

Jeffrey D. Feltman
Acting Assistant Secretary, Near Eastern Affairs Bureau
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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.

Since the initial days of this new administration, President Obama and Secretary Clinton have worked actively to demonstrate our continuing and unwavering support for 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 in working toward this goal. We are also continuing important efforts to strengthen the institutions of the Lebanese state and to support the Lebanese government's efforts to extend its authority throughout Lebanon. As we strive to achieve these objectives in Lebanon, we are also seeking to advance a comprehensive regional peace. The administration's dedication to this effort is evidenced by the appointment of Special Envoy George Mitchell and the Secretary's recent travel to the region. While Senator Mitchell's initial travel to the region has focused primarily on the Israeli-Palestinian track, Lebanon will play a key role in the long-term effort to build lasting stability and peace in the Middle East. So will its neighbor, Syria. Within this framework, our continuing support for the institutions of the Lebanese state and for an independent, stable Lebanon will be crucial to the future success of our efforts.

In Lebanon, the countdown has begun for the June 2009 parliamentary elections, providing a final and crucial step towards fulfilling the final steps of the pledges made in the Doha agreement, which brought to a close months of political deadlock and internal strife. The institutions of the Lebanese state have been set back in motion and the yoke of Syria's dominance over Lebanon has been cast off. Lebanon must now take ownership of its own future.

The June 7 parliamentary elections provide an opportunity to continue the process of reinforcing Lebanon's independence and work to deepen Lebanon's democratic institutions. Elections offer an opportunity for moderate voices within Lebanon to continue their support for a sovereign, stable and independent Lebanon. Decisions on the shape and composition of Lebanon's next government can and should be

made by the Lebanese themselves, for Lebanon, free from outside interference, political intimidation, and violence.

Election preparations, including security plans, are well underway. Candidate registration began on March 2, launching the formal campaign season. Political parties have begun discussions on the formation of their electoral lists, and the March 14 coalition recently launched its formal electoral platform. The March 2 National Dialogue communiqué in which participants called for all parties to refrain from violence, create a positive atmosphere for the conduct of elections, and speed the formation of the Constitutional Council, is a positive development.

Interior Minister Ziad Baroud is developing a master plan for donor nations that wish to provide assistance for the 2009 elections. The U.S. will support that effort, including support for election monitors. In the last several years, the U.S. has provided some \$10.5 million for a number of programs to help Lebanon improve its ability to carry out fair, transparent elections and improve the functioning of its democracy. The EU, European and Arab countries also are expected to send election observation missions, which will play an important role in deterring the use of political violence during the elections.

The political scene in Lebanon remains largely divided between the pro-independence March 14 bloc, and the March 8 bloc whose coalition is closely aligned with Syria and Hizballah. Most observers anticipate the election results will hinge on a handful of seats, located primarily in Christian-dominated areas of Lebanon. How these Christian voters divide along March 14 or March 8 lines will determine who has the majority in the next parliament and the next cabinet.

The composition of the next government to be formed after the June election is, of course, an issue for the Lebanese alone to decide. It is important that the U.S. and other members of the international community support the holding of elections as scheduled, free of any violence and intimidation, and without any attempts to disrupt the proper functioning of government institutions until the new government is formed. We anticipate that the shape of the United States' assistance programs in Lebanon will be evaluated in the context of Lebanon's parliamentary election results and the policies formed by the new cabinet.

We remained extremely concerned about the role Hizballah is playing in Lebanon. The group continues to receive weapons from Syria and Iran in violation of Security Council resolution 1701. Additionally, Hizballah's violent actions against fellow Lebanese citizens in May 2008 have given many Lebanese a fresh reminder

of the threat the group poses to peace and stability. The group's bellicose rhetoric during the Gaza crisis in January 2009 was yet another example of a violent agenda that most Lebanese have come to reject. Hizballah clearly remains a danger to Lebanon and the region.

Within Lebanon, Hizballah and its allies continue to monopolize the political and religious expression of Lebanese Shia, spuriously asserting that they are the sole voice of Lebanon's Shia community. However, we are convinced that Shia interests in Lebanon can be represented successfully by moderate voices, rather than those of terrorist organizations.

The United Kingdom recently announced it had begun contacts with the political wing of Hizballah, leading many to ask whether the United States was considering a similar shift in policy. The answer is, emphatically, no. Our position on Hizballah remains as it was when the group was first designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization in 1997. We see no distinction between the leadership and funding of the group's terrorist, military, political, and social wings. Nor does Hizballah. Spokesman Hassan Izzeddine recently affirmed that "Hizballah cannot be split into a military and political wing." Our longstanding policy remains in effect: should Hizballah renounce terrorism—both in Lebanon and abroad—and submit to the rule of law and the authority of the Lebanese state, we would reconsider this status.

The Special Tribunal for Lebanon opened on March 1. The Tribunal represents the hope of Lebanon and the international community for an end to an era of impunity for political assassinations. Prosecutor Daniel Bellemare has cautioned that it will take time to issue indictments. We are confident that the Tribunal will bring the murderers of Rafiq Hariri and other Lebanese to justice. Our support for the Tribunal is strong and will continue. We recently pledged to increase our assistance to the Tribunal by \$6 million, pending Congressional approval, bringing our total pledge to \$20 million. Let me state clearly that the Tribunal cannot be traded away or shackled as part of a regional political deal. The Tribunal is an independent body staffed by professionals committed to the impartial pursuit of justice based on the evidence uncovered during the investigative phase of the Tribunal's work. The Tribunal should not be politicized. There will be no deals at the expense of justice.

We are encouraged that the Lebanese state continues to strengthen its authority throughout the country, with considerable help from the United States, particularly for the security services. Our assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) has

helped it respond more quickly and effectively to isolated outbreaks of violence throughout the country, prevent additional rocket launches, and discover more arms caches in south Lebanon. Our partners in the LAF have proven highly professional, and our assistance continues to be used responsibly with an exemplary end-use record, as noted in our regular and rigorous monitoring. Our relationship with the LAF is growing ever stronger, as evidenced by the recent visit to Washington of LAF Commander General Jean Kahwaji—the first ever by an LAF commander to the United States. While in Washington, General Kahwaji reaffirmed his strong commitment, which he and other senior officials of the Lebanese government have publicly stated on numerous occasions, to Security Council resolution 1701. That resolution includes a call for a durable ceasefire with Israel and for combating terrorism in Lebanon. With the decision to hold parliamentary elections in a single day, both the LAF and Internal Security Forces will make use of the help they have received to deploy throughout Lebanon, deter violence, and ensure that Lebanese are able to vote freely, fairly, and without fear.

I recently traveled to Lebanon and Syria with Dan Shapiro, Senior Director for the Middle East and North Africa at the National Security Council. In Damascus, we affirmed that Lebanese elections should proceed without interference, and that the Lebanese should be allowed to determine the shape of their next government. We also raised a number of other Lebanon-related concerns, including unimplemented provisions of Security Council resolutions 1559, 1680, and 1701, which call *inter alia* for delineation of the Lebanon-Syria border, an exchange of ambassadors, and disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon. We hope to use continued dialogue with Syria to press these and other regional concerns and were very clear that our diplomacy will be results oriented. As Secretary Clinton has stated, we are not engaging for engagement's sake, but to advance the interests of the United States and our allies.

While we support Israeli and Syrian efforts to reach a peace agreement, we also hope that Lebanon and Israel can find a mutually acceptable mechanism to address their outstanding issues. Both governments regularly profess support for Security Council resolution 1701, though its full implementation requires further work and dialogue by both countries. Some in Lebanon have called publicly for the government of Lebanon to begin talks with Israel under the framework of resolution 1701. In its recently unveiled political platform, March 14 stressed the importance of full implementation of 1701 as a means of achieving Lebanon's independence, stability, and prosperity, and putting it in "harmony" with the international community. We are prepared to support any such dialogue, and are pleased to see Israel and Lebanon already engaged, through the UN, over northern

Ghajar. We look forward to this issue's resolution as a demonstration that diplomacy, rather than Hizballah's weapons, can best secure Lebanon's interests. As we reinvigorate our efforts to achieve a comprehensive regional peace, no deal will be made at Lebanon's expense.

Pro-independence forces in Lebanon tell us consistently of their appreciation for the clear support they receive from members of Congress and the administration. That support must continue. The United States will continue 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.