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**Written Statement
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**Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and
Central Asian Affairs
“Lebanon at the Crossroads”
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Chairman Kaine, Ranking Senator Risch and other distinguished members of the subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today about the evolving security situation in Lebanon in relation to the conflict in Syria and the importance of our partnership with the Lebanese Armed Forces.

Your help in drawing attention to Lebanon’s security challenges, especially to those due to the Syrian conflict, is both timely and beneficial.

The impact on Lebanon from the conflict in Syria has become acute. In Lebanon, there are now nearly one million refugees from Syria, equal to approximately 20-percent of the current population in Lebanon. Despite Lebanon’s official dissociation policy regarding the Syrian conflict, Hizballah is militarily involved in Syria, and sectarian tensions are spilling over the Syria-Lebanon border. Lebanese towns and villages near the border with Syria regularly experience shelling from Syria – both by the Syrian regime and Syrian opposition forces – due to regime allegations that opposition fighters use Sunni-dominated areas as safe havens as well as opposition allegations that Hizballah uses Shia-dominated areas to enter Syria and launch attacks.

The Syrian conflict is attracting foreign fighters from across the region and around the world. We assess there are now significantly more foreign fighters in Syria than there were

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foreign fighters in Iraq at the height of the Iraq war. Many of these fighters are finding their way to a number of fighting units, including terrorist groups such as the al-Nusra Front, and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. These foreign fighters are becoming battle-hardened and gaining experience that could have destabilizing effects in the years to come. Of great concern, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, in particular, has exploited the governing vacuum in eastern Syria to carve out territory to train its fighters, recruit more of them, and plan attacks. Both the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and Al Nusra Front have established a presence in Lebanon and are seeking to increase their cooperation with Sunni extremists groups already operating in Lebanon. These Lebanese-based groups have claimed a number of recent attacks in Lebanon.

Senator Kaine, as you experienced during your recent visit to Beirut, Sunni terrorist attacks in Lebanon are on the rise. Since the beginning of 2014 alone, seven suicide attacks have hit Shia population centers. Last week's twin bombing in Bir Hassan, as reported in the press, likely was targeting the Iranian Culture Center in the area in south Beirut. Approximately 10 individuals died and more than 120 were wounded. The Al-Qaeda-linked Abdallah Azzam Brigades claimed responsibility for the attacks. Leaders across Lebanon's political spectrum have condemned the attacks.

The Lebanese Armed Forces and Stability

The Lebanese Armed Forces has taken a variety of bold measures to maintain stability in Lebanon and counter the destabilizing effects that the Syrian conflict risks to Lebanon's security. The increased operational tempo of Lebanese Armed Forces deployments over the past few months reflects their commitment to Lebanon's security. In the last seven months, we have seen our partners in the Lebanese Special Forces deploy to Sidon for counterterrorism

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operations, to Tripoli to conduct stability operations, and to Aarsal to provide security for the populations affected by Syria's instability. Throughout this period, the 2nd Intervention Regiment conducted stability operations and supported counterterrorism and counternarcotics efforts in the Bekaa Valley. The LAF's willingness to exercise its role as the sole legitimate defense force in Lebanon has made it a target as well. Just last weekend, 2nd Border Regiment personnel were killed when a suicide bomber detonated his vehicle at a LAF checkpoint.

U.S. and international assistance builds the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces to serve the democratic government and people of Lebanon. The Lebanese Armed Forces have organized themselves effectively to maintain a tremendously high operational tempo for many of its units, and have demonstrated the ability to make appropriate requests for and use of equipment, as well as unity and professionalism in numerous operations. One recent example of the Lebanese Armed Forces' success was the February 12, 2014, arrest of an Abdallah Azzam official, which led to the discovery of and dismantling of a large car bomb.

U.S. Support to the Lebanese Armed Forces

Our continued engagement and assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces are all the more important in this time of increased challenges to Lebanon's stability. As mentioned in previous testimony, the Lebanese have just agreed upon a new government formed by Prime Minister Tammam Salam. This is an important step for the government and people of Lebanon, and provides us with an opportunity to increase our engagement with Lebanon's government as a whole and the Lebanese Armed Forces in particular.

The emergence of the Lebanese Armed Forces as Lebanon's sole legitimate defense force is a critical component of Lebanon's long-term stability and development. U.S. assistance

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to Lebanese Armed Forces, approximately \$71 million in Fiscal Year 2014 FMF and \$8.7M in Fiscal Year 2013 1206 funding, strengthens the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces and supports its mission to secure Lebanon's borders, defend the sovereignty of the state, and implement UN Security Council Resolutions 1559 and 1701. Since 2005, the United States has allocated nearly \$1 billion to support the Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security forces, making us Lebanon's largest partner in security cooperation – a key pillar of our bilateral relationship.

In December 2013, President Sleiman announced that Saudi Arabia will grant Lebanon \$3 billion to purchase defense items from the French. In concert with international partners such as the French, and in line with the International Support Group for Lebanon, we fully support strengthening the Lebanese Armed Forces and will continue to work with partners to ensure that our assistance is complementary and used effectively to meet these growing challenges.

Our International Military Education and Training (IMET) program with Lebanon is the 4th largest in the world. IMET builds strong ties between the United States and Lebanon by bringing Lebanese officers and officials to the United States for professional development and to train alongside U.S. forces. In Fiscal Year 2013, Lebanon received \$ 2.9M under the IMET program that allowed 67 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.

Our Section 1206 assistance has enhanced the Lebanese Armed Forces' ability to monitor, secure, and protect Lebanon's borders against terrorist threats and the illicit transfer of goods. Since 2006, the United States has provided more than \$100M in Section 1206 funding to assist the Lebanese Armed Forces to build its counterterrorism capabilities. Most recently, Congress

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approved \$9.3M in FY 2014 1206 funding to enhance Lebanon's border security capability further by providing the Lebanese Armed Forces' 2nd Border Regiment with additional surveillance equipment to guard its portion of the border - including radars, seismic sensors, and cameras.

We are also focused on supporting the Lebanese Armed Forces' desire for institutional reform; the Department of Defense has just started a Defense Institution Reform Initiative (DIRI) with the Lebanese Armed Forces. This initiative complements a U.S. whole-of-government effort supporting Lebanese security sector reform. U.S. Central Command continues to provide support to the training and professionalization of the Lebanese Armed Forces, while the Department of State Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs funds a program to strengthen the capability and management capacity of the Internal Security Forces. All of these programs help to strengthen our relationship and ties between our two militaries and throughout their ranks.

Supporting Lebanon

The crisis in Syria will likely not end soon, nor unfortunately will its impact on neighboring Lebanon. Our positive relationship with, and continued support to, Lebanon and the Lebanese Armed Forces is now more important than ever. The effectiveness of U.S. security assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces is evident in how well it has managed the violence that has plagued Lebanon over the course of the conflict in Syria. The Lebanese Armed Forces is a critical pillar of Lebanon's stability and its ability and commitment to curtailing sectarian

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fighting and terrorism has been a significant factor in preventing Lebanon from descending into greater violence.

Again Senator Kaine and Senator Risch, I thank you and the other distinguished members of the sub-committee for not only calling this hearing, but for your abiding interest in – and support for – Lebanon.