and missiles in Lebanon, Dr. Exum?

Mr. EXUM. Are you referring to Hezbollah's arsenal?

Mr. YOHO. Yes.

Mr. EXUM. I think I could say that in this hearing that they have reconstituted at the very least their rocket arsenal from 2006. I think to go into greater detail I'd be happy to arrange for a briefing from one of our intelligence——

Mr. YOHO. Yes, I'd like to get that because I have here in my notes that it says the Israelis' current assessment is 150,000 missiles and rockets. I would be curious to see where we are from there.

And then we've also heard with the Iran nuclear deal that Iran has said they were going to help retrofit these with smart bomb technology.

Do we have any indication that that's going on?

Mr. EXUM. Again, I will refer those——

Mr. YOHO. Okay.

Mr. EXUM [continuing]. The specific questions to our intelligence community. Let me just say, though, Congressman, that as you know we have partnered with the Israelis I think over the past 5 years. The Department of Defense has spent an average of $500 million over the past 5 years alone—an average annually—of $500 million to partner with the Israelis on their missile defense technology and we've had several key successes both with the development of the Arrow 2 and Arrow 3 systems, the David sling system—these are for more long-range ballistic missiles—but most importantly, the Iron Dome program that the United States has co-developed with Israel has saved countless Israeli lives. This has all been since 2006.

Mr. YOHO. No, and that's great.

Mr. EXUM. So we take this threat very seriously, Congressman.

Mr. YOHO. Well, and let me ask both of you. With the—again, trying to assess the aftermath of the Iran nuclear deal—do you see Iran inserting and influencing that region more, getting more hegemony in that area and taking, you know, just more leadership

in that area? Are we seeing that more since the Iran nuclear deal or since some of the sanctions have been released or money been released?

Ambassador FEIERSTEIN. Mr. Yoho, this is, of course, something that we watch very carefully and was a subject of most of the conversation that the President had with the GCC leadership when he was in Riyadh just 2 weeks ago.

We do believe that in the period since the JCPOA was signed that the Government of Iran has tried to expand its influence, its presence in the region—that they are going to continue to try to at least portray an image of an Iran that is becoming more and more active, more and more powerful in the region.

Some of this is, of course, overstated and is designed really to create a certain image of Iran of perhaps more than is real.

But there are also elements of it that are well worth watching and therefore, the strategy that we are pursuing, which is to build up the capabilities of our allies and partners in the region—the GCC, Government of Israel—to confront these Iranian efforts. Also as Dr. Exum said, whether you're looking at Baghdad or at Beirut or at Sana'a to increase the ability of those societies to resist Iranian expansion, to resist Iranian exploitation of vulnerabilities, to work with our Gulf allies to do that.

Mr. YOHO. And that's—the important thing that we want to do is make sure that the unintended consequences doesn't embolden Iran that has more of a destabilizing effect, if that's possible, in that region.

Ambassador FEIERSTEIN. Absolutely.

Mr. YOHO. That we want to make sure that if they are having an influence it's a positive influence, which time will tell on that.

As far as Russia's involvement in Syria, along the Israeli border with Syria, are we seeing any influence with Russia's presence there as far as a stabilizing in that area or have you assessed anything? Is it a positive effect or negative or no change at all?

Ambassador FEIERSTEIN. In terms of the Israeli-Syrian border?

Mr. YOHO. Yes.

Ambassador FEIERSTEIN. Well, I think that if you look at the evidence, there's a dialogue going on between the Israelis and the Russians in order to try to deconflict and, of course, the Government of Israel has said that they had an understanding with the Russians that they would continue to carry out their defensive operations inside of Syria in order to ensure that the Iranians or others couldn't exploit the political chaos in that region. So that part has been positive. But overall, the Russian presence has not contributed to stability on the border.

Mr. YOHO. Okay. I'm out of time and I thank you——

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Dr. Yoho.

Mr. YOHO [continuing]. For your time.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you. Mr. Connolly.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Madam Chairman, and Mr. Feierstein, I want to be real clear. You hold an appointment in this administration and I want to make very clear what you did or did not say to Mr. Yoho on the record.

Is there any evidence that because of JCPOA, or related to it in some fashion, Iran has changed or expanded its activity with re-

spect to Hezbollah in Lebanon specifically and in other places in the region because of the free-up of funds?

Ambassador FEIERSTEIN. No, sir. There is no direct evidence linking the two.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Right. Right. And in fact, the evidence is, despite all of this PR about the funds, almost all of those funds have been used, in fact, for domestic investment because they ran down their reserves and they've got some serious reinvestment they need to make in order to pump up the oil production as well. Is that a fair statement?

Ambassador FEIERSTEIN. This is absolutely the assessment that we made.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you. Just want to clear that up for the record.

You know, when my friend, Graham Beneman, who's here today—by the way, he worked for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Madam Chairman.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. All the good people came.

Mr. CONNOLLY. You know, we're everywhere. We're everywhere, still.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Congressman Deutch, do you remember that?

Mr. CONNOLLY. But we went to Lebanon well over 30 years ago and, you know, there were problems about Lebanese stability then and it only got worse in the '80s when we were there, right, because the civil war had ended—we thought that was the worst.

But certainly U.S. suffered terrible losses and, by the way, Democrats didn't exploit those problems of Ronald Reagan. So the Embassy got blown up not once but twice. The MAU—the Marine amphibious unit—at the Beirut Airport was blown up by terrorists and we lost 240 young men—240—241, thank you.

Graham and I lost a friend, Bill McIntyre, in the first bombing of the Embassy. He worked for USAID at that time. And we had a series of assassinations of Lebanese leaders, most of it attributed to Syrian activity and because Syria wanted to keep control over Lebanon and certainly had, as I recall, troops in the Beqaa.

But now when we look at Lebanon, and this is the question I want to ask you, are we looking now really at a fundamentally failed state and can we ever find the formula to sort of put Humpty Dumpty back together again and, I mean, and not necessarily with the status quo ante but with something more democratic, more reflective of the demographics—the actual demographics—and a state that's going to function and work and provide services and security for its citizens and to make sure it has secure borders with its neighbors like Israel. Go for it.

Ambassador FEIERSTEIN. Mr. Connolly, we would absolutely not suggest that Lebanon is a failed state or anything close to being a failed state.

As Dr. Exum said, there are drivers of stability there, that there is a resilience that has been demonstrated over these past years that in many ways is quite remarkable.

The fact that Lebanon has been able to absorb over a third of its population in the form of refugees without creating huge social or

political disintegration or dysfunction is a remarkable achievement on their part.

The performance of the LAF and the internal security forces in holding the security together and addressing some fairly serious challenges both externally from spillover from the Syrian conflict into the Beqaa Valley but also in terms of preventing the rise of extremism from within Syria and the performance within Lebanon, the performance of the ISF and the OAF, for example, in Tripoli in maintaining stability there even though there were extremist forces operating.

So all of these things are very positive. There are challenges. There are serious challenges on the political front, the need to resolve this 2-year vacancy in the presidency and to allow the government to function—the challenge of Hezbollah——

Mr. CONNOLLY. Close to as bad as leaving a Supreme Court seat vacant for 9 months.

Ambassador FEIERSTEIN. Yes, sir. All of these things are challenges. But I don't think that we have ever been at a point where we were not confident that the Lebanese would be able to pull this together and create a strong and stable society.

Mr. EXUM. No, I would just concur with that. I think that we have seen examples where we have been able build up effective national institutions and I would concur. I think, you know, again, like I said at the beginning, if I were to go back 5 years and think that Lebanon would somehow be relatively stable I would not have believed it.

But I think Lebanon has proven a lot of us wrong the past several years, given the resiliency of not only its people but also the institutions it does have either at the national or communal level.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Connolly.

Mr. Higgins.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Just a couple of questions. We have a vote.

So just the Lebanese Armed Forces, for both of you, is—what percentage of their force is made up of the Shi'a population?

Mr. EXUM. Yes, I have the precise demographics here. It's, roughly, it's about a third Christian, a third Sunni Muslim and about a third Shi'a Muslim with about 6 percent Druze population in there. I can go into greater detail if you'd like, sir.

Mr. HIGGINS. Does the Lebanese Armed Forces—are they viewed as being more effective than Hezbollah as a fighting force?

Mr. EXUM. They're not, I would say. I would think that the Lebanese Armed Forces are still a work in progress and it's largely uneven.

We've done some great work with the Lebanese special operations forces. I think everybody, to include the Lebanese Armed Forces and our own military, believes that we've got a lot more work to do with the so-called conventional units within the Lebanese Armed Forces—the intervention brigades, the border regiment forces—and I think there is still a perception, which we are working to counter quite actively, that Hezbollah is a more effective actor on the battlefield.

Mr. HIGGINS. Externally, with the Saudi pull back of $4 billion to support the Lebanese Armed Forces, is there a concern that—

internally in the country—that the Lebanese Armed Forces loses its street cred, if you will, among the Shi'a population as the institution that is in place to protect all of Lebanon?

Mr. EXUM. So and here, Congressman, I've taken off my DoD hat. I've got my analyst hat on now and I've never really worried about the credibility of the Lebanese Armed Forces within the Shi'a population or within the Christian population.

It's in large part the Sunni population that I've worried about in part because so many of the operations that the Lebanese Armed Forces carry out are against Sunni extremists, against—and often they operate in largely Sunni communities like Arsal, like Tripoli in the north, like Sidon in the south. And I worry that there's a perception among some in Lebanon's Sunni community, which I believe has been increasingly radicalized, in places, due to the conflict in Syria and broader waves of sectarianism that have swept the region over the past 10 years, I worry about not their credibility but the way they are perceived within that specific community.

I will say, overall, the Lebanese Armed Forces have never been more popular and never been more respected within Lebanon overall and that's highly encouraging, Congressman.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you.

Mr. HIGGINS. I'm sorry. Okay.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. And Mr. Higgins, we really do have 3 minutes to get to our vote. But thank you so much and I'm sorry.

Mr. HIGGINS. It's okay.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. And with that, our subcommittee is adjourned.

Thank you, gentlemen. Thank you to the audience.

[Whereupon, at 4:36 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

Material Submitted for the Record

SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa
Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Chairman

April 21, 2016

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held by the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at http://www.ForeignAffairs.house.gov):

DATE: Thursday, April 28, 2016

TIME: 2:00 p.m.

SUBJECT: U.S. Policy Toward Lebanon

WITNESSES: The Honorable Gerald M. Feierstein
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs
U.S. Department of State

Andrew Exum, Ph.D
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Middle East Policy
U.S. Department of Defense

By Direction of the Chairman

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON *the Middle East and North Africa* HEARING

Day *Thursday* **Date** *April 28, 2016* **Room** *2172*

Starting Time *2:02 p.m.* **Ending Time** *4:36 p.m.*

Recesses [ ] (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____)

Presiding Member(s)

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session [✓]
Executive (closed) Session [ ]
Televised [✓]
Electronically Recorded (taped) [✓]
Stenographic Record [✓]

TITLE OF HEARING:

U.S. Policy Toward Lebanon

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Reps. Chabot, Weber, DeSantis, Meadows, Yoho, Clawson, and Zeldin
Ranking Member Deutch, Reps. Connolly, Higgins, and Cicilline

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: *(Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)*

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes [✓] **No** [ ]
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____
or
TIME ADJOURNED *4:36 p.m.*

Subcommittee Staff Director

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Gerald Feierstein by
Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
April 28, 2016

Question:

In 2014, the GAO published a report entitled: "DOD and State Need to Address Gaps in Monitoring of Security Equipment Transferred to Lebanon," which found that both Departments were not fully implementing all safeguards on the relevant checklists with regard to U.S. origin equipment and arms. Further, a GAO-issued report on security assistance to Egypt noted that there had been an evaluation of security assistance to Lebanon that was meant to be the model for similar evaluations of security assistance to Egypt and elsewhere that was long-delayed, then formally stopped, because the security situation in Lebanon was too risky.

So have these gaps in monitoring of security equipment transferred to Lebanon been filled? Are we fully implementing all safeguards? What safeguards are currently in place to ensure that the training, equipment, arms and intelligence we provide to the LAF and ISF are not being shared with Hezbollah, and by extension, Iran? How do we properly evaluate and vet this assistance if we can't conduct the field work required in Lebanon because of the dangerous security situation?

Question:

There are upcoming municipal council and mayoral elections set to be carried out in Lebanon over four days in May. What is our assessment of the chances that these elections go on as planned? How is the security situation ahead of these elections and what is our assessment of the likelihood that these elections will be free, fair and transparent and can help move the stalled political process forward in Lebanon?

Answer:

The United States encourages Lebanon to hold municipal elections on time in May 2016. This will be an important step in helping to restore the vibrancy of Lebanon's democracy. We have also pressed Lebanese authorities, including the Ministry of the Interior, to do everything possible to provide adequate security for this important event.

We remain deeply concerned, however, about the continuing paralysis of Lebanon's political institutions, including the absence of a president since May of 2014. Without a President, the Lebanese government is paralyzed on fundamental decisions, tying its hands as it needs to confront the many challenges it faces.

Question:

What is the outlook for Lebanon's political future – what are we doing to prevent its political institutions from continuing to erode? If the deadlock persists, who is likely to fill the vacuum, and what steps are we taking to ensure that Iran and Hezbollah will not fill that void?

Answer:

The United States is working tirelessly to encourage all Lebanese parties to make progress towards resolving the country's continued political paralysis. At present, none of the three major political institutions of the state – the presidency, the parliament, and cabinet – is functioning adequately. The presidential vacancy undermines national unity and hinders Lebanon from adequately confronting a range of political, economic, security, and humanitarian challenges.

We continue to urge Lebanon's leaders to meet and elect a president as soon as possible – in accordance with Lebanon's constitution and National Pact – and to begin planning for parliamentary elections in 2017. Lebanon deserves a functioning government that can meet the needs of the people.

We believe that supporting Lebanon's legitimate state institutions, especially the military and security services, is essential to diminishing the role of Hizballah. Towards this end, we are supporting the Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces. Our training and equipping of the Lebanese security institutions is intended to develop functioning, non-sectarian state institutions that address security concerns through engagement with the community and in adherence to international standards. These strengthened state security institutions serve as a counterweight to Hizballah, dispelling Hizballah's narratives that the Lebanese people need militias for protection or to advance their political aims.

[NOTE: State Department officials did not provide responses to all questions prior to printing. Any additional responses received will be made available at: http://docs.house.gov/Committee/Calendar/ByEvent.aspx?EventID=104873.]

Questions for the Record Submitted to
Deputy Assistant Secretary Andrew Exum by
Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
April 28, 2016

Question:

Dr. Exum, has the United States been in talks with Saudi Arabia to resume its military assistance to Lebanon? If so, why? Are we offering the Saudis anything in return for the resumption of military assistance to Lebanon?

Question:

You stated that we are urging our other Gulf partners to fill the gap left by the Saudis when the Kingdom halted its military assistance. How would you describe these talks and what are we offering in return to our partners, if anything? How are those discussions going, and has anyone pledged any assistance?

Question:

What is our current assessment of Hezbollah's relationship with the LAF? Is there any level of coordination between the two? Do they conduct any operations jointly? Is there any level at all, or any indication that there is any level at all, of intelligence sharing? How do you explain the fundamental difference in our assessment of the LAF/Hezbollah linkage as compared to the Saudi assessment?

Question:

In your testimony, you assured the Subcommittee that there are safeguards in check to ensure our assistance does not get into the hands of Hezbollah. However, in 2014, the GAO published a report entitled: "DOD and State Need to Address Gaps in Monitoring of Security Equipment Transferred to Lebanon," which found that both Departments were not fully implementing all safeguards on the relevant checklists with regard to U.S. origin equipment and arms. Further, a GAO-issued report on security assistance to Egypt noted that there had been an evaluation of security assistance to Lebanon that was meant to be the model for similar evaluations of security assistance to Egypt and elsewhere that was long-delayed, then formally stopped, because the security situation in Lebanon was too risky.

So have these gaps in monitoring of security equipment transferred to Lebanon been filled? Are we fully implementing all safeguards? What safeguards are currently in place to ensure that the training, equipment, arms and intelligence we provide to the LAF and ISF are not being shared with Hezbollah, and by extension, Iran? How do we properly evaluate and vet this assistance if we can't conduct the field work required in Lebanon because of the dangerous security situation?

[NOTE: Department of Defense officials did not provide responses for the official record prior to printing. Any responses received will be made available at: http://docs.house.gov/Committee/Calendar/ByEvent.aspx?EventID=104873.]

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