

UPDATE ON THE SITUATION IN LEBANON

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
THE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS
SECOND SESSION

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JULY 29, 2008
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UPDATE ON THE SITUATION IN LEBANON

TUESDAY, JULY 29, 2008

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

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 4:07 p.m. in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Gary L. Ackerman (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. ACKERMAN. The subcommittee will come to order.

In the 19th century, a Scottish preacher named Alexander MacLaren warned us that “our blunders mostly come from letting our wishes interpret our duties.” I fear that this habit has been at work on our policy in Lebanon and that the new state of affairs which exists in that country is as much the work of our, and our allies, lack of energy and action as it is a product of the brutality and determination of Hezbollah and their Iranian and Syrian patrons.

The practical consequences of the Doha agreement are not yet fully clear, and I want to state as plainly as I can that the future of Lebanon is not settled. Changes in Lebanon’s electoral laws may produce more Hezbollah seats in the next election, but the shock of Hezbollah’s war against the Lebanese state may have finally dealt an irreparable blow to the credibility of the delusional General Aoun and could result in the reallocation of his voters to other Christian blocs. Moreover, news reports that Hezbollah may have succeeded in stirring up the embers of Sunni militancy in Lebanon, the consequences of which are far from clear. It should also be noted that General Sleiman is now President Sleiman and that Prime Minister Siniora is still Prime Minister Siniora.

I am not suggesting that what happened in June was not an agonizing setback or that, like a burst cyst, the turmoil, distrust, and hostility in Lebanon’s political system has been fully vented and the nation is now headed for recovery and healing. Not at all. What I am saying is that the Doha agreement is a beginning, not an end, and that the struggle for Lebanon’s independence and sovereignty is not even close to over, that the future of Lebanon as a state for all of its people, democratic and governed by the rule of law, has been delayed but cannot forever be denied.

It is true that the recent Hezbollah insurrection has, by intimidation and murder, forced a new and unjust political status quo upon Lebanon. But I cannot, and will not, accept that the future of Lebanon is with a gang of vicious thugs hiding in clerics’ robes and

awaiting instructions from Tehran and Damascus. Lebanon is too diverse, too modern and too boisterous a society to be stuffed into the straitjacket of tyranny and religious or ideological conformity.

In short, there has been no reason for Lebanon's allies to give up on a better future for that state and, by implication, the region as a whole. There is, however, serious need for us to review both our overall strategy and our tactics. What happened in Lebanon was absolutely foreseeable and probably preventable.

Back in July 2007, the situation in Lebanon was already deteriorating severely enough for Congress to address the issue. The House adopted H. Res. 548, which "reaffirmed its intention to continue to provide financial and material assistance to support the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity, and political independence of Lebanon under the sole and exclusive authority of the Government of Lebanon."

Although the political dynamics in Lebanon worsened in the fall of 2007, the Bush administration's response remained limited and tactical. The House, noting the slide, in October, 2007, took up another resolution, H. Res. 738, which "urged the President to use all peaceful means at the disposal of the United States to help safeguard Lebanon's sovereignty and independence."

Still, the Bush administration—mired both in Iraq and a faith-based foreign policy, where the President boldly declares his wishes and then prays for them to come true—remained strangely passive. While United States assistance to Lebanon had surged after the 2006 war, it quickly reduced to the tens of millions of dollars while Lebanon's enemies, both foreign and domestic, took advantage of our, and our allies, relative frugality and poured huge investments into arms purchasing, social services, reconstruction efforts and propaganda.

On October 24th, Secretary Rice appeared before the House Foreign Affairs Committee. In person, and in a letter, I warned that the threats to Lebanon were urgent and that, I quote—and I take no solace in quoting myself—"unless the United States responds appropriately to this challenge, I fear our allies in Lebanon will be overcome."

I suggested four policy responses: A major Presidential address declaring red-lines for Lebanon's independence, aggressive sanctioning of the Syrian regime's key figures, creation of an international contact group for Lebanon, and additional assistance for Lebanon.

Shortly thereafter, the Secretary graciously responded by letter and reiterated her commitment and that of the President to Lebanon's sovereignty and independence and noted progress on the Special Tribunal, new sanctions on Syria, and a high-level meeting of interested foreign ministers in Istanbul. A good start, but, unfortunately, not much more than that.

In November, Assistant Secretary Welch appeared before this subcommittee and heard this warning:

"Lebanon is truly on the brink of either collapse of the Cedar Revolution or the return of civil war. Like most Lebanese, we want neither. For Lebanon to remain a sovereign and independent state, ruled by a government elected and accountable

only to the Lebanese people, the United States and the international community are going to have to act fast.”

And still there was no noticeable shift or change in U.S. policy.

As fall 2007 passed into the spring of 2008, various Lebanese leaders came to Washington to plead for assistance and warn of the danger in Lebanon. These are brave, decent and admirable people; and they deserved every bit of the support we gave them. But there are significant failures on their side that, if that future is going to be different than the past, must also be considered and remedied.

As the Lebanese political crisis worsened and their own situation became more perilous, their focus became more and more narrow. Rather than rallying the Lebanese people to save their state, they focused on rallying foreign support. Rather than exploiting the rancid hypocrisy and staggeringly obvious political liabilities of the March 8 opposition, they remained at war with each other over strategy and control of policy. Rather than reaching out to the large number of Lebanese Shiites who are not aligned with Hezbollah, they preferred to watch and wait.

Benjamin Franklin warned our Founding Fathers. He said we must, indeed, all hang together or, most assuredly, we will hang separately. And in the end, this lesson was not absorbed in Lebanon.

So what now? Number one, no deal on the Special Tribunal. Period, full stop. No one knows what it will do or say, and we and, more importantly, the Lebanese are entitled to find out.

Second, the United States cannot continue to try to shape events in the region by reading the newspaper. As a number of analysts have recently described, a great number of political deals in the region are in negotiation or are being put into effect, and our net input into nearly every one of them is zero. Nobody in the history of any sport ever scored from the bench.

Third, what is done is done. The reality in Lebanon is what it is, regardless of our likes or dislikes; and we have to go back to work on building up the strength of our allies. But this time I think we have to focus not only on the capacity of Lebanese governing institutions but also on helping our friends learn some important lessons about coalition building, grassroots politics, political outreach, voter registration and mobilization. Ultimately, as people who believe that Lebanon must be governed by and for the Lebanese people, we must recognize that this democratic test is the true center of gravity in the struggle for Lebanon’s future. It is Lebanon’s best hope, and it is the challenge Lebanon’s enemies can never hope of winning.

I turn now to our ranking member, my partner in the hearing, Mr. Pence.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Ackerman follows:]

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

In the 19th century, a Scottish preacher named Alexander MacLaren warned us that “Our blunders mostly come from letting our wishes interpret our duties.” I fear this habit has been at work on our policy in Lebanon, and that the new state of affairs which exists in that country is as much the work of our, and our allies’, lack

of energy and action as it is a product of the brutality and determination of Hezbollah and their Iranian and Syrian patrons.

The practical consequences of the Doha agreement are not yet fully clear, and I want to state as plainly as I can that the future of Lebanon is NOT settled. Changes in Lebanon's electoral laws may produce more Hezbollah seats in the next election, but the shock of Hezbollah's war against the Lebanese state may have finally dealt an irreparable blow to the credibility of the delusional Gen. Aoun, and could result in the reallocation of his voters to other Christian blocs. Moreover, news reports indicate that Hezbollah may have succeeded in stirring up the embers of Sunni militancy in Lebanon, the consequences of which are far from clear. It should also be noted, that Gen. Sleiman is now President Sleiman, and that Prime Minister Siniora is still Prime Minister Siniora.

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It's true that the recent Hezbollah insurrection has, by intimidation and murder, forced a new and unjust political status quo upon Lebanon. But I can not, and will not, accept that the future of Lebanon is with a gang of vicious thugs hiding in clerics' robes awaiting instructions from Tehran and Damascus. Lebanon is too diverse, too modern and too boisterous a society to be stuffed into the straitjacket of tyranny and religious or ideological conformity.

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Mr. PENCE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for calling this hearing.

And I want to welcome our distinguished witness before this committee. As Ambassador to Lebanon for almost 4 years, ending earlier this year, thank you for your service to the United States in that difficult assignment.

I also, Mr. Chairman, would be the first to point out that Ambassador Feltman spent 4 years of his life in central Indiana as a student at Ball State University, which no doubt prepared him for Foreign Service in ways that we can't fully appreciate.

Mr. ACKERMAN. We can try.

Mr. PENCE. Following the tragic assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in February 2005, nationwide outrage at the long Syrian occupation and its likely role in this atrocity created and crested in huge popular demonstrations. But the high hopes of that March 14th coalition have given way to stalemate and now worse. A recent public demonstration could not have provided a more disheartening contrast, I would offer, specifically, a heroes' welcome given to the terrorist Samir Kuntar on the 16th day of July, 2008.

Kuntar, as the Ambassador knows, was sprung from prison in a prisoner exchange with Israel. Kuntar was convicted of having murdered two Israeli civilians in 1979, horrifically slamming in one case a 4-year-old girl's head into a rock repeatedly. Characteristically unrepentant, Kuntar greeted adoring crowds in Lebanon with a vow to keep fighting Israel.

Even worse, his return was greeted by President Michel Sleiman, who thanked "the resistance," for Kuntar's release. And Israel's ostensible partner in peace, Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, sent

a greeting praising Kuntar as well. It was a sickening spectacle, given the horrific past of this criminal and terrorist.

Even more disconcerting, Hezbollah has not only been welcomed into the Government of Lebanon but is now holding enough seats to have veto power over an often-deadlocked government. Far from paying a price for abducting Israeli soldiers and rocketing Israelis civilians, thus triggering the 2006 war, Hezbollah has perversely increased its popularity and influence, despite wreaking huge destruction on Lebanon. Hezbollah holds Parliament seats but has refused to disarm its illegal militia; and the unholy alliance that some key figures in the Christian community, notably President Sleiman, have made with Hezbollah is highly troubling.

It is not as if incorporating Hezbollah into the government has moderated it. Hezbollah launched an attack on your successor and our newly confirmed Ambassador to Lebanon, Michele Sison's, motorcade last month. Just today, it is reported that Hezbollah member of Parliament Ali Amar lashed out at Ambassador Sison, calling her, "Israel's Ambassador." If anything, Hezbollah represents foreign occupation, I would add, that of Iran and Syria.

The problem with Hezbollah in the cabinet is not that it will radically alter how the Lebanese Government operates but that it has a seat at the table. Its presence is legitimized in the Lebanese Government, all the while it is continuing to wage war on its internal and external rivals.

Rather than downplaying this egregious fact, our policy should be one of total isolation of Hezbollah, as is our approach toward Hamas in Gaza. If this is an insidious terrorist organization, and it certainly is, I hope we do not contemplate any official interaction or overtures toward this group.

And I also trust that our \$1 billion in aid over the last 2 years cannot possibly have found its way into the hands of Hezbollah or its allies. And if political mischief and praising and arming terrorists weren't enough, the security of Beirut Airport may be jeopardized by Hezbollah's role there, according to Ambassador Sison's testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee just last week.

Additionally, there is an ongoing campaign of assassinations of anti-Syrian occupation officials. And just over the weekend, fierce fighting was reported in Tripoli, north Lebanon, as Hezbollah took on regular Lebanese forces.

Mr. Chairman, for those who put their faith in the international community and its institutions, the case of Lebanon, like Iran now and Iraq before, seems to provide an example of entities in violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions, often coupled with indifference to the international community. All of us can decry the situation, but this does not change the outcome.

And what precisely is the delay in the Hariri assassination investigation 3½ years after the fact? I look forward to the Ambassador's testimony on that and strongly would associate myself with comments made by the chairman of this committee in regards to that inquiry.

In contrast to this bleak state of affairs, Israel has offered to negotiate with Lebanon, which still for some reason does not recognize Israel's existence. Meanwhile, Hezbollah insists it will not dis-

arm, even if the disputed Shaba Farms question is settled. I am not certain that Shaba Farms is as urgent or as clear-cut as the Secretary's recent comments indicate, and I welcome our witness's comments on that.

I do believe that there are some slightly encouraging signs. The second class of Internal Security Forces, some 186 ISF have graduated under our aegis. Clearly, a beautiful and vibrant country with a rich history. There is no doubt that the Cedars of Lebanon are trying to emerge from under the yoke of Hezbollah and its violence.

Ambassador Feltman, I must say I admire your optimism and look very much forward to your testimony today. And I do want to acknowledge, as the chairman says, what is done is done. There is some wisdom to saying we have to take the world as we find it, and today we have to take Lebanon as we find it. But it appears to me at best that Lebanon remains a house divided. And in my tradition, I believe there is truth in the statement that a house divided against itself cannot stand.

Chairman, thank you for calling this distinguished witness, and I look forward to hearing the balance of his testimony.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you very much.

Mr. Carnahan?

Mr. CARNAHAN. Mr. Chairman, I am going to present my remarks for the record so we can get on to our distinguished witness.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Carnahan follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE RUSS CARNAHAN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN
CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF MISSOURI

Thank you. I would like to thank both the Chair and Ranking Member for holding this hearing on Lebanon.

Since Prime Minister Hariri's assassination in 2005, Lebanon has been in various stages of turmoil. With the recent formation of a unity government, under new President Suleiman, Lebanon has the opportunity to return to the development and progress that was occurring up to Hariri's assassination. Like many of my colleagues, and the many Lebanese—American constituents that I represent, I hope to see a rebirth of the post-civil war Lebanon.

However, there are still many questions left to be answered. We are left with the fact that Hezbollah, which is recognized as a terrorist organization, that has some of its members as elected Members of the Lebanese Parliament. Mr. Feltman, I would be curious to know your thoughts on the best way to move forward in dealing with Hezbollah as it relates to their role in the government.

I would also like to address the issue of Hezbollah, in general, and am interested in hearing your thoughts on how we move forward in dealing with them and their role in Lebanon, and in the Middle East. In particular, I am interested in hearing your thoughts on what we can do to bolster the Lebanese government's ability to effectively govern all of Lebanon. When we look at the situation in southern Lebanon, for example, Hezbollah is acting a service provider—they supply water, electricity, and medical services, among other things. So, if Hezbollah is providing for the basic needs that the government is not, then the citizens of that region are going to turn to Hezbollah, and not the government. What is it that we need to be doing to bolster the Lebanese government, and to help end the Hezbollah stronghold in areas of the country, such as in the South?

I very much want to see Lebanon succeed as a unified country ? not only is that great for the Lebanese people, but it will also help bolster security in the region.

Mr. Feltman, thank you for being here today, and I look forward to your testimony.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Wilson.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank you for holding this important hearing today on the situation in Lebanon.

The recent political unrest and violence that has occurred in and around Lebanon is the consequence of a greater power struggle within the Middle East. We are all aware of the fluid nature of the conflicts we see in this region, where the instability in one area can spark or enhance instability in another.

Additionally, nations like Syria and Iran are trying to expand influence into the populations and governments of neighboring nations in order to capitalize on that instability for their gain. We have seen Iran's interference in Iraq. We have seen similar training, equipping and logistical support being given to Hezbollah by Syria and Iran before the war with Israel in 2006, during the conflict and since. The United States' support and that of our allies for the people of Lebanon is a positive factor in that region, but the strength of Hezbollah and the influence of Iran and Syria continue to undermine our collective efforts.

While Lebanon remains unstable and unsure of its political future, the threats that proliferate against Israel and other neighboring nations are emboldened. During a recent trip to Israel—I was with Congressman Mike Pence—I visited the northern border between Israel and Lebanon, where I sadly saw the flag of Hezbollah flying over an outpost along the border. It was a stark reminder that this organization, bolstered by a militia and with military backing from Iran and Syria, is intent on maintaining, if not expanding, its control within and without the formal Government of Lebanon.

Again, I wish to thank Chairman Ackerman and my fellow committee members for this opportunity; and I look forward to today's testimony.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you very much.

We are joined today by Congressman Nick Joe Rahall; and, without objection, for purposes of this hearing, he will sit in as a member of the committee. So ordered. Nick?

Mr. RAHALL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just want to commend you for not only conducting this hearing today, which I think comes at a very important time in the history of Lebanon, but also for the courtesy extended me as a nonmember of this committee. I am a member of full Lebanese ancestry in the Congress of the United States.

I certainly want to commend Ambassador Feltman for his career of public service. Truly, he has served in the hot spot of the world. I thank him for helping Codel Rahall to visit Beirut on May 25th this year, allowing us to see the historic convening of the Lebanese Parliament, to witness the election of the President and to witness his inaugural speech. I think it sends a strong signal to the people of Lebanon that the United States, this Congress and this administration remains committed.

Thank you.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you.

I am very pleased to welcome our witness, who is filling in on very short notice for Secretary Welch, but I suspect scarcely needed any briefing to be ready for today's hearing.

We couldn't hope to have a more expert witness than Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman. Ambassador Feltman is Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs. Until January 25th of this year, he served as U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon, having been sworn in on July 22nd, 2004.

A career member of the U.S. Foreign Service since January, 1986, before his posting to Lebanon, Ambassador Feltman headed the Coalition Provisional Authority's office in Irbil and simultaneously served as deputy regional coordinator for CPA's northern area. From August, 2001, until December, 2003, Mr. Feltman served as the U.S. consulate general in Jerusalem, first as deputy principal officer and then from July, 2001, until September, 2002, as acting principal officer.

In addition to a number of staff positions in Washington, Ambassador Feltman has also served in Tel Aviv, Tunisia, Hungary and Haiti; and we are truly privileged to have him here to testify before us today.

Ambassador.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE JEFFREY FELTMAN, PRINCIPAL DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE (FORMER U.S. AMBASSADOR TO LEBANON)

Ambassador FELTMAN. Chairman Ackerman, members of this committee, thank you very much for this opportunity. It is truly an honor for me to appear before you and talk about Lebanon when so many members of this committee and Congress showed support for me, for my mission and for independent sovereign Lebanon during the 3½ years I spent in Lebanon. I want to say thank you for the support that you showed for Lebanon and for me and my mission when I served there.

It is also sort of a poignant time to appear before this committee, because I remember that 2 years ago Lebanon was at war, a war that Hezbollah dragged the country into; and 2 years ago this week, our Embassy had just completed the successful evacuation of over 15,000 Americans from Lebanon. And that is something that at this time of year I will remember for the rest of my life, what we were able to accomplish, but why we had to, which is that Hezbollah dragged Lebanon to war.

President Bush and Secretary Rice are committed, Mr. Chairman, to supporting that democratic, sovereign, independent Lebanon that we all want to see flourish. We will continue to seek the implementation of all U.N. security resolutions. We will continue to work unilaterally and multilaterally. We will remain engaged with our partners in pursuit of those very goals that you outlined.

We all watched with great dismay what happened on the streets of Beirut in May, but Lebanon has emerged from that episode of Hezbollah-engineered political deadlock with—as you say, it is an unfinished story, we don't know the end yet, but there are some opportunities here, Mr. Chairman.

This crisis came to a head in May when Hezbollah turned its weapons against the Lebanese people, when Hezbollah revealed itself to the Lebanese people and to the world as something other than the resistance it had purported to be for all those years.

But the Doha agreement helped to bring this chapter to a close. The Doha agreement helped to revive the constitutional institutions of Lebanon that had been stagnant for 1½ years.

President Michel Sleiman was elected on May 25th, and a new cabinet was formed on July 11th. That cabinet is now working to develop a statement outlining the government's policy platform. It is not easy, but the government is meeting, the government is operating.

As part of the Doha agreement, as many of you have noted, the majority March 14th coalition conceded what is called a blocking third of the cabinet seats. Hezbollah has only one minister in the cabinet, but the Hezbollah and its allies together have 11 out of 30 seats. This concession, I can say from having watched Lebanon up close for 3½ years, probably has less impact in practical terms than it has symbolically. The previous Lebanese cabinets almost always operated on a consensus basis; and those decisions where votes are required, most decisions only require a simple majority anyway, which March 14 has. But I will give you one personal example.

The Fouad Siniora cabinet, from its start in July 2005 until the Hezbollah and its allies walked out in November, 2006, passed over 4,800 cabinet decrees. All of those except one were done by consensus. March 14th retained the Prime Minister, a key position in the cabinet, obviously, and the majority in the cabinet. They elected Michel Sleiman as President; and they received at Doha an agreement, an agreement to raise Hezbollah's arms in a national dialogue process.

In addition, March 14th has done exactly what you counseled, Chairman Ackerman, which is to reach out to the independent Shia. March 14th took one of its cabinet seats and appointed an independent Shia to the cabinet.

In addition, the Parliamentary Majority Leader, Saad Hariri, you probably saw in the press, recently traveled to Iraq, where he met with Iraqi leaders, religious and political leaders, including a major Shia cleric in Najaf.

So I think the March 14th coalition has received loud and clear the message that you counseled, Chairman Ackerman, about reaching out and building a coalition.

Parliamentary elections will be held next spring, spring of 2009. We are hopeful that the new government will encourage the adoption of a new electoral law that will pass necessary reforms to ensure that those elections meet international standards, are accepted by the Lebanese people as free and fair.

Now Hezbollah and Syria. We remain deeply concerned about Hezbollah's destabilizing role, its continuing efforts to build its military capabilities. That cabinet decision back in May that triggered the violence was aimed at asserting state control in the face of Hezbollah establishing its own telecommunications network and airport surveillance in Beirut. Those are examples of Hezbollah's challenge to Lebanon's state institutions.

We continue to press Syria to normalize its diplomatic relations with Lebanon. The recent announcement in Paris that there will be an exchange of Embassies is, on the surface at least, a positive step, but Syria needs to undertake tangible, concrete actions to es-

establish diplomatic relations in a way that is beneficial to both countries.

Syrian Foreign Minister Moallem was recently in Beirut, and his comments were ambiguous. While he said that Syria would be establishing diplomatic relations with Lebanon, recognizing for the first time Lebanon's independence, he suggested a little bit of a hook. Syria doesn't seem to be ready to recognize and respect Lebanon as an equal neighbor.

As I mentioned, 2 years ago this month Lebanon was at war. Hezbollah had dragged Lebanon to war with Israel. U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701 led to a cessation of hostilities in August 2006.

While there was much accomplished under 1701, there is much business that is left unfinished. There is still a problem of arms smuggling across the Syrian-Lebanese border that must be addressed. There is still a problem of Hezbollah's weapons that are now proven not only to threaten Lebanon's neighbors but also to threaten Lebanon's internal political dynamic.

U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701 also calls on the Secretary General to develop proposals for delineation of Lebanon's borders, including Shaba Farms, an issue that you mentioned, Mr. Pence. The Secretary General's cartographer has already conducted exhaustive research to assert the territorial definition of the Shaba Farms. He presented his work to the Security Council.

And Secretary Rice did raise this issue when she was in Beirut on June 16th of this year. She mentioned that the time had come to resolve the issue of Shaba Farms, as it is to resolve all of those issues under Resolution 1701.

A diplomatic solution to Shaba Farms would help solidify the control of the Lebanese state, we believe, but the primary—and it would also—excuse me—it would also demonstrate that Syria truly does want the good diplomatic relations with Lebanon that Syrians say that they want. Syria and Lebanon need to demarcate their common border as part of that normalization of relations; and a diplomatic solution to the Shaba Farms dispute would be an important step toward the implementation of all of Resolution 1701 and normalize relations between Syria and Lebanon and a lasting peace between Israel and Lebanon.

Since 2006, in support of Lebanese sovereignty and independence, the United States has committed over \$1 billion to help Lebanon strengthen state institutions and realize its economic potential. Most recently, the United States pledged \$22 million in Vienna for the reconstruction of the Nahr al-Barid Palestinian refugee camp and the revitalization of adjacent Lebanese communities to make these a model for security and economic development in the region; and we very much appreciate the generosity of the United States taxpayers, the support of the U.S. Congress in these efforts.

In terms of helping to build up the Lebanese state security organizations, the United States continues to work to strengthen the forces of the Lebanese state, the Lebanese Army and the Internal Security Forces. Since 2006, we have committed congressional approval of over \$400 million. Our assistance has had a tangible impact. You know that sectarian-charged violence when Hezbollah

took to the streets in early May, it was a challenge beyond the current capabilities of the Lebanese Army, but the government forces have worked cooperatively to counter more recent violence in Tripoli and the Beka'a Valley.

I remember very well the courage that the Lebanese Army demonstrated a year ago when Sunni terrorists from Nahr al-Barid refugee camp threatened Lebanon's security, and the Lebanese Army took steps. The Lebanese Army has increased its presence in the current areas of tension, moving troops with recently delivered U.S.-origin trucks, Humvees, reinforcing them with M113s that the United States repaired and refurbished. Lebanese police worked alongside the Army, putting to use their U.S.-funded training, vehicles, and equipment. Lebanese Army and police forces participating in a pilot program to increase security along Lebanese northern border have successfully intercepted a number of commercial smuggling operations, while communicating on new U.S.-funded radios.

In 2008, ammunition, small arms, small parts, vehicles, communications gear, and individual equipment, including body armor, will constitute of bulk of our deliveries to the Lebanese Armed Forces. We will also inaugurate a multi-year comprehensive training program for all echelons of Lebanese Armed Forces later this year. The Internal Security Forces continue to receive U.S. training at the police academy. We are helping refurbish and deployed U.S. police vehicles, radios, and duty gear throughout the country.

We have also increased our engagement with the Army and the police leadership with visits from acting CENTCOM Commander General Martin Dempsey, Under Secretary of Defense Eric Edelman, CENTCOM Major General Robert Allardice. And Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement David Johnson recently visited Lebanon.

Of course, our Charge d'Affaires, Michele Sison, maintains regular contact with the leadership of Lebanon's security forces.

Diplomatically, we remain engaged through a high-level international support group along the lines that Chairman Ackerman suggested that we call the Friends of Lebanon. And, of course, I mentioned earlier the Secretary of State's visit to Lebanon in June.

Helping Lebanon establish credible and capable security forces to protect the nation's sovereignty and security will require sustained engagement, significant resources and coordination among numerous U.S. Government agencies. There is no quick answer. There is no fast solution.

I believe strongly, having served there for 3½ years, that the biggest enemy to Hezbollah is a fully functioning, effective state, accountable to the Lebanese people through democratic institutions. And I thank Congress, particularly the members of this committee, for their generous support of our efforts.

We must continue to support Lebanon. Along with the United Nations, the United States continues to voice its commitment to support the Lebanese people in their goal of a fully sovereign, democratic state as outlined in U.N. Security Resolutions 1559, 1680, and 1701. The goal is vital not only to Lebanon itself but also to the achievement of peace and stability throughout the region.

Thank you.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you very much, Ambassador.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Feltman follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE JEFFREY FELTMAN, PRINCIPAL DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE (FORMER U.S. AMBASSADOR TO LEBANON)

Thank you, Mister Chairman, and other distinguished Members of the Committee for inviting me here today and providing the opportunity to discuss recent developments in Lebanon. President Bush and Secretary Rice are committed to supporting a sovereign, democratic and prosperous Lebanon. We will continue to seek full implementation of all UN Security Council resolutions on Lebanon and remain engaged with our partners working in support of this goal.

Now is a crucial stage in the run-up to Lebanon's spring 2009 parliamentary elections. Lebanon has recently emerged from an episode of Hizballah-engineered political deadlock beginning with the November 2006 resignation of six opposition-affiliated ministers in the previous cabinet. This crisis came to a head in May when Hizballah turned its weapons against the Lebanese people. The Doha agreement, which engaged Lebanon's Arab neighbors in helping resolve this political crisis helped to bring this chapter to a close.

Since Doha, Lebanon has made important strides. A re-opened parliament elected President Michel Sleiman on May 25. PM Siniora was asked to form a new government. Lebanese political leaders reached agreement on formation of a new cabinet on July 11, after seven weeks of intense political negotiations. The new 30-member cabinet, headed by Fouad Siniora and forged under the framework established by Doha, is a welcome development in light of the country's recent political impasse. The cabinet is now working to develop a statement outlining the government's policy platform.

Many have noted the majority March 14 coalition conceded a blocking third of cabinet seats in the Doha agreement. We must acknowledge that this agreement was made for Lebanon by Lebanese to help in bringing a resolution to a long-standing political crisis. By taking a step back and placing this development in a broader view, we see that this concession may have less significance on the ground, given that the previous Lebanese cabinet nearly always operated on consensus basis and many decisions require only a simple majority to pass. Significantly, March 14 has retained the Prime Minister and majority in the cabinet, elected a president it supports, and received an agreement to raise Hizballah's arms in the context of renewed national dialogue. Hizballah has only one minister in the cabinet and for the first time, March 14 has appointed an independent Shia minister, Ibrahim Shamsiddine, to the cabinet, which will make it much more difficult for Hizballah and its allies to assert that they are the sole voice of the Lebanese Shia community.

For his part, President Sleiman played an important role in the cabinet's formation. In his inaugural address, he supported the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and relevant UN Security Council resolutions, as well as his commitment to a national dialogue process that will address creating a national defense strategy that would include Hizballah's arms.

Looking forward, parliamentary elections will be held in spring 2009. The new government will need to work with parliament to implement remaining items from the Doha agreement, including drafting a new electoral law. Serious shortcomings exist in the current electoral framework, which fails to meet international standards in many areas. We are hopeful that the new government will take up this issue and not only encourage adoption of a new electoral law, but pass the necessary reforms to ensure that Lebanon's elections meet international standards and are considered free and fair.

We remain concerned about the destabilizing role of Hizballah and its continuing efforts to build its military capabilities. Arms continue to flow to the group across the Syria-Lebanon border in contravention of United Nations Security Council resolutions. Hizballah also has made a number of statements asserting it will not relinquish its weapons, even if the disputed Sheba'a farms territory is handed over to Lebanon. Hizballah's efforts to establish its own telecommunications network and conduct airport surveillance in Beirut—two issues that triggered the violent crisis in Beirut last May—are lingering examples of its challenge to Lebanon's institutions.

We also are troubled by Hizballah's efforts to exploit the July 16 return to Israel of the bodies of two Israeli soldiers captured in 2006 in exchange for the return to Lebanon of five prisoners, including Samir Kantar, and the remains of nearly 200 fighters. Despite Hizballah's claims that the presence of its arms made the exchange with Israel possible, the reality is that this action resulted from the determined efforts of the UN and its negotiator, working in furtherance of UNSCR 1701 to bring

an end to the issue. Although we note this exchange marks the closing of a difficult chapter in Lebanese-Israeli relations, we condemn the egregious crimes committed by Kantar.

We continue to press Syria to normalize its diplomatic relationship with Lebanon, to include exchanging embassies and bilateral delineation of the Lebanon/Syria border. The recent announcement in Paris that there will be an exchange of embassies with Syria is a positive step toward ensuring Syrian respect for Lebanon's sovereignty; however, Syria must move from mere jargon to undertake the concrete actions required to formally establish diplomatic relations in a way beneficial to both countries. We join with President Sleiman in pressing for Syrian cooperation in delineating the common border between Syria and Lebanon. We also continue to press for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias as outlined in UN Security Council resolutions 1559, 1680 and 1701, recognizing this will be a subject of national dialogue.

Turning specifically to the issue of Sheba'a farms, we believe a diplomatic resolution to the dispute would undermine Hizballah's spurious "resistance" credentials and complicate the group's efforts to maintain an armed state-within-a-state. UN Security Council resolution 1701 calls upon the UN Secretary General to develop proposals for the delineation of Lebanon's borders, especially in those areas where the border is disputed or uncertain, including the Sheba'a farms. It also calls in parallel for the disarmament of Hizballah and all Lebanese militias. A diplomatic solution to the Sheba'a farms dispute, beginning with the Syrian-Lebanese delineation of their border would constitute an important step toward implementation of one part of resolution 1701, normalized relations between Syria and Lebanon, and a lasting peace between Israel and Lebanon.

U.S. support for the Lebanese people's aspirations for a sovereign, democratic and stable Lebanon continues through a robust bilateral assistance program. Since 2006, the U.S. has committed over one billion dollars to help Lebanon. Most recently, Under Secretary Burns and U.S. Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Michele Sison represented the United States on June 23 at a donors' conference in Vienna to support Prime Minister Siniora's plan—developed in coordination with the World Bank and the UN Relief and Works Agency—for the reconstruction of the Nahr al-Barid Palestinian refugee camp and the revitalization of adjacent Lebanese communities. The United States is a strong supporter of this initiative, as demonstrated by our initial pledge of \$22 million in Vienna.

In addition, the United States continues working to strengthen the forces of the Lebanese state—the Lebanese Army and the Internal Security Forces. Since 2006, we have committed an aggregate of over \$400 million to help the Lebanese government protect Lebanon's borders, maintain law and order, and confront threats to the nation's internal security. Capable and credible Lebanese army and police forces that can fight some battles—like last summer's conflict with Fatah al-Islam militants in the Nahr al-Barid refugee camp—and deter others, will allow the Lebanese people to live in peace and security without recourse to illegal militias.

Our assistance already has had tangible effects. While sectarian-charged violence of early May posed a challenge beyond the current capabilities of the Lebanese army and police, government forces have worked cooperatively to counter more recent violence in Tripoli and the Beka'a Valley. The Lebanese Army has increased its presence in areas of tension, moving troops with recently delivered U.S.-origin trucks and HMWVs, and reinforcing them with M113s the United States repaired and refurbished. Lebanese police worked alongside them, putting to use their U.S.-funded training, vehicles, and equipment. Lebanese army and police forces participating in a pilot project to increase security along Lebanon's northern border have successfully intercepted a number of commercial smuggling operations while communicating on new U.S.-funded radios.

Our assistance continues to focus on addressing the more basic needs of these two forces after decades of neglect under Syrian occupation. In 2008, ammunition, small arms, spare parts, vehicles, communications gear, and individual equipment including body armor will constitute the bulk of our deliveries to the Lebanese Armed Forces. In addition, we are committed to addressing the need for more advanced capabilities, and will inaugurate a multi-year comprehensive training program for all echelons of the Lebanese Armed Forces later this year. Meanwhile, the Internal Security Forces continue to receive U.S.-funded training at the police academy we are helping refurbish, and have deployed their U.S.-funded police vehicles, radios, and duty gear throughout the country.

As we expand provision of equipment and training to these two forces, we have also increased our engagement with their leadership. Acting CENTCOM Commander, General Martin Dempsey, visited Beirut on May 14 to discuss security cooperation with Defense Minister Elias Murr and then-Army Commander Michel

Sleiman. He was followed by Under Secretary of Defense Eric Edelman on May 31. From July 13–15, CENTCOM Major General Robert Allardice visited Lebanon to discuss the army's specific equipment and training needs. On March 31, Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement David Johnson visited Lebanon to discuss progress in the U.S.-funded training and equipping program for the Internal Security Forces with Prime Minister Siniora, Interior Minister Hassan Sabaa and Internal Security Forces Director General Asraf Rifi. U.S. Charge d'Affaires, a.i. to Lebanon Michele Sison also maintains regular contact with the leadership of Lebanon's security forces to ensure our assistance is meeting their needs.

Helping Lebanon establish capable and credible security forces to protect the nation's sovereignty and security will require sustained engagement, significant resources, and coordination amongst numerous U.S. government agencies. I thank Congress and particularly the members of this committee for their generous support of our efforts. In addition to the democratic freedoms they have fought so hard to win, the Lebanese people deserve freedom from violence and the threat thereof. The best way to provide it is to strengthen the legitimate security forces of the Lebanese state.

We must continue to support Lebanon. Along with the United Nations, the United States continues to voice its commitment to support the Lebanese people in their goal of a fully sovereign democratic state as outlined in UNSCRs 1559, 1680, and 1701. This goal is not only vital to Lebanon itself, but also to the achievement of peace and stability throughout the region.

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

Mr. ACKERMAN. Earlier this month, a group of Syrians associated with the Assad regime came to Washington and were supposed to meet with Secretary Welch. It turned out that the meeting didn't happen.

Can you tell us what the administration's policy is regarding engagement with Syria? Are we now following the Israeli model, where we conduct our bilateral relations indirectly? And is there a way for America to engage with Syria without appearing to sell out Lebanon's sovereignty and stability?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Mr. Chairman, at this time, of course, as you know, we have an Embassy in Damascus. Syria has an Embassy in Washington. We have diplomatic—

Mr. ACKERMAN. Is there an ambassador in our Embassy?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Our Embassy is headed by a very capable Charge Senior Foreign Service Officer.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I take that as a no.

Ambassador FELTMAN. It is a charge d'affaires. Our Ambassador was withdrawn in the aftermath of the brutal assassination of Rafik Hariri in February 2005.

At the time, we continue to limit our diplomatic engagement with the Syrians. The Syrians know what we want to see. What we want to see is Syria comply with the international obligations regarding Lebanon. We want to see an end to the transfer of weapons to Hezbollah across the Syrian border. We want to see an end to Syrian interference in Lebanon. We want to see Syria do more to stop the flow of foreign fighters into Iraq. We want to see the end of Syrian support for Palestinian rejectionists. Hamas, PIJ, et cetera, are still based in Damascus.

Mr. ACKERMAN. How is all that working out?

Ambassador FELTMAN. As I said, we are limiting our diplomatic engagement pending—pending some change in Syrian behavior.

Mr. ACKERMAN. So we got our fingers crossed.

Ambassador FELTMAN. At the same time, Mr. Chairman, we do support broadening the circle of peace between Israel and its neigh-

bors. We know that the talks—the proximity talks that Israel and Syria are conducting via Turkey are serious talks, and anything that broadens the circle of peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors is something we support. We would expect that these talks, of course, would not do things that would undermine our partners in Lebanon, that would not put our partners in Lebanon in an awkward situation or in a weakened position.

Mr. ACKERMAN. The circle of peace. In describing the recent exchange between Hezbollah and Israel, noting the return of Samir Kuntar, your testimony left out the hero's reception that this repulsive child killer got not just from the blood-soaked goons of Hezbollah but from the people in the Lebanese Government, who have previously stood for different and much better values it seems. What does this say about their grip on the public affections that they felt compelled to mimic the moral imbecility of Hezbollah? And what does it say about Lebanon?

Ambassador FELTMAN. I think, Mr. Chairman, I will start off by saying something on a personal note.

Of course, I was—I was dismayed to see people who I know to be decent Lebanese participating in a ceremony like that. This is a deeply emotional issue. On both sides of the Israeli-Lebanese border, it is a deeply emotional issue.

Samir Kuntar's crime, I don't know how you rate crimes on a scale of atrocities, but it is a pretty appalling crime what he did. You know our policy. We don't engage in these kind of negotiations on hostages. We don't proceed this way.

The decision by Israel to move this way was a sovereign decision by Israel, and I think Israel must have had—Israel knows the situation in Lebanon quite well. Israel must have known what the inevitable result was going to be on the Lebanese side.

But it was very important for the Israelis to put a closure to this chapter. What I can say is that this chapter, this very, very sad chapter of Lebanese-Israeli relations, is now behind us. This is one less issue that has to be resolved between the Israelis and the Lebanese at this point.

You know, Hezbollah tried to take credit for this. Of course, it was a U.N. mediation that was part of the 1701 follow-up. It was mentioned in the 1701 follow-up. But I believe that many of our Lebanese friends and partners probably felt that they were in a very awkward situation with that release and the way that it was done.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Well, I will get back to me, but my 5 minutes is up.

Mr. Wilson?

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Again, thank you, Ambassador, for being here today.

As we look ahead, how effective has the expanded United States assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces been in improving the performance of the LAF? And how would you respond to critics who argue that the inability of the LAF to defend against Palestinian organizations is the result of insufficient training or lack of sophisticated equipment?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Mr. Congressman, I think that the—first of all, we are making a long-term investment in the state. We are

making a long-term investment in the security of the state. We are investing in one of the—in a national institution that enjoys almost universal respect among the Lebanese. I think that this is a very, very good investment. We are not the only country that is a partner with the Lebanese Armed Forces. There is a multilateral effort to support the Lebanese Armed Forces.

Now let's evaluate the performance of the Lebanese Armed Forces for a minute.

First of all, keep in mind that this force, very proud force, it has the respect of the people, but it is about the size of the New York Police Force. It is not an enormous standing Army. There is no draft in Lebanon. There are many, many security problems in Lebanon, Palestinian refugee camps with problems inside the Palestinian refugee camps.

The Lebanese Armed Forces basically has to deploy a brigade to every one of those Palestinian refugee camps to make sure the problems, intra-Palestinian problems, Sunni extremists don't spill out and endanger Lebanon's security.

There was some very moving pictures you might have seen at the end of that war in the summer of 2006, when the Lebanese Armed Forces agreed for the first time since the late '60s to deploy to the south of the country. They didn't have the equipment to do so. They were using tow trucks to try to move their equipment down. They were ill-equipped and ill-prepared, but yet they went out and did it. This is raw material that, again, is worth investing in.

Right now, the Lebanese Armed Forces are setting up checkpoints, doing house searches, providing buffer zones between Alawites and Sunnis in Tripoli to try to reduce the clashes in Tripoli. They have done the same thing in the Beka'a Valley. I see a qualitative improvement in Lebanese Army performance.

But one of the primary reasons why we are investing in the Lebanese Armed Forces is because the Lebanese people need to feel that they have a capable Army that is able to defend Lebanon's security and sovereignty. This is a long-term proposition, but it reduces the need of the Lebanese to rely on private militias, on feudal leaders for their protection if they see that they have a national capable organization.

There was one very dramatic day I would like to relate, December 1st, 2006. Hezbollah and Michel Aoun, but mostly Hezbollah, had gathered in the square around the Prime Minister's office. This was after the Shia ministers and one Christian minister had resigned from the cabinet. They were basically besieging the seat of government.

The Hezbollah mobs had closed off all roads to the Prime Minister's office. It was impossible to get in or out. In a very courageous move, the Lebanese Army reopened roads, confined the Hezbollah mobs, protected the institutions of the state.

I am not sure that any of us watching it that morning how it developed would have predicted the Lebanese Armed Forces would have done that, but they proved on that day that they were protecting the state. They were not protecting a person or that person. They were protecting the state institutions.

Mr. WILSON. Well, that is encouraging; and I really hope for the best. Indeed, with Congressman Rahall here, in the community I

represent in South Carolina, many of our leading business people are Lebanese Americans. For over 100 years, people of Lebanese ancestry in America but in the region that I represent have been leading business people. So we want the best.

And a final question. Given the amended electoral law, what is the likelihood that parliamentary elections in 2009 will change the composition of the government? And what is your perception of the future of Lebanon's constitutional process if the political gridlock persists after the election?

Ambassador FELTMAN. The election law that was used in 2005 I don't think can be used again, is my personal assessment. It is up to the Lebanese to decide. This is a Lebanese decision. It is not for the international community to decide what the right law is for Lebanon's elections. But given the strange gerrymandering of districting that that law encompassed, I don't think that the Lebanese particularly want to use that law again.

At Doha, they agreed to use a smaller electoral district basing; and I think the people at Doha, like any good politicians, were calculating who is going to win, who is going to—from using smaller districts.

My guess is that you are going to have a Parliament that is roughly similar to what the Parliament is today, is you are going to have a deeply divided Parliament. I think that truly reflects the Lebanon body politic today, is that there are two visions of Lebanon at play. There is one vision that is allied with Syria and Iran. There is another vision of Lebanon that is looking westward, that is playing on Lebanon's cosmopolitan roots. And I think that any election law is going to result in elections that reflect that split, any fair election law.

I don't like that answer, but I think that that is the truth. And it is why our commitment to Lebanon needs to be long-term, to help build those institutions of the state. The more that the state institutions can be effective, can be publicly accountable, can be responsive to the needs of the Lebanese people through their constitutional institutions, the less the Lebanese I believe are going to feel that they have to rely on traditional tribal leaders, on militias, things like that.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you.

Congressman Rahall.

Mr. RAHALL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador Feltman, thank you for your very clear and insightful testimony today.

Mr. Chairman, I commend you as well on your opening statement, particularly your last two paragraphs. The ranking member—and I am glad to see he just walked back in the room—gave some rather scathing comments about the current President of Lebanon and the Prime Minister. I would agree with you, Mr. Chairman, that the Doha agreement is only a beginning, not an end. I think the current President Sleiman and Prime Minister Siniora offer the best hope in the office of presidency and prime minister that Lebanon has had in many, many years; and I think we ought to give them our support. And I would hope that in those remarks

made by the ranking member that he would look at what you said, Mr. Chairman, in your opening comments, that we should not try to shape events in the region by reading the newspaper.

Ambassador Feltman, I would like to raise an issue with you that I raised personally with the Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. Olmert, during Speaker Nancy Pelosi's codel in March 2007 and then raised it again with the speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, Nabih Berry, a few days later and that is in regard to cluster munitions.

I would like to quote from Assistant Secretary David Welch when he said at a subcommittee hearing on the Middle East and South Asia over a year ago—that being April 18th of '07—and I quote:

“Israel has not yet provided detailed information on its utilization of certain weapons, cluster munitions, in Lebanon during the July–August '06 conflict. The U.S. has done likewise independently. We are still waiting further information from the Government of Israel.”

My question is, have we received such information or have the Lebanese received such information from the Government of Israel about these cluster munitions that may still be hidden in southern Lebanon and still may pose a danger to innocent civilian life? Prime Minister Olmert of Israel has said they have provided all the information necessary. The Lebanese would dispute that.

Ambassador FELTMAN. Congressman Rahall, there has been a lot of back and forth between this committee—of course, you are a member of this committee today, but there has been some briefings for committee staff and for committee members on this issue, and we are happy to come up and talk to you as well about this.

The short answer is that we wanted to see the Israelis provide the information to the United Nations. The Israelis have provided the information twice to the United Nations. We had some questions about the timing, but they have now provided information twice to the United Nations. I would refer you to the United Nations about the quality of this information, but they have done it.

At the same time, we are also working, with the support of Congress, of course, to actually clean up the problem on the ground. There has been great progress made in decontamination that we have worked on with the Lebanese and with international NGOs in order to clean up the problem on the ground.

Mr. RAHALL. I appreciate that.

Did Secretary of State Rice respond to Senator Patrick Leahy's request for this information that he made in an April 9th of this year hearing of his subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee?

Ambassador FELTMAN. You know, I am not familiar with the letter itself. I can't imagine we wouldn't have responded, Mr. Congressman. I will get back to you on that.

Mr. RAHALL. Okay. I appreciate it.

If I have time, Mr. Chairman, let me turn very quickly to Shaba Farms. Is the administration relying strictly on U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon to carry the water, so to speak, on this issue or is the administration also engaged with Israel or other parties regarding Shaba? If there is an Israeli withdrawal, wouldn't it be

better that the Lebanese get credit for it, thereby not only delegitimizing the reason for Hezbollah's presence but also shoring up the Government of Lebanon?

Ambassador FELTMAN. I mean, the lead in the Shaba Farms issue should be the Syrian and the Lebanese Governments. That should be the lead. Because it is up to the Syrians and the Lebanese to demarcate their border.

The Syrians continue to say, well, this is impossible because Israel occupies the area. I guess they have never heard of things like satellite imagery and GPS, et cetera. So the lead should be the Syrian and Lebanese Governments.

The Lebanese have said repeatedly that they are ready to demarcate the border. The Syrians have not responded or have responded ambiguously, you know, saying things like, well, we will start demarcating at the very north and work down. Well, where is the problem area? The problem area is at Shaba.

But in terms of the U.N. role, yes, the U.N. has a very important role. It was incorporated in 1701, that Security Council resolution that led to the cessation of hostilities in 2006. The Secretary General was asked to address the issue of Shaba Farms. He appointed a cartographer.

The cartographer worked on the territorial definition of Shaba Farms. When we say Shaba Farms, what are we talking about? How big is that area? And the cartographer has now reported to the Secretary General that, based on the documents, the maps, that he said that he has a pretty good idea of what Shaba Farms is in terms of territory.

It is different from sovereignty. The sovereignty has to be determined between the Lebanese and the Syrians, and it is the Syrians that are so far proving to be the obstacle. I am sure the Syrians want to keep this issue alive forever in order to give Hezbollah a pretext to pressure the Government of Lebanon, to keep Lebanon-Israeli relations as low as possible.

The Secretary would definitely like to see this issue resolved. She has talked to the Secretary General. She has talked to the Israelis. She has talked to the Lebanese. She would like to see this resolved in the context of resolving all the 1701 issues.

Mr. RAHALL. Do you understand my point of the Lebanese Government getting the credit for it?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Yes, I understood it very clearly, Mr. Congressman.

Mr. RAHALL. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Pence.

Mr. PENCE. Thank you, Chairman.

Thank you again to our witness for your testimony today and for your service under, as you reminded us, extraordinary circumstances just 2 years ago during the hostilities of 2006.

I want to make a clarification. I take a second chair to no one in my respect for Congressman Rahall, and for that reason raise no objection to his attendance at this hearing and full participation. And I welcome the gentleman. But let me see if I can clarify an issue with the witness.

I think Mr. Rahall said, as the chairman—I think the chairman said, memorably, that we cannot continue to shape events by reading newspapers. Mr. Rahall I think was referring to my opening statement, saying we shouldn't get our info from newspapers.

Ambassador Feltman, is there any doubt that President Sleiman appeared publicly at a rally with the terrorist Samir Kuntar?

Ambassador FELTMAN. No, there is no doubt at all, Mr. Congressman.

Mr. PENCE. So he was there?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Yes. He was there. He gave a speech. Yes, he was there.

Mr. PENCE. And in my opening statement when I said that President Michel Sleiman thanked "the resistance," for Kuntar's release, does that square with your recollection of that—

Ambassador FELTMAN. Yes.

Mr. PENCE [continuing]. Setting?

What else did he say? Was he critical of Hezbollah? Was he critical of this blood-soaked murderer's past at the rally, or did he—did the President essentially join in this what I would characterize as a pep rally for a terrorist?

Ambassador FELTMAN. You know, I had the privilege, the honor, whatever you want to—the duty to work directly with General Sleiman for 3½ years. Because even before the 2006 war, we did have a military assistance program in Lebanon, although quite modest, mostly officer training through IMET programs, things like that. So I was able to work with, to observe, to listen to General Sleiman for 3½ years; and I would like to make a couple of comments on this.

First, he was elected by the Lebanese members of Parliament. It was not a situation like 4 years ago. Four years ago, the Lebanese President's term was extended by the Lebanese members of Parliament because the Syrians told them to, because the Syrians threatened them. They were under orders.

This time, there was an agreement. Lebanese—even before Doha, even before Hezbollah took to the streets in May, Michel Sleiman was the consensus candidate. The Lebanese Parliament was going to elect Michel Sleiman.

So, first of all, our philosophy has been we want to support the Lebanese people, the Lebanese taking control of Lebanon for themselves. They elected Michel Sleiman in a legitimate election. So that is one thing to keep in mind.

The second thing is, in terms of actions, I would—you know, I have respect for many things that Michel Sleiman has done over the time that I was in Beirut; and I mention the December 1st, 2006, example again, where the Lebanese Armed Forces played a critical role in making sure that there was—that Prime Minister Siniora was not dragged out of his offices by a Hezbollah mob.

I think General Sleiman knew very well how difficult it was going to be to deploy to the south after the 2006 war, given the lack of equipment. But he knew that it was essential to Lebanon's independence and sovereignty and security that he ordered the Army to do that.

The May, 2007, decision to go into Palestinian refugee camps, it is hard to explain how significant this was. The Lebanese had basi-

cally, because of a whole history with the Palestinians that dates back way before the civil war, had basically let the Palestinians, you know, self-govern supposedly, but they let the Palestinian refugee camps—they were off limits to the Lebanese security services, off limits entirely. You didn't enter those. It was taboo. And it was seen as not only breaking an internal Lebanese taboo but an Arab taboo that you were confronting Palestinians. And Michel Sleiman made that decision to go in because he saw the threat to Lebanon that Fatah al-Islam did.

When I look at his inaugural speech that Congressman Rahall and the rest of the delegation witnessed on May 25th, 2008, as an American, there are words in that speech that I don't particularly like. I don't like to hear words about resistance and all of that. But there was a lot in that speech where he talked about the need for the state to be in control of Lebanon.

He is an Army man. He came up through the Army. An Army wants to be—you know, an Army man wants to be able to have the military in control of Lebanon. So I hope that as President he will show by his actions that he supports the Lebanese state institutions as much as I believe he does.

Mr. PENCE. Well, thank you for clarifying.

One other, with the chairman's indulgence, as our side, obviously, won't burden the hearing with any additional questions, I understand and am grateful for the context about President Sleiman's—to use your pronunciation—leadership and the role in finding the good that is there, finding the hopefulness that is there. And, as I acknowledged, I appreciate your optimism about the region.

I just wanted to clarify that there was no question that President Sleiman did appear publicly—

Ambassador FELTMAN. There is no question.

Mr. PENCE [continuing]. At the rally, welcoming the terrorist Kuntar, who had murdered two Israeli civilians in 1979. And it was a rally that celebrated, in his words, the resistance.

Let me ask you one other thing, and then I will be done, Mr. Chairman; and I thank you.

I think Mr. Rahall also said—and I quote this with respect and would be happy to yield for a clarification—in reference to Hezbollah's role, I think he said, "We are glad that the chapter is behind us," that chapter, presumably, of Hezbollah's dark history. I would just ask you a series of questions. Has Hezbollah disarmed? Have they agreed to disarm? Have they renounced violence? Have they recognized Israel? Has Hezbollah changed or is it still essentially a terrorist organization?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Hezbollah is a terrorist organization without question. And if I wasn't clear about that, I apologize. I do not want to leave any ambiguity about that.

Hezbollah is a terrorist organization. We do not deal with Hezbollah. Hezbollah has a minister in the cabinet. We will not deal with that minister. Let me be clear about that.

What I meant was we want to see, as I said earlier, the circle of peace expand between Israel and its Arab neighbors, between the Arab world and Israel. There is a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, Jordan and Israel. The Secretary, the President are

working very hard, are committed to bringing about a peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis. There are the proximity talks between Israel and Syria going on via the Turks; and, again, these are serious talks.

At some point, we hope that Lebanon as well will be part of the circle of peace. There are a number of issues, a number of very complicated issues between the Lebanese and the Israelis: Palestinian refugees, a history, terrorism. Hezbollah's arms being probably the biggest of these issues.

But one of the issues was the detainees. It was mentioned in the 1701 resolution, the issue of the kidnapped soldiers and the detainees. What I meant was, you know, at least this issue is behind us. At least that issue is over with. I don't like the way it was done, but it is behind us.

Mr. PENCE. Well, I thank you for the clarification. And that was your term in the initial instance. And I thank you for your testimony. It is bracing, it is candid and as advertised from your reputation.

I thank you; and I yield back, Mr. Chairman, with gratitude.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you.

You indicated you would have time to have a response from Mr. Rahall, did you? Or if there is no objection.

Mr. PENCE. No objection.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I recognize Mr. Rahall for a minute.

Mr. RAHALL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Pence.

And I appreciate what Mr. Pence is saying. And in no way did I mean that what he said was not an accuracy or an event that did not happen. I realize fully that it happened.

The point I was trying to make is that it should be looked in the context of everything that is happening in the region. As the chairman has said in his opening comments, that there are a number of ongoing negotiations yet to be resolved in the entire region. Whether we are involved in or not is beside the point for the purposes here. But there are those negotiations going on.

There is the entire context of, as the Ambassador has so clearly stated, of General Sleiman's history; and I think it is a history that offers hope for the future of Lebanon. What has happened in the past, what has happened between Israelis and Lebanese and the Hezbollah as regarding negotiations for release of Mr. Kuntar, that is between the parties involved. We should put it behind us and move on now and help strengthen our allies in the region and especially in the Lebanese Government.

Mr. PENCE. Thank you.

Mr. RAHALL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ACKERMAN. You are very welcome.

Well, there being no further questions from the committee, I guess we solved that problem.

Ambassador FELTMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Ambassador Feltman, thank you very much for your testimony. Your full written testimony is a matter of the record as well. Thank you very much. Thank the committee.

We will stand adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 5:11 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE JOE WILSON, A REPRESENTATIVE IN
CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Thank you, Chairman Ackerman for holding this hearing today on the situation in Lebanon.

The recent political unrest and violence that has occurred in and around Lebanon is the consequence of a greater power struggle within the entire Middle East. We are all aware of the fluid nature of the conflicts we see in this region where the instability in one area can spark or enhance instability in another. Additionally, nations like Syria and Iran are trying to expand influence into the populations and governments of neighboring nations in order to capitalize on that instability for their gain. We have seen Iran's interference in Iraq. We have seen similar training, equipping, and logistical support being given to Hezbollah by Syria and Iran before the war with Israel in 2006, during the conflict, and since.

The United States' support and that of our allies for the people of Lebanon is a positive factor in that region but the strength of Hezbollah and the influence of Iran and Syria continue to undermine our collective efforts. While Lebanon remains unstable and unsure of its political future, the threats that proliferate against Israel and other neighboring nations are emboldened.

During a recent trip to Israel I visited the northern border between Israel and Lebanon where I sadly saw the flag of Hezbollah flying over an outpost along the border. It was a stark reminder that this organization—bolstered by a militia and with military backing from Iran and Syria—is intent on maintaining if not expanding its control within and without the formal government of Lebanon.

Again, I wish to thank Chairman Ackerman and my fellow committee members for this opportunity, and I look forward to today's testimony.

