

**WHAT'S NEXT FOR LEBANON?  
STABILITY AND SECURITY CHALLENGES**

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**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NEAR EAST,  
SOUTH ASIA, CENTRAL ASIA,  
AND COUNTERTERRORISM

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
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## WHAT'S NEXT FOR LEBANON? STABILITY AND SECURITY CHALLENGES

Wednesday, March 21, 2018

U.S. SENATE,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NEAR EAST, SOUTH ASIA,  
CENTRAL ASIA, AND COUNTERTERRORISM,  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,  
*Washington, DC*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:05 p.m., in Room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Jim Risch, Chairman of the Subcommittee, presiding.

Present: Senators Risch [presiding], Young, Kaine, Murphy, and Booker.

### OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES E. RISCH, U.S. SENATOR FROM IDAHO

Senator RISCH. The subcommittee hearing will come to order.

And appreciate those of you hardy souls who have shown up. And you can tell your grandkids you walked to work in snow that was waist deep, uphill both ways. And it will at least be partially true after today. So, thank you for coming.

This hearing is very timely, given a number of international conferences on Lebanon and upcoming elections in Lebanon in May. Lebanon has been a regional center for finance and trade for centuries, and has always been an important nation in the Middle East. But, it also sits in a very rough neighborhood today, with many outside forces attempting to upset the balance among its sectarian political forces.

Today, Lebanon faces enormous challenges. Security is first among those—these issues. Since 2006, the United States has provided roughly 1.7 billion to Lebanese Armed Forces and internal security forces. The recent conference in Rome provided additional commitments of more than \$500 million for security assistance to Lebanon.

Recently, the Lebanese Prime Minister announced that the Lebanese Armed Forces will increase their presence along the border with Israel. This decision is welcome as long as the LAF plays a role in decreasing the stockpiles of missiles and other weapons that Hezbollah has been stockpiling and installing along the border. But, I fear Hezbollah's behavior in the disputed areas could lead to a new war between Israel and Hezbollah.

The economy remains another priority for Lebanon's future. With an ailing infrastructure, the country has lacked the tools necessary to achieve economic growth. Added to this is a massive refugee cri-

sis. In a country of more than 4 million people, Lebanon has been ill-equipped to absorb over 1 million Syrian refugees in addition to a substantial Palestinian refugee community. Lebanon desperately needs to update its infrastructure if it hopes to achieve economic growth, but it also needs to stabilize its debt and implement reforms in key areas, such as the electricity sector and tackling corruption. The Paris Conference next month will be an important indicator of how much support exists for Lebanon.

Finally, a new election law is reshaping how to form electorate—electoral alliances and sparking new coalitions. With almost a thousand candidates for 128 seats in Parliament, the May 6th elections will test whether this new law will help move the country forward or if old alliances will dominate the political landscape. Political stability will be important to reach consensus on many of the domestic issues facing the country.

Despite all of these issues, Lebanon is caught between many actors in the region and have—that have a substantial impact on Lebanon’s future. Over the last several years, inaction and poor decisions regarding Syria have had dangerous consequences. Hezbollah, Iran, and other enemies have used this crisis to expand their reach. I am especially worried that we do not recognize the scale and regional reach of Hezbollah. Its strength inside Lebanon has grown, but it has also sent fighters to Syria, trainers to Iraq, and is supporting rebels in Yemen. While Hezbollah may be a power unto itself politically in Lebanon, it also serves as an emissary and interpreter for Iran throughout the Arab world, rallying militias and other fighters to destabilize countries and sow chaos.

The United States, and indeed the world, has an important role in helping Lebanon maintain its independence. We need to have a comprehensive strategy to empower the Lebanese government, limit the influence of Iran and Hezbollah, and improve security for Israel. I hope this hearing will help us understand how we can best support this goal.

Senator Kaine.

**STATEMENT OF HON. TIM KAINÉ,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM VIRGINIA**

Senator KAINÉ. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And I want to thank the Chairman for holding this hearing. In Foreign Relations, we spend an awful lot of time on this part of the world, but we do not spend a lot of time on Lebanon. And I think both of us are concerned about a number of items in the country, broader issues. And it is very, very good to have the hearing. We have two wonderful witnesses today.

Prime Minister Hariri’s brief resignation from Saudi Arabia was so unusual, a number of months back, and it led to calls in to our office from, sort of, all sides, raising the question about what was going on in Lebanon. That temporary problem seems to have abated, but, as the Chairman indicated, all kinds of issues remain. The growing strength of Hezbollah, the elections in May, the challenges of Hezbollah’s growing armaments in the south, to Israeli security and the massive refugee problem that the Chairman discussed, all create significant issues.

This has been a relationship—the U.S./Lebanon relationship has had some strengths, especially the cooperation of the United States with the Lebanese Armed Forces. I visited, I saw the work that we do together in traditional and special forces. The LAF may be one of the institutions in the country that does the best job of integrating folks from different parts of this challenging sectarian situation. And, while Hezbollah continues to grow, the announcement about more LAF presence near the border of Israel is positive. LAF has also played an important role for us in helping fight terrorism in Lebanon. Those are all the positives.

But, the concerns are those that the Chairman outlined: the upcoming elections, the Rome Conference, and the timing of the work that we are doing on the Armed Services Committee with respect to the National Defense Authorizing Act, which always includes this component of partnerships, is very important. I do know that General Votel, the CENTCOM regional commander, as well as Secretary Mattis are strong supporters of the U.S./LAF military relationship, and I think that is an important thing that we should try to make stronger.

But, this is a hearing where we can learn, you know, what is going well, but what we need to change, what we need to adjust. These are witnesses who are deeply skilled and have some differences of opinion. That is actually helpful to us as we grapple with this.

So, Mr. Chair, thanks, and I am glad we are able to do this today.

Senator RISCH. Thank you so much. It is an important subject, as you have indicated.

We are joined today by two witnesses with strong resumes and experience dealing with the Middle East:

Our first witness is Elliott Abrams, who is currently the Senior Fellow for Middle Eastern Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations. Previously, he served as Special Assistant to President George W. Bush and Senior Director of the National Security Council for Democracy, Human Rights, and International Organizations, as well as Senior Director of the National Security Council for Near East and North African Affairs, finally, ending his tenure as Deputy National Security Advisor, where he supervised U.S. policy in the Middle East for the White House.

Our second witness is Rob Malley, who currently serves as the President and CEO of the International Crisis Group. Prior to his current position, he served as Special Assistant to President Obama, heading the President's Counter-ISIL Campaign as well as coordinating White House policy for the Middle East, North Africa, and the Gulf region. In addition, he served as Special Assistant to President Clinton for Arab-Israeli Affairs, and Director for Near East and South Asian Affairs at the National Security Council.

We certainly have diverse people here today, which I think will help us as we struggle with the questions.

Gentlemen, we look forward to your testimony on this important topic.

Mr. Abrams, we will start with you.

**STATEMENT OF HON. ELLIOTT ABRAMS, SENIOR FELLOW,  
MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,  
WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. ABRAMS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for inviting me here today.

And I should, I guess, say I have spent the day giving people civics lessons, because people say, “You cannot have a hearing. The Government is closed.” And then I have had to explain, “No, no, that is the executive branch. See, the legislative branch is separate. They make”—it has been interesting.

Senator RISCH. You know, I have had the same challenge as I have dealt with some of our European friends to explain to them about the branches of government. They get lost sometimes and think we only have a single branch of government. And it is not the first branch, I might add.

Thank you.

Mr. ABRAMS. I would like to submit my full testimony for the record, and an article I wrote a few days ago about the need to prepare now for getting Americans out of harm’s way if there is another war in Lebanon.

Since about 2008, Lebanon has been in the grip of Hezbollah, which is a terrorist organization backed and largely controlled by Iran. I think U.S. policy largely fails to acknowledge that fact. We consider or treat Lebanon as if it were a friendly, sovereign, independent country whose government can actually set its foreign and defense policy. But, that is an illusion. That Lebanon no longer exists. Let me talk about politics and then the army.

In May 2008, Hezbollah ended a government crisis over its own powers by using its weapons to seize control of Beirut’s streets and, effectively, of the entire state. The New York Times, back then, quoted one expert on Hezbollah concluding, “This is effectively a coup.” It is been about a decade since, and Hezbollah’s power has grown, and so has its domination of Lebanon.

During the war in Syria for about the last 6 years, Hezbollah has served as Iran’s foreign legion and sent thousands of Lebanese Shia across the border to fight. Throughout 2017, Israeli officials have been warning that the distinction between Hezbollah and Lebanon can no longer be maintained. Hezbollah is, quite simply, running the country. Yes, it leaves administrative matters to the government—paying salaries, paving streets, collecting garbage—but there is no important decision taken without Hezbollah’s agreement.

Tony Badran, a research fellow here at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, summed up the current situation, quote, “In terms of the actual balance of power, the actual power on the ground, regardless of the politics, the cabinets, regardless of the parliamentary majorities, it is Hezbollah.” Lebanon’s constitution provides for a division of power by sect, but today there is really no balance of power. Hezbollah prevented the selection of a president for 2 years, until it could force the acceptance of the Christian closest to it, Michel Aoun. Parliamentary elections are coming May 6th, and there is a good chance they will help Hezbollah consolidate power. The issues that should be under debate, how to recover



Lebanon's sovereignty and prevent Hezbollah from involving Lebanon in foreign wars, can hardly be mentioned.

Let me just turn to the LAF in the time left. I would argue that our assistance to the LAF is based on the roles it is supposed to play under Security Council Resolutions 1559 and 1701. If the LAF were implementing those resolutions, it would be intercepting Hezbollah weapons shipments coming from Iran via Syria, it would be securing Lebanon's borders, it would be preventing Hezbollah from parading its military equipment and maintaining fixed bases, it would be preventing Hezbollah from placing military equipment in schools and hospitals. But, in real life, the LAF does none of those. If it were doing those things, it would be worth the 1.7 billion that the Chairman mentioned. You know, Lebanon is the fifth-largest recipient of FMF.

But, it is not doing those things. On March 15th, the State Department spokesman at the conference in Rome on Lebanon said that we would renew our support because the aid we provide is, quote, "enabling the Lebanese government to assert its authority throughout all of Lebanese territory," close quote. But, that is a fantasy. It is not happening. In fact, the relationship between the LAF and Hezbollah appears to be growing closer as time passes.

I would argue that our military assistance to Lebanon should be made dependent on pushing back on Hezbollah, on regaining Lebanese sovereignty and independence. The price Lebanon pays for Hezbollah should be made far clearer. The advantages Hezbollah gains from its control of Lebanon should be reduced and made far more controversial. So, I would argue for a reassessment of that, of the basis for that military aid, which I think is an assumption that the LAF is pushing back against Hezbollah and protecting Lebanon in ways that are simply contrary to fact.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Abrams follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HON. ELLIOTT ABRAMS

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me here today. I would like to submit for the record both my full testimony and an article I and a colleague wrote last week, entitled "Lebanon is Boiling. Thousands of Americans Could Get Stuck in the Middle of a War."

Mr. Chairman, Lebanon has at least since 2008 been in the grip of Hezbollah, a terrorist organization backed by Iran. In my view, U.S. policy fails to acknowledge that fact—and we continue to act as if Lebanon were a friendly, sovereign, and independent country whose government can actually set its foreign and defense policy. But that is an illusion: that Lebanon no longer exists.

I'd like to discuss Lebanese politics first, and then the Lebanese army.

In May 2008, Hezbollah ended a government crisis over its own powers by using its weapons—allegedly meant only to protect the country from Israel—to seize control of Beirut's streets and effectively of the entire state. The New York Times back then quoted one expert on Hezbollah concluding "This is effectively a coup."<sup>1</sup>

In the near decade since, Hezbollah's power has grown and so has its domination of Lebanon. During the war in Syria since 2012, Hezbollah has served as Iran's foreign legion and sent thousands of Lebanese Shia across the border to fight. A story in The New York Times last August summed up the current situation:

Hezbollah has rapidly expanded its realm of operations. It has sent legions of fighters to Syria. It has sent trainers to Iraq. It has backed rebels in Yemen. And it has helped organize a battalion of militants from Afghanistan that can fight almost anywhere. As a result, Hezbollah is not just a power unto itself, but is one of the most important instruments in the drive for regional supremacy by its sponsor: Iran. Hezbollah is involved in nearly every fight that matters

to Iran and, more significantly, has helped recruit, train and arm an array of new militant groups that are also advancing Iran's agenda.<sup>2</sup>

That story concluded that "few checks remain on Hezbollah's domestic power" in Lebanon.

And throughout 2017, Israeli officials have been warning that the distinction between Hezbollah and "Lebanon" can no longer be maintained. Hezbollah is quite simply running the country. While it leaves administrative matters like paying government salaries, paving the roads, and collecting garbage to the state, no important decision can be taken without Hezbollah's agreement. Tony Badran, a research fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies who specializes in Lebanon, summed up the current situation: "In terms of the actual balance of power, the actual power on the ground, regardless of the politics, regardless of the Cabinets, regardless of the parliamentary majorities: it's Hezbollah."<sup>3</sup>

Lebanon's constitution provides for a division of power by sect, with a Shia parliamentary speaker, Christian president, and Sunni prime minister. But today, there is no such division or balance of real power. Hezbollah prevented the selection of a president for more than 2 years, until it could force acceptance of the Christian closest to it, Michel Aoun. As an analyst at the Institute for National Security Studies in Israel put it, "Hezbollah has been very squarely backing Aoun for president and this was always the deal between Aoun's party and Hezbollah. Hezbollah has upheld its end of the deal. With this election . . . you can see Hezbollah being consolidated in terms of its political allies as well as its position in Lebanon."<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, today the Sunni prime minister, Saad Hariri, provides cover to Hezbollah's domination of the state rather than a counterbalance to that power. Hezbollah is part of Hariri's coalition government—but Hezbollah, not the government, dominates.

Parliamentary elections will be held on May 6, and they will most likely help Hezbollah consolidate power—because challenging Hezbollah and running against it are simply too dangerous. The issues that should be under debate, primarily how to recover Lebanon's sovereignty and prevent Hezbollah from involving Lebanon in foreign wars, cannot be mentioned. Some will argue that fear is not the only motivating factor, and that apathy and fatigue also play key roles. The result is the same: Hezbollah today faces no real opposition from Christian, Druze, or Sunni party leaders.

Sadly, there is another way to measure Hezbollah's domination of Lebanon: its ability to use the institutions of the state to punish even rhetorical challenges. Hanin Ghaddar, an analyst at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, has been convicted by a Lebanese military court for the "crime" of "defaming" the Lebanese army. The sad story is told in full by the Washington Institute, and relates to comments she made at a conference in Washington in 2014. What did she say? That the Lebanese military targets Sunni groups while showing preference to Shiite groups, such as Hezbollah. After a closed trial held in absentia, she was sentenced to 6 months imprisonment. So much for freedom of expression in Lebanon.

I would like now to turn to the Lebanese Armed Forces or "LAF."

U.S. assistance to the LAF is based on U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1559 and 1701, which call for the disarmament of all militias in Lebanon and the affirmation of state sovereignty and independence. If the LAF were implementing 1559 and 1701, it would be intercepting Hezbollah weapons shipments coming from Iran via Syria. It would be securing Lebanon's borders. It would be preventing Hezbollah from parading its military equipment and maintaining fixed bases. It would be preventing Hezbollah from placing military equipment at civilian sites like homes and schools. But in real life, the LAF does none of these things.

If the LAF were doing these things it would certainly deserve the \$1.7 billion in aid that the United States has given it. That amount includes \$123 million in FY2017, and Lebanon is the fifth largest recipient of foreign military financing (FMF). Our ambassador to Lebanon, Elizabeth Richard, said publicly on October 31 of last year that total support for the LAF from State Department and Defense Department accounts totaled \$160 million over the previous year.<sup>5</sup> The State Department's proposed budget for FY2018 zeroes out FMF for Lebanon, which may suggest some doubt within the administration regarding the LAF's achievements.

But on January 31, Acting Assistant Secretary of State David Satterfield stated that "We will sustain our efforts to support legitimate state security institutions in Lebanon, such as the Lebanese Armed Forces, which is the only legitimate force in Lebanon." And on March 15, at a conference on Lebanon held in Rome, the State Department "renewed its support" and said that the aid we provide is "enabling the Lebanese government to . . . assert its authority throughout all of Lebanese territory."

That statement is a fantasy. A far more realistic view of the situation is offered by Israel's Minister of Defense, Avigdor Liberman, who recently stated that "today, the Lebanese army has lost its independence and is another unit in Hezbollah's apparatus, and therefore, as far as we are concerned, the infrastructure of the Lebanese army and the Lebanese state is one with the infrastructure of Hezbollah."<sup>6</sup>

The relationship between the LAF and Hezbollah appears to be growing and the notion that Hezbollah is a legitimate power is getting enconced in LAF doctrine. The analyst Tony Badran described this development:

The LAF's synergetic relationship with Hezbollah isn't haphazard. It's a reflection of the power configuration and the Hezbollah-dominated political order in Beirut. It's also codified in the LAF's doctrine. Namely, the LAF's doctrine adopts Hezbollah's formulation and vocabulary about the group's role and position in the state: "This Resistance, which has been supported by the government, the army and the civilians, has led to the defeat of the enemy on Lebanon's land." The combination of "Resistance" (that is, Hezbollah), "Army," and "civilians" is an adaptation of Hezbollah's so-called "Army-People-Resistance" doctrine, the embodiment of the Iranian revolutionary template, which in turn is adopted by the Lebanese government in its official policy statement. This doctrine licenses the LAF's joint deployment and extensive coordination with Hezbollah. It fosters not just toleration but also legitimization of so-called "resistance" militias and paramilitary groups operating under Hezbollah's wing. And overall, it instills the pro-Hezbollah culture in the LAF officer corps.<sup>7</sup>

The LAF is increasingly intertwined with Hezbollah. David Schenker of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy described the situation this way:

In April 2017, Hezbollah brought more than a dozen international journalists on a tour of Lebanon's frontier with Israel, breezing through several checkpoints manned by national intelligence organs and LAF units, suggesting a high degree of coordination. The next month, Hezbollah turned over several of its Syria border observation posts to the LAF ... Finally, in late June, the LAF sent 150 officer cadets to tour Hezbollah's Mleeta war museum, near Nabatiyah, a shrine to the organization's 'resistance' credentials vis-a-vis Israel.<sup>8</sup>

As a Center for American Progress report stated, "The Lebanese government has repeatedly denied any coordination with Hezbollah. However, events along the border make these claims increasingly implausible. Reports of such coordination undercut the LAF's standing and raise vexing questions for policymakers regarding the utility of U.S. security assistance to Lebanon."<sup>9</sup> The leader of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, himself "characterized the LAF as a 'partner' and a 'pillar' in what Hezbollah has described as the 'golden formula, which means the resistance, the Army, and the people'" in the words of a recent Congressional Research Service report.<sup>10</sup>

It is worth noting that in the face of Hezbollah's increasing domination of the Lebanese state, Prime Minister Hariri last week referred to Israel as "the primary threat to Lebanon."<sup>11</sup> That is an adoption of the Hezbollah line and a justification for Hezbollah's and Lebanon's absolute failure to implement Security Council resolutions 1559 and 1701.

All of these developments should explain the tougher line toward Lebanon being taken in the last year by Saudi Arabia. The Saudis are no longer willing to prop up Lebanon while it serves as the base for Hezbollah's military and terrorist activities in league with Iran. Instead, they are asking what it will take for Lebanese to pressure Hezbollah to cut back on its actions and to allow the Lebanese state to govern again. What the Saudis are saying is, Enough—let's start describing Lebanese reality instead of burying it. Let's stop financing a situation that allows Hezbollah to feed off the Lebanese state, dominate that state, and use it as a launching pad for terror and aggression in the Middle East, all on Iran's behalf. Similarly, Israeli officials and analysts are noting Hezbollah's increasing domination of Lebanon and the great danger it creates—for Israel and for Lebanon. And meanwhile, as I've noted, American officials appear determined to avoid stating the facts and instead speak about Lebanon as if this were not 2018 but the days right after the Cedar Revolution when true national independence and sovereignty appeared possible.

There is of course no guarantee that this tougher approach will succeed: Lebanese may be too terrified of Hezbollah. And success will require action by the United States and its allies, particularly France. If all of Lebanon's friends take the same approach, demanding that Hezbollah's grip on the country and the state be limited, we may embolden Lebanon's citizens and its politicians to protest Hezbollah's chokehold. Economic assistance to Lebanon and military assistance to its army should be made dependent on pushing back on Hezbollah and regaining Lebanese

independence. The price Lebanon pays for Hezbollah should be made far clearer, and the advantages Hezbollah gains from its control of Lebanon should be reduced—and made far more controversial.

Lebanese sovereignty and the prevention of Hezbollah domination of the state are in fact demanded by U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701, adopted in August 2006 to end the war between Hezbollah and Israel. It's worth recalling what started that war: an unprovoked attack by Hezbollah into Israel, killing and kidnapping Israeli soldiers.

Resolution 1701 includes these provisions:

Emphasizes the importance of the extension of the control of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory [and] for it to exercise its full sovereignty, so that there will be no weapons without the consent of the Government of Lebanon and no authority other than that of the Government of Lebanon . . .

Calls for . . . the disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon, so that, pursuant to the Lebanese cabinet decision of 27 July 2006, there will be no weapons or authority in Lebanon other than that of the Lebanese State . . . <sup>12</sup>

Now, Hezbollah is once again thrusting Lebanon into deadly conflicts in the region—including the risk of another war with Israel. These dangers will not be avoided by burying our heads in the sand, nor will Lebanon's sovereignty be restored by ignoring Hezbollah's destruction of that sovereignty. A better way forward is to tell the truth about the situation in Lebanon, and use both diplomatic and economic pressure to undermine Hezbollah's iron grip.

The United States should reassess our military assistance and our entire policy. After all, if our strategy has been aimed at strengthening Lebanon's independence, we have failed. If our goal has been to limit the power of Hezbollah and its integration into Iran's regional system of military aggression, we have failed. If our goal has been to strengthen Sunni, Druze, and Christian minorities in Lebanon, we have failed. If we have tried to make the LAF a counterbalance to Hezbollah, we have failed. Perhaps things would be even worse today without our aid and our efforts, but that is a proposition that should be examined and tested.

Is Lebanon closer to meeting the demands of Resolution 1701 than it was a decade ago—closer to exercising sovereignty over its territory and disarming militias and terrorist groups? I think not. And that's why American strategy for Lebanon requires a careful reassessment.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear today.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Robert F. Worth and Nada Bakri, "Hezbollah Seizes Swath of Beirut From U.S.-Backed Lebanon Government," *New York Times*, May 10, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/10/world/middleeast/10lebanon.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Ben Hubbard, "Iran Out to Remake Mideast With Arab Enforcer: Hezbollah," *New York Times*, August 27, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/27/world/middleeast/hezbollah-iran-syria-israel-lebanon.html?r=1>.

<sup>3</sup> Jenna Lifhits, "Lebanese PM's Resignation Magnifies Congressional Scrutiny of Hezbollah," *Weekly Standard*, November 7, 2017, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/lebanese-pms-resignation-magnifies-congressional-scrutiny-of-hezbollah/article/2010377>.

<sup>4</sup> Reuters et al., "Lebanon's New Pro-Hezbollah President Vows to Retake 'Israeli-Occupied' Land," *Jerusalem Post*, October 31, 2016, <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Hezbollah-ally-Michel-Aoun-elected-President-of-Lebanon-471301>.

<sup>5</sup> Jack Detsch, "U.S. Sticks by Lebanese army despite Hariri Resignation," *Al-Monitor*, November 6, 2017, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/11/us-support-lebanon-army-hariri-resignation-saudi-arabia.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Eldad Shavit, *Insight No. 1027: Israel's Position on U.S. Military Aid to the Lebanese Army* (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2018), <http://www.inss.org.il/publication/israels-position-us-military-aid-lebanese-army/>.

<sup>7</sup> Tony Badran, "American Policy in Lebanon Isn't Policy. It's Poetry," *Tablet*, October 27, 2017, <http://www.tabletmag.com/scroll/248071/american-policy-in-lebanon-isnt-policy-its-poetry>.

<sup>8</sup> David Schenker, *PolicyWatch 2840: U.S. Security Assistance to Lebanon at Risk* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2017), <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/u.s.-security-assistance-to-lebanon-at-risk>.

<sup>9</sup> Hardin Lang and Alia Awadallah, *Playing the Long Game: U.S. Counterterrorism Assistance for Lebanon* (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, 2017), <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2017/08/30/437853/playing-long-game/>.

<sup>10</sup> Carla E. Humud, *Lebanon* (CRS Report No. R44759) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2017), 11, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R44759.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Steve Scherer, "Lebanon plans to boost army presence on Israel border," *Reuters*, March 15, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-italy-conference/lebanon-plans-to-boost-army-presence-on-israel-border-idUSKCN1GR2P0>.

<sup>12</sup>United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1701, Middle East, S/RES/1701, ¶3, ¶8, <https://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/resolutions/2006.shtml>.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Mr. Abrams.  
Mr. Malley.

**STATEMENT OF ROBERT MALLEY, PRESIDENT AND CEO,  
INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. MALLEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Senator Kaine, other members of the subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me today, to talk about an important country that, as you say, is too often overlooked.

Lebanon is an exceptional country, because it is both a microcosm of the region and an exception to it. It is a microcosm because so many things that ail the region, from sectarian polarization to refugee flows to the role of Sunni jihadism to the role of Iran, and to the role of a nonstate actor and the weakness of a state, all of that is characteristic of Lebanon.

But, at the same time, it is an exception because of the pluralism, the tolerance, the multiconfessional politics, the fact that it manages, for better or for worse, to have relations with the U.S., with Iran, with Saudi Arabia. All those things make Lebanon stand out in a region that suffers from too little of all of that.

And when you think about it, the shocks that Lebanon has, and continues to experience, from the wars that have—that has—it has suffered, from the over a million refugees, as you said, Mr. Chairman, about a quarter of its population, the spillover of the Syrian conflict, in terms of jihadism, but also sectarianism, and Hezbollah's role in that war. Most countries would not have been able to survive that, let alone a country as fragile and as polarized as Lebanon.

The fact that it held together is because of two things. First, the memories of a very bloody civil war, but, second, because it has this awkward and sometimes troubling, and often quite troubling and disturbing balance between its relations with Iran and the role that it has allowed and afforded to a nonstate actor like Hezbollah. It is that balancing which gives Hezbollah, as my good friend Elliott Abrams just said, an outsized role in domestic politics and a veto on foreign policy. It is that balance that has allowed Lebanon to survive against the odds, as it is, and to be as resilient as it is.

But, it is an unsavory balance that also raises the question that, as this subcommittee is examining, is that Elliott just spoke about, that balance means—that unsavory balance means that you have a nonstate actor that is an ally of Iran, that is obviously our enemy, that is dominating local politics. Nothing can be done against their will—governments cannot be formed against their will, a president cannot be chosen against their will—and that has hijacked their foreign policy. And that is why there are some—and Elliott is among them—who is arguing for a break from traditional U.S. policy, which has been to try to balance Hezbollah's influence by supporting independence or sovereign institutions—in particular, the LAF—and trying to prevent a recurrence of an Israeli/Hezbollah war. And I think Elliott has made a very strong case about why the policies that we have put in place have not fully achieved the goals that we would have liked to see occur in Leb-

anon. And so, the idea would be—the contrary idea would be, let us diminish Hezbollah, and therefore Iran’s role, by sanctioning, punishing, cutting off aid to institutions like the LAF.

Now, in a word, as with so many of these theories in the Middle East, it looks very good in practice—in theory; in practice, it is wrongheaded and dangerous. I think we have learned from experience that grand theories to try to change and to disturb the equilibrium in a particular country—in this case, Lebanon—often has unintended consequences with—which we should think about very carefully and prudently before going down that road.

In this case, if we were to cut off assistance and halt our aid to the LAF, it could jeopardize Lebanon’s stability. If we provoked a confrontation between Hezbollah and the LAF, I think we know who would prevail. It could intensify risks of war with Israel. It would weaken those who we want to support, those who count on independent institutions, who count on the LAF. It would give a freer hand to Iran and Hezbollah to dominate the LAF and other institutions. And, by creating chaos, it also would help Iran, which has a real ability and has always thrived on chaos in the region, whether it is in Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon.

And this is not just theory. I am not just speculating. Saudi Arabia tried, at some point, as you know, to engineer this kind of policy by forcing Prime Minister Hariri to resign in order to force Lebanon to have this choice, “Either you get rid of Hezbollah or you get rid of our assistance. You cannot get both.”

Now, I happened to be in Lebanon on the Monday after Prime Minister Hariri was detained in Saudi Arabia. I happened to be in Saudi Arabia last week, where I had a long meeting with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. I came away from both those meetings, one in November, the other last week, convinced that the Saudi gambit had failed, and only slightly less convinced that the Crown Prince, himself, realizes that it failed. And it failed because Lebanon is a country where you cannot exclude one constituency, like Hezbollah, however much we may not like it. It has failed because all of the Lebanese, including the Sunnis who are closest to Hariri, were against this gambit. They told me, as they have told the Saudis, as they have told U.S. officials, “This is far too dangerous to continue. We need to preserve the stability.”

So, in a few words, what is a better approach? Continue our assistance to—and donor assistance—to Lebanon, ensuring that the LAF and other institutions, in particular, can be strengthened as a counterweight for Hezbollah. When we help the LAF, make sure that we tell them clearly that there are certain lines that they cannot cross, in terms of cooperation with the LAF. Use our—that leverage to get the institutions to work in the right direction. Avoid escalation between Hezbollah and Israel. And there are some—I do not have time here but we have some recommendations, in the International Crisis Group report, on this.

And then, a last point, which may be beyond the remit of this hearing, but I think it is relevant, which is to try to de-escalate tensions in the region and our policies towards Iran, our policies on the Iran nuclear deal, our policies toward Saudi Arabia, which we should support, but not enable. All those, unfortunately, in my—in our opinion, are going in the wrong direction.

So, this is not a grand agenda. It is not as inspirational or transformative as some may like. It is more of the status quo, maintaining our support, maintaining that policy. But, I think Lebanon is too weak, too vulnerable, too susceptible to destabilization to afford grand aspirations. It is not a country where grand dreams are made. It is a country which we have learned, Israel has learned, the French have learned—it is a country where grand dreams are—crash.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Malley follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ROBERT MALLEY

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Kaine, and members of the Committee. First, let me express my deep appreciation for the invitation to testify before you and discuss how best to support security and stability in Lebanon.

I am the President and CEO of the International Crisis Group, a non-governmental organization that conducts field-based research on 40 conflicts and vulnerable countries and monitors another 30 around the world. I previously also had the honor of serving in the White House under both Presidents Clinton and then Obama, most recently as his Senior Adviser for the Counter-ISIL Campaign and White House Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa, and the Gulf region. My government and Crisis Group roles entail different mandates, interests to pursue, and interlocutors with which we can engage; in particular, Crisis Group has the ability to talk to people on all sides of the Lebanese divide, Hezbollah included. Today, I am speaking in my capacity as head of Crisis Group whose overriding goal is to resolve and prevent deadly conflict around the globe.

You will likely have heard from others that the solution to diminishing Hezbollah, and by extension Iranian influence, lies in punishing the Lebanese state, sanctioning it, and conditioning support to its institutions and national army on an end to the Shiite movement's wholly disproportionate role. But Crisis Group's field work and analysis—as well as my own experience—paints a different picture. To drop our assistance to Lebanese state institutions and force a confrontation among Lebanese would produce precisely the opposite of what advocates of this approach purport to achieve. It would jeopardize Lebanon's stability; potentially prompt a domestic showdown in which Hezbollah's superior cohesion and militarily might would prevail; intensify risks of war with Israel; and imperil what remains of Lebanon's state institutions. Besides the enormous human cost entailed, such chaos and violence would come a time when the region already is experiencing far too much of both and would play into the hands of Iran and its allies that thrive on them.

1.

Mr. Chairman, to begin, a few words about Lebanon, a unique case in the region—both a microcosm of the Middle East, but also a striking exception to it. Lebanon has participated in, experienced and suffered from the Israeli-Arab conflict, the pernicious influence of sectarianism, the rise of militant jihadism, interference from regional actors, and dramatic refugee flows. The region's more powerful actors use it, variously, as a venue for their proxy wars, an arena in which to play out the Arab-Israeli conflict, and a testing ground for Saudi-Iranian rivalry.

Yet Lebanon also is that rarest of examples of what so much of the Middle East is lacking: pluralism, tolerance, consensus-based politics, and an ability to maintain relations with the U.S., Iran, and Saudi Arabia. The shocks Lebanon has experienced—from more than a million Syrian refugees, or a quarter of its population, who've poured in through Lebanon's eastern border, in addition to hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees; to a vicious war next door; to the sectarian tensions generated by that war and Hezbollah's direct involvement in it; to the rise of jihadi militancy—would have destabilized even a sturdy country, let alone one as polarized along political and confessional lines. The fact that it continues to hold together in large part is due to memories of the recent civil war but also to the delicate and at times unsavory domestic and foreign balancing act in which it constantly engages.

Its resilience, in other words, has come at a price, including a power-sharing arrangement prone to paralysis, fragmentation along clan, family, regional, social and ideological lines, corruption and vast patronage networks, vulnerability to outside influence and, most notably, the persistent weakness of the central state and its co-

existence with a powerful non-state armed actor closely allied with Iran that enjoys outsized influence. But that price ought not make us ignore the achievement of building and preserving a relatively stable and diverse entity in an exceptionally violent and polarized part of the world and in the wake of an extraordinarily long and bloody civil war. And it must not make us forget the overriding U.S. interest in preserving its stability, helping it cope with the strains caused by the inflow of Syrian refugees, strengthening its national institutions and independence, and avoiding another costly war with Israel.

That once may have been a relatively uncontentious view. No more. My friend and fellow witness, Elliot Abrams, as well as senior officials from Saudi Arabia, advance a different view. They argue that the time has come to rip the mask off a government that, in their view, has simply become a convenient cover for Hezbollah's and, it follows, Iran's agenda in the region. In Abrams' words,

Economic assistance to Lebanon and military assistance to its army should be made dependent on pushing back on Hezbollah and regaining Lebanese independence. The price Lebanon pays for Hezbollah should be made far clearer, and the advantages Hezbollah gains from its control of Lebanon should be reduced—and made far more controversial.

He concludes: "The United States should reassess our military assistance and our entire policy".

That might sound good on paper but is highly risky and inadvisable in practice. Saudi Arabia toyed with this approach late last November, when it unceremoniously compelled Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri to resign in a bid to force his country to choose between continued Saudi assistance and Lebanon's stability on the one hand and Hezbollah continued outsized role on the other. I happened to be in Lebanon the day after Hariri was held up in Riyadh, and I happened to be in Riyadh last week meeting with Crown Prince Mohammed

Bin Salman, on the eve of his visit to the U.S. I came away from both convinced that the Saudi gambit had backfired, and only slightly less convinced that the Crown Prince realizes it. Indeed, since those days, the Kingdom has reverted to a more realistic and pragmatic approach, maintaining ties to Lebanon without a fundamental change in the delicate political balance among Hariri, Hezbollah, and other forces that govern the country.

It's what the U.S. administration also concluded after an animated debate at that time, when sounder minds that saw value in protecting Lebanon's stability and supporting its institutions prevailed over those who argued for the more hazardous option of fully backing the Saudi gambit. It's what I'd like to convince members of this committee of today.

2.

Mr. Chairman, potential threats to Lebanon's resilience could emanate from three distinct sources. The first is a stark disruption in the domestic balance of power which, frustrating and troubling as it may be, has preserved stability against the odds. A second danger is the outbreak of another war between Israel and Hezbollah, whose relations are governed by a regime of mutual deterrence that keeps conflict but one misstep or miscalculation away. The third peril comes from a regional environment that currently is experiencing far too many sources of tension and far too little diplomacy. Let me address each in turn.

As for the domestic equilibrium: Lebanon's relative stability, as I noted, has been purchased at a disturbing cost. It has entailed accommodating an armed movement, Hezbollah, founded with active participation and funding from Iran, with the explicit mission of fighting against the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon at the time and that has been a loyal Iranian ally ever since. Hezbollah, which has developed strong social roots by successfully exploiting the historical marginalization of the Shiite community, acts with considerable autonomy in Lebanese affairs. Today, it holds 12 parliamentary seats and, together with the closely aligned Amal movement, largely monopolizes the Shiite vote in Lebanon's sectarian political system.

But while Hezbollah is thus a political actor that represents the choice and preferences of a sizable Lebanese constituency, as expressed in consecutive elections deemed largely free and fair (2005 and 2009), this, as you know all too well, is only part of the picture. The group has the capacity to maintain, equip and deploy its own militia fighters. It engages and cooperates with state institutions at its own discretion, and it maintains the de facto ability to block actions by political institutions that do not align with its agenda. It takes direct action in foreign theaters such as Syria to promote its agenda. In other words, the two secondary ministries (industry, youth and sport) it presently holds hardly reflects its actual power. Its massive mili-



tary and organizational strength has discouraged or quelled any attempt to challenge it. It has resorted to arms in the past to make this clear and has demonstrated that it will not tolerate any accommodation by the Lebanese state with Israel, nor will it permit any alignment between Lebanon with regional actors that are opposed to the so-called “axis of resistance.” Indeed, in the past, Lebanese politicians who advanced policies contrary to this agenda were the target of assassinations in which Hezbollah’s role is widely suspected. As other Lebanese parties have learned at their expense, at times violently, there is no government, let alone a sustainable one without Hezbollah’s participation and support.

The question for this subcommittee and for the U.S. more broadly, is what to do about this far from satisfactory reality. That was the question Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman asked and answered last November. As he saw it, and as he and other Saudi officials told me, for Hariri to preside over a government that included Hezbollah meant allowing one of Riyadh’s closest allies to cooperate with Tehran’s most loyal partner, and thus to empower and—given various forms of Saudi economic assistance, from the employment of Lebanese workers to its deposits in Lebanese banks, to its import of Lebanese products—indirectly subsidize both Iran and Hezbollah. MBS viewed this as an irrational and counter-productive arrangement and, just 2 days before I coincidentally was to meet with Hariri in Beirut, held him against his will in Riyadh and got him to announce his resignation. As I wrote from Beirut at the time, “That [Hariri] made the statement from Riyadh told much of the story; that he delivered it with the genuineness of one forced to read his own prison sentence told the rest. The decision was announced by the Lebanese prime minister but it was made in Saudi Arabia.” While to this day Saudi officials deny this and maintain Hariri’s resignation was entirely voluntary, few—in Lebanon, in the region, in Europe, or in the U.S. administration—take that denial at face value.

The gambit failed, and it failed in large part because Lebanese—whether Sunni, Christian or Shiite, and whether they support or decry Hezbollah—resented such brazen foreign interference and feared the destabilizing impact of such a disruption of their political order. It failed, too, because most Lebanese understand that, as of now at least, keeping Hezbollah within the government is a better guarantor of peace than forcing it out, and that an inclusive power-sharing arrangement is more stable than an exclusive one.

Indeed, by and large, Hezbollah’s agenda today is one of maintaining internal stability. We should be clear-eyed about why it does so: Hezbollah prizes calm because the status quo serves the organization well. On one hand, formal Lebanese state sovereignty provides a legal umbrella under which it can operate despite terrorist designations, without that state exerting real influence, let alone control over its actions. Preserving stability and state functionality also allows Hezbollah to focus on its military agenda and creates an environment in which its constituents can benefit from state services.

Hezbollah has also shown a readiness to cooperate with political rivals and state institutions on security matters. With Hezbollah’s quiet support, the last several years have seen Lebanon absorb large numbers of Sunni refugees from the Syrian conflict without significant sectarian violence. Hezbollah was also a force for restraint after a series of jihadi attacks against Shiite neighborhoods in the southern suburbs of Beirut between 2012 and 2015.

Hezbollah’s benefiting from the status quo and cooperating with the Lebanese Armed Forces (or LAF) in combatting jihadists is, of course, part of the problem. But it’s also part of the reality we need to take into account in seeking to address it—namely that any effort to break the current governing alliance risks tearing Lebanon down and exposing to a greater jihadist threat. In offering you this picture, I do not mean to suggest any level of comfort with Hezbollah’s status as an armed and unaccountable state within a state. But it is important to have a clear sense of how the group is operating on the ground, and what an effort to exclude it or sanction Lebanese institutions would provoke.

3.

Mr. Chairman, the picture I have just painted counsels in favor of continued donor assistance to the Lebanese state, rather than treating it as a pariah. While one ought not underestimate the role Hezbollah plays in Lebanese political life, and particularly in its foreign policy, it is not coterminous with the Lebanese state, and the Lebanese state cannot be reduced to, or should be held responsible for, the actions of an actor that has largely usurped its foreign policy. Furthermore, punishing the Lebanese state and weakening its institutions by withholding support likely would not inflict substantial harm on Hezbollah, which may be appropriating some

of this support but does not rely on it. It would, however, disproportionately affect those Lebanese who attempt to defend what remains of the autonomy of state institutions, and their capacity to enable governance and participation in sectors that have not been captured by Hezbollah. As a Lebanese academic once quipped: “People say that Hezbollah is a state within a state, but in reality it’s a state within a failed state”. Getting that state to function better and with more autonomy will not rein in Hezbollah in the short term, but may narrow their base of support further down the road. By contrast, cutting off all support to and cooperation with the LAF would leave Iran and its allies without competition.

The Lebanese army and other security forces form an important bulwark against the influence of jihadi elements in Lebanon, defeating ISIS and AQ-affiliated groups. Investing in these institutions is likely to be particularly important following the impending defeat of jihadi elements in Syria, which may prompt such groups to move to ungoverned or weakly controlled areas of neighboring countries like Lebanon. By supporting Lebanese institutions, the U.S. and donors more broadly can support stabilization of the perimeter of the Syrian conflict, help prevent spillover effects, and help provide security for the vast Syrian refugee community that currently resides in Lebanon.

But there should be no expectation that Lebanese state security agencies will face down Hezbollah militarily. For one, even with much better equipment and training than they have today, these forces and agencies will not be a match to the size, equipment and combat experience of Hezbollah, in particular after the latter’s participation, and training acquired, in the Syrian conflict. More importantly still, Lebanese security institutions comprise a cross-section of Lebanese society, and a significant part of their personnel, if put to the test, should be expected to place loyalty to the sectarian community to which they belong over loyalty to the Lebanese state. An open confrontation between Hezbollah, which enjoys the overwhelming support of the Shiite community, and any state security institution will almost certainly lead to the fracturing of the latter into its sectarian components, and initiate a sectarian civil war from which Hezbollah is likely to emerge victorious. Such a course in any event almost certainly would be rejected by the security establishment itself, as well as by the majority of political actors, including Hezbollah’s opponents.

Following the upcoming elections in May, the emergence of yet another “national unity government”, in which Hezbollah and its allies will be included, is highly probable. Hezbollah has expressed the clear intention to continue the current, broad political alliance that enabled the unblocking of the political/constitutional impasse in late 2016. The U.S. administration should accept this irrespective of its view of the organization, as an adversarial government formation would likely return Lebanon to the paralysis that characterized its politics prior to 2016, and potentially would be destabilizing, without affecting the behavior of the organization and Lebanon’s regional posture.

Finally, the U.S., and other international donors, should continue and if possible enhance support for Syrian refugees. Lebanon is bearing a huge burden remarkably well, but there are clear signs of strain. It is critical to continue financial support of humanitarian agencies to prevent existing tensions between refugees and host communities from escalating, and the Lebanese authorities from responding to popular pressure by pushing for unsafe returns to Syria.

## 4.

Mr. Chairman, the second threat facing Lebanon, as I mentioned, is another Israeli-Hezbollah war.

Although Israel and Hezbollah face each other across Lebanon’s southern border, and although tensions are mounting regarding the precise path of Israel’s fence and the delineation of the Lebanese and Israeli maritime Exclusive Economic Zones, few in Lebanon seem to believe such a war is imminent. Both protagonists have cause for self-restraint. Hezbollah knows that a provocation on its part would be met by devastating Israeli force. And the very reason Israel wishes to forcefully strike Hezbollah is the reason that it is inhibited from doing so—namely the prospect of a barrage of missiles on its urban centers. While Israel still possesses far greater ability to inflict pain, Hezbollah possesses far greater capacity to absorb it, which means that any large-scale Israeli operation runs the risk of being open-ended.

At bottom, and despite the huge disparity in military power, each party recognizes in the other a formidable adversary and that any conflict likely would be far more destructive than their last military confrontation in 2006. On the one hand, according to Israel’s own assessments, Hezbollah had some 16,000 missiles on the eve of the 2006 war and holds today 130,000 missiles, including some with more advanced capacities. On the other hand, Israeli officials have made clear that, should a war

break out, this time they would make little distinction between Hezbollah and the state behind which it hides. In the words of a senior Israeli military commander,

If a war breaks out in the northern arena we need to act with full force from the beginning. What we could do in 34 days during the second Lebanon war we can now do in 48 to 60 hours. The growth of our strength has not been linear. This is potential power unimaginable in its scope, much different to what we have seen in the past and far greater than people estimate.

In a similar vein, last October, Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman warned, “today, the Lebanese army has lost its independence and is another unit in Hezbollah’s apparatus, and therefore, as far as we are concerned, the infrastructure of the Lebanese army and the Lebanese state is one with the infrastructure of Hezbollah.”

There are other reasons why war may not be imminent. The presence of United Nations peacekeepers (the UNIFIL mission continues to patrol the area between the Litani river and the Israel-Lebanon border with a total of 10,838 troops) and the existence of established channels for communication and mediation of disputes helps manage the risk of an accidental escalation. Because both Israel and Hezbollah have understood the de facto “rules of the game,” mutual deterrence has worked for the past 12 years to keep the peace on that border. The recently more vocal maritime dispute between the two countries already secured constructive U.S. mediation efforts, led by the State Department, and is unlikely to lead to war.

Yet any sense of complacency would be misplaced. Those rules of the game have been challenged by significant changes in the ground, most notably the Syrian conflict and attendant growth of Iran’s and Hezbollah’s presence in that country. In response, Israel has described several redlines the crossing of which already has, or will prompt a military response. First, Israel has made clear it would not accept Hezbollah developing the indigenous capacity to build high-precision missiles whether in Lebanon or Syria. Against the backdrop of Israel’s successes in blocking convoys with high-precision missiles from Syria, Israeli officials claim Hezbollah has attempted to build subterranean high-precision missile factories in both countries. If Israel were to destroy such a factory, Hezbollah and its allies may forcefully react, potentially triggering a major conflict.

Second, Israel is determined to prevent Hezbollah or Shiite militias from approaching the 1974 armistice line in southwest Syria and setting up offensive infrastructure in its vicinity. Yet if the Syrian regime were to seek to retake the southwest, it likely would do so with support from Hezbollah which could mean hundreds of Hezbollah fighters adjacent to the Israeli-Syrian fence. Israel fears that troops operating from this area, which has no Shiite population, would be harder to deter than Hezbollah forces operating from southern Lebanon, where any firefight with Israeli forces would produce large numbers of casualties among the organization’s core constituency.

Third, and more broadly, Israel wants to prevent its rivals from consolidating a permanent military presence anywhere in Syria, which, it fears, would strengthen their hand in future wars as well as their influence in Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinian arena. Iran is of particular concern: Israel’s redlines seek to block it from establishing an airport, naval port, military base, or permanent presence of militias. Israel has already demonstrated its resolve to disrupt the construction of this sort of major military infrastructure.

Under virtually any of these scenarios, including those originally limited to Syria, the risk of war spreading to Lebanon would be considerable. If a tit-for-tat encounter were to begin in the southwest, and pressure to build in Israel to conduct a more robust response, it would have to choose among a series of bad options: target Hezbollah in Lebanon; strike Syrian targets in an effort to force Damascus or Moscow to rein in Hezbollah; or, should strain mount to levels it deems unbearable, launch an incursion into Syria to push Hezbollah back. All have the potential to trigger a wider war. And, as noted, the odds of that war being far more intense, bloody and costly than the last confrontation that occurred in 2006 would be high.

The region already had one close call. In February 2018, Israel responded to the intrusion of an Iranian drone into its airspace with airstrikes against alleged Iranian bases in Syria. During that attack, Israel lost an F16 fighter jet and responded by destroying a part of the Syrian anti-aircraft defenses. The chain of events demonstrates the potential for rapid escalation in the southern Syria theater. Were Hezbollah involved in such a cycle of escalation, it almost certainly would spill into an all-out confrontation in Lebanon.

It is often said, in both Israel and in Lebanon, that the next war is no longer a matter of “if” but of “when”. Israel, from this perspective simply cannot accept the presence of a large, armed non-state actors on its borders whose ability to inflict

pain would, over time, significantly limit Israel's freedom of maneuver. And Hezbollah would feel no choice but to react, lest it lose what is left of its "resistance" credentials. The trendline of the past four decades or so provides fodder for this view. Since 1978, Israel and Lebanon have been involved in three major confrontations, and the current lull—some 12 years of relative calm—has been the longest since 1978.

For various reasons, the U.S. enjoys only modest ability to prevent such an occurrence but it should use whatever influence it retains. Together with Russia and Jordan, it is a co-signatory of the southwestern ceasefire agreement, which includes limitations on Iranian and Hezbollah presence in the area. In a recent report, Crisis Group recommended steps to bolster this arrangement and decrease risks of a Syrian regime attempt to retake the southwest—and thus reduce the odds of an Israeli-Hezbollah war. In reality, however, Russia has the most important role to play in that effort. Alone among major players, it enjoys good relations with all parties involved—Syria, Israel, Iran and Hezbollah—and all these regional actors in turn feel some obligation to accommodate Russian concerns. Moscow reportedly stepped in directly in early February to keep the confrontation triggered by the drone incursion from spinning wholly out of control. But it can and should do more: rather than rushing to contain such flare-ups, Russia should facilitate channels of mediation and the establishment of rules of the game that would prevent such escalation from occurring in the first place. The U.S. should be clear with Russia on what those rules should be, and what Israel's redlines are.

## 5.

The third threat to Lebanon's stability is one that would appear beyond this hearing's remit, but it is not. I am referring to the broader regional context. Instability and conflict in the Middle East is nothing new. What is new, however, is Iran's unusually far-reaching regional role, an unusually apprehensive Israel, an unusually assertive Saudi leadership and, of course, an unusual U.S. president. As for Iran: For several years now, it has successfully exploited regional chaos to spread or enhance its influence in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen. As for Israel: For months now, it has been sounding alarm bells about Hezbollah's and Iran's growing footprint in Syria, and more particularly about the Lebanese movement's potential capacity to indigenously produce precision-guided missiles.

As for the new Saudi leadership: MBS is convinced that Iran for too long has viewed Saudi Arabia as a punching bag, and that Saudi Arabia for too long has obliged. He sees Tehran possessing far less money, military equipment, or powerful international allies than Riyadh, yet nonetheless on the ascent, exerting or expanding control over Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut, and Sanaa. He believes that only by more forcefully and aggressively pushing back—whether in Yemen, Iraq, or Lebanon—can Saudi Arabia and its partners halt Iran and turn the tide.

As for the U.S.: Unpredictable and inconstant in so many ways, President Trump has been consistent in one regard at least, which is a belligerency toward Iran that has become the hallmark of his administration's Mideast policy. U.S. officials evoke his willingness to take action against Iran to restore the U.S. credibility and deterrence he feels his predecessor frittered away. To which one might add the administration's calling into question the Iranian nuclear deal and considering ramping up sanctions against Tehran, which unnecessarily heightens tensions. In this, the U.S. approach appears to be very much of a piece with the kingdom's: dismissive of diplomatic engagement with Tehran and persuaded of the need to establish a new balance of power.

In such a tense environment, conflict is always but one step away, and confrontation in one arena quickly could spread to another. While the nuclear deal, by design, was tailored to exclusively address concerns over Iran's nuclear program, the implications of its demise may become manifest not only in stepped-up Iranian efforts to enrich uranium but in asymmetric responses by Tehran, targeting U.S. forces deployed in close proximity to Iranian local partners in Iraq, Syria or Afghanistan. Economic sanctions against Iran might have effects in Syria's Deir el-Zour province, where U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces and Iranian-backed Shiite militias compete over territory that has strategic value and energy resources. Another missile strike fired by Huthis in Yemen toward a Saudi or Emirati city or an inadvertent clash in the Strait of Hormuz could provide justification for direct U.S. retaliation on Iranian soil, or for new sanctions that could jeopardise the JCPOA. All of which could—given its susceptibility to regional dynamics—quickly drag Lebanon into a regional escalation.

Missing from this picture is any hint of diplomacy—between Iran and Saudi Arabia or between Iran and the U.S. Rather, the region faces a free for all in which

the only operative restraint on one's actions is nervousness over what it might provoke. That's hardly reassuring and ought to change. That need not mean halting efforts to push back against Iranian destabilizing activities. But it would mean halting efforts to undo the Iranian nuclear deal and resuming at least some of the high-level U.S.-Iranian engagement that existed in recent years.

6.

This, then, is the complex reality of Lebanon and Hezbollah. A surprisingly resilient but nevertheless fragile Lebanese state coexists with an autonomous armed actor, Hezbollah, that is fixed in its opposition to Israel and alliance with Iran; a tense Israeli-Hezbollah relationship that is a single mistake or misinterpreted signal away from a very dangerous confrontation; and regional context rife with conflict trigger points and devoid of diplomacy.

Mr. Chairman, given this picture, the lesson—unsatisfying as it might seem—is that outside actors, the U.S. among them, should deal cautiously with Lebanese affairs; bolster the central government and its institutions, notably the LAF; mitigate risks of a new Israel-Hezbollah confrontation; reduce regional tensions through diplomatic engagement, including with Iran, all the while the putting aside more ambitious goals.

This is not necessarily the most inspiring or transformational of agendas. But Lebanon is too weak, too vulnerable, too fragile, too finely balanced to be the vehicle for a transformative agenda. Lebanon is not the place where grand dreams are made. It's where they crash.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, to both of you.

You have both raised some questions that I think we ought to explore a little bit. And that is—Mr. Abrams, you noted, as I did in my opening statement, that there are elections, May—what is it?—6th? May 12th? And there are 1,000 people running. And your suggestion was that perhaps Hezbollah will make gains in those elections. What are your thoughts? I want to hear both of your thoughts on this. Do you think the people of Lebanon have a clear vision of the effects of electing a terrorist—a designated terrorist organization to be the government of the country? We have a model there with—in—obviously, in Gaza. And, in my mind, I see parallels there, that if, indeed, the electorate makes that choice—and, of course, they can make a choice that they want to make—some bad things are going to happen. Your thoughts, please.

Mr. ABRAMS. I think they certainly recognize the nature of the coalition government they have had, of which—today—of which Hezbollah is a part. And certainly everybody in Lebanon recognizes that Hezbollah has, let us call it, extra-constitutional powers just by virtue of the fact that it has the guns. But, I think they do not have a sense that—of the price they are paying, because we do not set a price.

I was struck, in Rob's testimony, that he said, you know, in a sense—another version of what I said, that is, he said, "We need to set limits." And I basically said, "Unless there are limits, we should not give them any money." I think we are saying, in that sense, the same thing. We ought to be saying to the LAF and to the—more generally, the people of Lebanon, "Certain things are not permissible, and they will cause us to walk away." And we have actually not done that. I mean, in the speech that Secretary Tillerson made in Beirut, he just applauded. Everything was just wonderful in Lebanon. There was no sense that—yes, he attacked Hezbollah, but he did not say, nor did we say at the Rome Conference, "The following things are unacceptable to us, and they are going to have to change." So, unless we say that, I think Lebanese will not get that message.

Senator RISCH. Mr. Malley, you may have a different view.

Mr. MALLEY. Well, first of all, I think the elections are not going to change much of—on the political equilibrium in the country. This is a finely balanced—they have a new electoral law, but in—I think we are going to see a replica of what we see today. It is going to be a national unity government. Those are the only ones that work. Lebanon experienced, in the past, an attempt to exclude one party or the other. It does not work. And, in fact, their basic—their constitution kind of requires that every constituency be represented. Hezbollah has a constituency among Shiites. It is, by far, the most powerful movement among Shia, with Amal, which is its ally. So, they will have that support and its—and we will not be able to diminish that support, even if we were to threaten a cutoff in aid. Hezbollah simply is too powerful among its constituents.

And it is true, as Elliott says, it is—Lebanese may not know the price they pay by voting for Hezbollah. I think they would continue—the Shiites will continue to vote for them. They do know the price of trying to confront Hezbollah. For better or for worse, they have experience in the past. Hezbollah is a stronger party. And the army, itself, would splinter if there was a confrontation, because many Shia and others in the army would join Hezbollah.

So, I think we have to be very realistic about what can be achieved and how our threats would play, or not, on Lebanese theater. My understanding, from talking to U.S. officials, is that they—we do tell the LAF. Of course, they are doing more, they are cooperating more, or they are working more with Hezbollah than as—than we might like. In some cases, because they had to cooperate with them to get rid of ISIS and get rid of al Qaeda on the border, they have worked together. But, we do set certain lines about how much we do not want them to cooperate. And the truth is, if we were not there, if we did not have that leverage, that cooperation and that sort of—the takeover by Hezbollah of the LAF would be—would probably be far more extensive than we are seeing today.

So, this is not a comfortable situation, but it is the reality of Lebanon today, that there is no politics without Hezbollah, there is no equilibrium or balance or stability without Hezbollah. And either we decide that we are going to leave the—Lebanon and the Lebanese to that dominance and to Iran, and we are not going to play a role, or we are going to have to try to find a way to shape it as we go along.

Senator RISCH. Mr. Abrams, do you want to take a minute to respond?

Mr. ABRAMS. Yeah, I just—I think there is a strawman being built here. I did not suggest cutting off Lebanon without a cent. I did not suggest breaking relations. I did not suggest that we end our economic assistance.

I do think, though, that—you know, that Rob is operating on a theory, which is that if we significantly diminish our military aid, then there will be more cooperation between the LAF and Hezbollah. You know, we do not give them the whole budget. The budget—we probably give about 10 or 20 percent of the LAF and ISF budget. So, this is operating on a theory. And I think we would be better off saying certain things are just not acceptable, and some

of those things are things that they have done—handing bases over from the LAF to Hezbollah, watching them parade, making no effort, really, to push back. Now, maybe they cannot push back, but then why are we paying for it?

Senator RISCH. Senator Kaine.

Senator KAINE. You know, these are great discussions. So, let me just pick up on that. Because it is the case that Mr. Abrams was not talking about a cut, he is talking about with the right limitations. But, I would say it is also the case that Mr. Malley is not just advocating a theory, or at least not just his own theory, because what he is advocating would be what Secretary Tillerson advocates and also what General Votel and Secretary Mattis advocate.

But, let me ask you a hard question, Mr. Malley. So, if we pursue this direction, the—you know, the Malley/Votel/Mattis/Tillerson—what is the long game? Hezbollah continues to grow, you know, a little bit stronger, a little bit stronger, a little bit stronger. What is the path to something better? What is the path to something where Israel can feel more secure with its next-door neighbor or there is a better chance of, you know, a Lebanon that can deal with its internal challenges more successfully?

Mr. Malley.

Mr. MALLEY. It is a great question. And I do not think it is going to be resolved by us dealing with Lebanon. This is a big question having to do with Iran's policy in the region, which is why I think the third point that I made, which is, we have to—we have to push back against Iran. I do not think doing it without diplomacy, without engagement, is going to get us where we want to go. But, it is a big problem that—you know, administration after administration, the ones that Elliott served and the ones I served in, have not been able to tackle, which is, What do we do about Iran's role in the region? What do we do about the existence of an armed militia, like Hezbollah, with 100,000 missiles? That is a real problem. But, it is not by—I do not think—and I am not saying that Elliott is suggesting it—it is not by cutting off aid, or threatening to cut off aid to the LAF, that we are going to address that issue. That is going to take a transformation in the region. It may take events beyond our control that might happen in Iran, that would happen in Lebanon.

Senator KAINE. How about—there is legislation pending before the committee on additional Hezbollah-related sanctions. So, say we leave the LAF funding and other economic support steady to show that a continued partnership—what about the viability of additional sanctions? I think there is a Rubio-Shaheen bill that has been pending.

Mr. MALLEY. So, I am not familiar with the details of that bill. I have seen other bills in the past. I think one question is, Is it going to—I think we have sanctioned Hezbollah.

Senator KAINE. Right.

Mr. MALLEY. Again, different administrations have, including the ones in which I served. The question is, are we also affecting Lebanon's economy? And we have to be careful that we do not affect ordinary Lebanese. And Lebanese in—I am sure you know it, be-

cause you get those phone calls—Sunni, Christian, and Shia, who say, “Be careful. Our banking sector”——

Senator Kaine. Right.

Mr. Malley.—“is teetering.” And so, we have to just be careful about that.

But, I will say, not—you know, this is not a position against sanctions. We have to be realistic about what it is going to achieve. Sanctions are not going to diminish Hezbollah’s power. Their power does not depend on whether the U.S. is providing, or others are providing, forms of assistance. There may be an initial, “Why do we want”—as Elliott says, “Well, are we supporting them—why should we be supporting Lebanon if it is giving this kind of cover to Hezbollah?” But, again, that is not going to resolve the very big question you ask, which is a question we have been trying to grapple with for a long time, but not resolving, which is——

Senator Kaine. Here is a big question that I grapple with. And when I go to Lebanon or elsewhere, when I go to southern Turkey or Iraq or Jordan, one of the questions I hear, but especially in Lebanon, is, “We feel like we are just, you know, being trampled on by a Iranian-Saudi proxy war.” People really feel like they are under the thumb of a big proxy war. And they—you know, the people I talk to are very upset about Iranian influence, but they are also upset about Saudi influence. The reaction to this forced, you know, resignation—I know that Prime Minister Hariri’s popularity has really been boosted in the aftermath of this, because there was a strong reaction in Lebanon against, you know, a foreign government trying to decide who the PM should be.

How do you think Prime—either of you—how can, or likely will, the Prime Minister use that boost to try to make improvements? Or is that something that is just temporary, that is going to fade and does not give him any really increased ability to make improvements?

Mr. Abrams. Well, that would be my judgment about it. I do not think you will see much of a change. I think he did have a boost in popularity, but I do not think, even in the Sunni community, he is viewed as a kind of strong leader, let us say, that his father was.

Mr. Malley. I do not necessarily disagree. I think he did get a boost. I think that boost is probably going to be temporary, as political boosts often are in many situations. But, I think that the point you made—and, again, I happened to be in Lebanon at the time—Sunnis who are very close to Hariri, who are very anti-Hezbollah, who are very pro-American, were saying, “How could Saudi Arabia do this? It is making us look bad. It is making us look like puppets.” And that is why I think, with pressure from here and from the French and others, the Crown Prince reversed that decision, which I think was wise, because it was backfiring.

Senator Kaine. All right. I will stop right there, let others ask.

Senator Risch. Senator Young.

Senator Young. Well, thank you, gentlemen, for being here today. You have had an interesting back-and-forth, and it is already been instructive for me.

There seems to be some common agreement that our assistance to the LAF—more generally, to Lebanon—should be conditional upon certain good behavior. There perhaps is disagreement about



the tactics we employ, but I think, foundationally, you have both agreed that—actually, you have explicitly stated that was the case.

So, my question is, Is it feasible for, say, our State Department to establish achievable, verifiable conditions, to lay those out, to make those very clear to the Lebanese? And, if so, what would you regard as some of those—the most important benchmarks or conditions that need to be achieved?

Mr. MALLEY. So, as you say, I think, you know, neither one of us would want to give *carte blanche* and say they can do whatever they want. If, tomorrow, the LAF were completely under the control of Hezbollah, I do not—I think it would be hard to argue for continued assistance. I think where we would differ is, I think where we are today, and where the State Department and the—and General Votel and Secretary Mattis are, is that—where we are today, that is a right balance. I do not know that we want to be as explicit. I think it is the kind of thing, as I understand it and from my experience, that we work directly with the LAF, and we say there are some things, in terms of the degree of coordination and cooperation with Hezbollah that would cross the line. It is more we know when we see it rather than red lines, which then may lead Hezbollah to try to cross them.

So, I think there are steps about how closely the LAF and Hezbollah coordinate, how much Hezbollah has direction, in terms of the decisions that the LAF is making. But, I would—I think, again, where we differ is that today I do not think that we should be at a point where we say that, if the status quo were to continue, then Lebanon should see implications, in terms of the degree of our assistance.

Senator YOUNG. So, Mr. Abrams, do you have different thoughts about the extent we should—

Mr. ABRAMS. Yeah, I would say—

Senator YOUNG. —we should be explicit about what constitutes good behavior? And then, secondarily, would it be feasible, to borrow, actually, a construct that Senator Kaine put forward in a different setting, to perhaps put some money in escrow until the Lebanese come into good behavior?

Mr. ABRAMS. I think that is—

Senator YOUNG. This is a different context—

Mr. ABRAMS. Yeah. I think it is a very interesting idea, because I think there are some things—I do not mean that we should shout them from the rooftops. We can say them privately to the LAF. It will become known to Hezbollah within about 10 minutes. We do not want to see any visible cooperation between those two. And you do see visible cooperation. That is just one example.

I would like to take a look at the question of promotions within the LAF, where I believe Hezbollah has pretty much a veto power, which is really—really ought to be unacceptable to us.

So, I think there are things that we could talk about to the LAF in private that we would set as more or less red lines, or at least as things that we are going to consider at the top of the list if we are going to release the escrow fund, for example.

Senator YOUNG. Let me pivot to Hezbollah and its threat to Israel. Mr. Abrams, how has Hezbollah's rocket and missile arsenal

changed since the 2006 war, in terms of size of the arsenal and the range of the missiles?

Mr. ABRAMS. It is generally believed that the arsenal is something like five or six times as large, from 10- to 20,000 to 100- to 150,000 missiles. And in 2006, they were really dumb bombs. Now Hezbollah has at least a few thousand targetable rockets that can go after a powerplant, a desalination plant, the IDF headquarters. This is why Israel is spending so much effort trying to prevent Iran from getting more of those to Hezbollah or creating a precision weapons factory in Syria or Lebanon. So, the level of danger has risen considerably.

Senator YOUNG. I can only imagine how Americans would feel if we were under a similar situation, where our most populous cities were under a threat of—a continuous threat, as are the Israelis. What might we do, as a government, that we are not doing to assist the Israelis, our strongest ally in the region, dealing with this threat?

Mr. ABRAMS. I think you are doing it, actually.

Senator YOUNG. Okay.

Mr. ABRAMS. I mean, one thing is to make sure that we pre-position munitions in Israel so that you do not have to have the kind of airlift we needed in 1973. Another is to join with the Israelis in building the various forms of rocket and missile defense that have been very useful to them already, and can be very useful to us, as well. And Congress has been really quite generous in financing that.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you.

Senator RISCH. Mr. Malley, briefly, do you agree with Mr. Abrams' assessment of the situation regarding the rockets in Lebanon?

Mr. MALLEY. I think that is an uncontroversial—I mean, I think people generally agree with it. That is the size of Hezbollah. I think the real question is, what is the risk of war? The International Crisis Group has the ability to talk to all parties. I think our assessment, having spoken to leadership in Israel and in—and among Hezbollah, is that neither side wants a war right now, precisely because of this balance of deterrence, what Hezbollah calls “balance of terror,” that Hezbollah knows it would be decimated if it provoked Israel. But, Israel also knows that, if it had to face 100,000 rockets pouring on its cities, that would be very difficult. I think they would do it if they felt they had to, but neither side right now is itching for a fight.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you, Mr. Malley.

Senator RISCH. Senator Murphy.

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

I think it would be a mistake if we left this hearing viewing Lebanon through the prism of “a problem child.” It has challenges, it has an alliance in connection to Hezbollah and Iran that causes difficulties for us. But, we would wish for the existence of a Lebanon-like political arrangements on many of its neighbors. This is a multiethnic, pluralistic, coalition government. It is a nation that is, by and large, stable, free from military/civil conflict. And it is also, by the way, hosting 1.5 million Syrian refugees, which equals one-quarter of the country's population. Without Lebanon's agreements

to host those refugees, our military operations in Syria would be in a very different position today.

And so, I think this is a very useful conversation about how we try to prompt Lebanon to move in a different direction with respect to its relationship with Hezbollah. But, I think it is important to celebrate the successes of a country that should have collapsed by now, given all of the challenges that it confronts, and could be a model for other nations with respect to how it has been able to weave together people of different faiths and different ethnic backgrounds.

And, with that in mind, I wanted to ask you, Mr. Malley, to maybe expand on your third point. You said, "Listen, the future of Lebanon is really much more about this broader contest." And what the Saudis did is really extraordinary. It may have backfired, and they may have pulled back, thanks, in part, to some intervention from the United States and others, but it begs the question what their next gambit may be and how the new positioning by this administration, as a relatively unconditional supporter of the Saudis' regional plays, will affect the decision they make a year from now, or 2 years from now.

Should we worry about MBS' emboldened position and his next attempt to try to force the hands of the Lebanese? Is this it? Are they just back in their corner, or are we perhaps—should we be thinking about getting ready for another potentially destabilizing effort inside Lebanon?

Mr. MALLEY. Well, first of all, thank you, Senator Murphy, for what you said at the beginning, which is exactly my view. I said, at the beginning of my testimony, there is so much that Lebanon is an exception to the rest of the region, and that we need to support the pluralistic, tolerant, multiconfessional. Also, as you say, Lebanon has too often been the arena for the struggles of other. Whether it is regional neighbors, whether it is others, it has been the victim of power politics by regional and international actors, and they have always paid a very heavy price. And I think we now can—this is one of the longest stretches of time where Lebanon has not been the victim of those conflicts, if you—since the second Israeli/Hezbollah war in 2006. And that is—that is, again, something to be, not just celebrated, but to be supported.

I spoke earlier about Saudi Arabia's gambit. I believe it backfired. I also said I was in Saudi Arabia last week, where I met with the Crown Prince. My sense—but, this is just my words, not his—I think that he realizes that the gambit backfired, and they have a—they have now reverted to a more pragmatic approach of, basically, status quo ante of work, trying to support those institutions in Lebanon that are sovereign and independent.

How long that would last, he still—I think, still believes, deep down, sort of as Elliott would say, that there is something wrong with this picture. Why are we supporting a country in which Hezbollah is a—not just a partner, but the dominant partner?

And that brings me to the issue of U.S. policy. I have nothing against supporting Saudi Arabia. I do think there is a problem when we enable them, and enable their worst instincts. And I think that has been a trend in Yemen, it has been a trend in their—at the beginning of this Lebanese adventure. It has been a

trend in their conflict—their dispute with Qatar. I think support has to come with good advice, and support has to come with trying to channel Saudi—the renewed vision for the region, channel it in the right direction. And I hope—and, in this case, as you know well, after a first supportive—expression of support by the administration for what was—what had gone on between Saudi Arabia and Lebanon, there was an—strong pushback by Assistant Secretary Satterfield—Acting Assistant Secretary Satterfield. I think that needs to continue. We need to tell the Crown Prince, “Here are some things that you ought not to do.”

Senator MURPHY. Let me try to sneak in a question to you, Mr. Abrams. You can take a stick approach with the LAF and with the Lebanese government, and you can take a carrot approach. I wanted to ask you about—because we have got a proposed budget that, you know, will not see the light of day here from the Trump administration, that proposes, you know, wiping out 56 percent of the bilateral aid that we give to Lebanon. But, what about a concerted effort to try to reach out to the Shia populations in Lebanon to convince them that Iran is not only—is not their only friend, is not their only protectorate, that they have other places to turn? The Iranians have done this effectively throughout the region. In Bahrain, they reached out and convinced the Shia populations that the only way that they could gain protection as a minority population was to turn to Iran. What about using additional assistance, rather than just the threat of cutting off assistance, especially with respect to the Shia population, to try to give them a choice?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, I would like to see us make an effort to get more Shia away from Hezbollah. And I think it is very hard to measure what percentage of the Shia population actually does not support Hezbollah. It is not zero. But I do not know if we are really equipped to do it. I do not know if we really know how to do that. I would like to see us do it in Bahrain, as well, which is another hearing. But I do think that we should be thinking about ways to get the Shia population to see the problem more clearly, and to begin to turn away from Hezbollah. The problem you run into there is Hezbollah’s power, which does not primarily come from speeches, it comes from—primarily from the fact that they have the guns.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator RISCH. Senator Booker.

Senator BOOKER. Thank you so much.

Mr. Malley, just real quick, the instability in southern Lebanon, the incredible influx of refugees, the poverty amongst the populations there, to me it creates an environment where radicalism much more easily takes root. And I am wondering, in that context, with all the levers that the United States has, how important is, you know, USAID’s education efforts going on there, trying to service children? Could you just sort of let—help me understand, in terms of—as we think about all these levers that we have, the importance of doing direct support to poor populations, particularly children, education, things like that?

Mr. MALLEY. Thank you, Senator Booker.

I think this piggybacks on the question that Senator Murphy asked, and I think it is absolutely right. We—where do we have value added? We have value added in many things that are soft

power—our economy, our support for refugees, our support for programs on the ground, which right now in southern Lebanon—I mean, where does Hezbollah’s strength originally come from? From the fact that they were the vehicle for the empowerment of the community, the Shiites, who felt disempowered and marginalized. Others need to step in. Again, that is what Senator Murphy said.

And the broader point here, which relates to Hezbollah and Iran’s influence, if there is one lesson I think we could take from the last 15 or more years, is that instability, chaos, that is what benefits Iran. That was true in Lebanon, it was true in—it is true in Yemen today, it is true in Syria, it was definitely true in Iraq. Whereas our value, our strength comes from when we could support institutions, when our economic strength comes into play, where our social programs come into play. We should not be promoting instability. And again, I am not saying that is what my friend Elliott is advocating, but some of these policies could lead—and what the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia had tried at one point—could lead to instability, and that instability not only helps radicalism, it also supports the efforts of a country like Iran that knows how to prosper on chaos.

Senator BOOKER. Do you want to comment on that?

Mr. ABRAMS. Just one brief comment. And that is, I agree with that, but I do think that, on the economic side, we have to take a careful look at the Lebanese banking system, which has often been used by Hezbollah. And, I mean, hundreds of millions of dollars come into Hezbollah, some from Iran, but many from illegal activities, including narcotics trafficking, primarily in Latin America. And a lot of that goes through the Lebanese banking system. So, while I agree that it is fragile, if it is a criminal enterprise, it needs to be investigated and sanctioned by the United States. That is what our laws are there for. So, I would not give them a pass on that.

Senator BOOKER. So, can I drill down on that a little bit more? Because, obviously, I think that Shaheen-Rubio did a pretty good job with helping us get more at the Lebanese banks to—trying to stop Hezbollah, these payments. But, what I am hearing and my staff is hearing is that the way that Hezbollah is moving these days is more in bulk cash payments, not through banking systems. They are using them for weapons transfers. And so, are the banks really the center of what we should be focusing our—that tool in our toolbox, the—our efforts at sanctioning—are we, in some ways, not getting into the root of the problem with the way that Hezbollah is moving its resources?

Mr. ABRAMS. I would not say there is a root. I would not say that the banks are the only way they are doing it. But—and I am not seeing the intel, these days. You are. But, I do not think that the Lebanese banking system gets a pass on this. Hezbollah is there and continues to use that banking system.

Senator BOOKER. Mr. Malley, you want to comment on that at all?

Mr. MALLEY. So, I mean, I—again, I think we have, historically, sanctioned Lebanese banks. Obviously, Hezbollah will find ways to circumvent that. They will always look for ways. I think we just have to be careful—and when we go after the banks, to make sure

that—and my understanding is that the Treasury Department is—feels like there has been progress made. That is—again, I do not get the intelligence briefings, either. We just have to be careful that we are not drowning the country, even as we are trying to hit Hezbollah. Because this is a fragile country, and their banking sector is pivotal for their economy. I think there are steps we can take. Maybe there is more that we could take. But, let us not go there with a sledge hammer and wreck up the country in the process.

Senator BOOKER. And then, just finally, I have a worry about just the—with the Iranian drone coming over and doing an incursion into Israel, with heightened tensions, with the instability that I see in the aftermath of the major conflicts in Syria, Iran's influence in Syria—I just have this—a growing concern that one of the things we should be looking at, put the JCPOA aside, is just a conflict between Israel—a direct conflict between Israel and Iran. Can you let me—help me understand how realistic my concerns are and what we should be thinking about, in terms of not allowing such a conflict to take place?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, I think you would get a proxy conflict, in a sense, between Hezbollah, backed by Iran, and Israel. And I think that is the—what we are all worried about. When I travel to Israel, I hear less and less about the Iran nuclear question or about Palestinian questions, and more and more about the northern front—Syria and Hezbollah. I think we do need to take a look at the question of Americans in Lebanon. There are something like 15- to 25,000. What happens to them if such a war breaks out? How do we protect them? How do we evacuate them? But, I am less worried about a direct conflict than I am about—

Senator BOOKER. Proxy fight.

Mr. ABRAMS. Yup.

Mr. MALLEY. If you do not mind, I think it is a fair—it is certainly a fair concern. The more likely fight is between Hezbollah and Israel, but the region today, I would say, is both more integrated and more polarized than it has ever been. In other words, it is very polarized. We obviously know that the dispute between Saudi Arabia and Iran, between Israel and Iran, between us and Iran. But, it is also very integrated. In other words, what happens in Lebanon will quickly spread to Syria, and vice versa. What happens in Yemen could spread to Iran, could spread to Syria, could spread to Lebanon, could spread to Israel. This is a place where you could light the match one place and the whole region could be ablaze. And it could well be that Iran and Israel will find themselves, as they almost did with the episode of the drone, directly at loggerheads.

I think the answer to this—and it goes, again, to the question that Senator Kaine was asking—How do we get to this broader problem of the Middle East? We are going to have to do what we are doing to try to push back, but we have to get engaged in diplomacy. There is going to have to be a new regional architecture for this region. It is not simply going to appear. Our pushback is not going to stop Iranian influence, it is not going to destroy the 100,000 missiles. We are going to have to think of how we get to

real diplomacy, which means carrots and sticks, which means pressure, but also engagement. And we have dropped that second part.

Senator RISCH. Thank you very much.

Gentlemen, we have got a vote going to go up. Senator Kaine and I each will close this out with a question. Hopefully, you can have a brief answer, because we do have a vote starting.

So, Senator Kaine, you want to go first?

Senator Kaine. Yeah, just really quickly.

I wanted to ask about the refugee issue. I mean, I—what Lebanon has done, given the size of its population, with this massive Syrian refugee population, is pretty amazing. As the Chair mentioned, there is already a longstanding Palestinian refugee community.

So, Mr. Malley, I sort of asked you this question, and I am going to ask you, in your ICG role, sort of, if we play down the road the politics in Lebanon, that is one thing, but let us play down the road this, you know, million-plus refugees. I am not sure they are going back to Syria anytime soon. They impose significant challenges, even as Lebanon has been pretty welcoming of them. What do we need to do, as an international community? And how do you see the long-term presence of this sizable number of Syrian refugees as, you know, shaping the future in Lebanon?

Mr. MALLEY. As you say, there is between 1- and 1.5 million. It is a quarter of the population.

Senator Kaine. Yeah.

Mr. MALLEY. Almost staggering, the numbers. So, very quickly, we need to provide support for the refugees. We also need to be very aware of the fact that it is creating sectarian tensions within Lebanon. And that—and so, we have to be very supportive and have social programs, employment programs to make sure the refugees do not become a drain.

And, my last point, yes, returning Syria, it may be a long-term aspiration. We have to make sure that it is done voluntarily. There is often a tendency in Lebanon to think that they should kick them out because of the imbalance they are creating on the sectarian spectrum. I think we have to be clear to the Lebanese that is an—unacceptable.

Senator Kaine. Thank you.

Senator RISCH. Let me close with this. U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701 and 2373 were pretty clear—not pretty clear, very clear—that the U.N. force in Lebanon was to assist the Lebanese government in creating an area free of any armed personnel, assets, and weapons, other than those of the Government of Lebanon and/or those of UNIFIL, obviously to the elimination of Hezbollah weapons. How do you assess—I hear a lot of criticism from the Israelis about that. How do each of you—as briefly as you can, tell me how successful that has been and whether you agree that it is not working very well.

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, I think it clearly has not worked. The goal has been to have Lebanese government sovereignty over the full territory, no militias, no terrorist groups. And, since the passage of those resolutions, I would say Hezbollah is more powerful. Also, at the end of the 2006 war, we, the United States, tried very hard to

enlarge and improve and empower UNIFIL, for the same reasons, really. And I would say that has failed, too.

So, if we have been trying since 2006 to create a situation in which the state has more control of the territory of Lebanon, and Hezbollah's power is diminished, we have failed.

Senator RISCH. Mr. Malley.

Mr. MALLEY. It is clear. 1701 are words on paper; they are not going to be translated on the ground, and they are not going to be translated anytime soon, for clear reason. Israel was not—was not able, in 2006, to completely destroy Hezbollah. It is certainly not the Lebanese Army, it is not UNIFIL that is going to be able to do it. So, we are going to have to live with the situation, where we have a resolution that is aspirational. But, Lebanon is simply, as I said—I will conclude with what I started with—it is too weak, it is too vulnerable for us to impose on that country, on that army, to try to do what greater powers have been unable to do.

Senator RISCH. Thanks, to both of you. And I think I speak for the committee and for the Ranking Member, we want to thank you for appearing here today, particularly under the circumstances we have with the weather.

But, the record will remain open until close of business on Friday for any additional questions that Senators may have.

Again, thank you for coming here. I think this has been very productive.

This committee will be adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:00 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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“LEBANON IS BOILING. THOUSANDS OF AMERICANS COULD GET STUCK IN THE MIDDLE OF A WAR.” BY ELLIOTT ABRAMS AND ZACHARY SHAPIRO

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Supporters of the Lebanese Hezbollah leader gather in Beirut, commemorating the party's killed leaders, on February 16, 2018. | Getty

WASHINGTON AND THE WORLD

**Lebanon Is Boiling. Thousands of Americans Could Get Stuck in the Middle of a War.**

There are few signs that the Trump administration is ready for the outbreak of a conflict that could trap U.S. citizens in a dangerous conflict.

By ELLIOTT ABRAMS and ZACHARY SHAPIRO | March 15, 2018

**T**he war in Lebanon in 2006 between Israel and Hezbollah left thousands of American citizens stranded. As Hezbollah rockets landed in Israel and Israeli jets bombed Lebanese targets, the United States government overcame logistical challenges, a bombed out airport, dangerous roads and bureaucratic failures to evacuate 15,000 citizens of the estimated 25,000 there at the time.

More than a decade later, Hezbollah and Israel remain on the brink of war. Meanwhile the U.S. seems unprepared, leaving thousands of citizens exposed and at risk in the event of conflict. Now is the time for the U.S. government to plan its next evacuation—and to learn from its mistakes in 2006.

#### **War Is Plausible**

As tensions continue to flare between Israel and Hezbollah, the possibility of war looks increasingly likely. A range of analysts is predicting some sort of direct confrontation. “Another war between Israel and Hezbollah is almost inevitable,” former defense official Mara Karlin wrote in *Foreign Affairs*, citing the clash of “strategic goals” and arguing that Hezbollah’s “regional popularity has plummeted, and its anti-Israel credentials, which have been tarnished by years of killing Syrians, need burnishing.”

Hezbollah continues to provoke Israeli forces and openly declare its willingness to fight. In various speeches, Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah warned that “Hezbollah soldiers and rockets can reach all the positions across the Zionist entity during any upcoming war.”

Nasrallah continually threatens Israel in yet other ways. He touts the abilities of Hezbollah forces, saying in 2017 that “any Israeli unit that enters Lebanon will be defeated,” and even threatening the Israeli nuclear reactor in Dimona.

Since the 2006 war, Hezbollah’s military strength has grown and Israeli officials estimate it has reached about 150,000 rockets and missiles of various sorts and ranges. Israeli airstrikes in Syria since 2006 have most often targeted Iranian efforts to supply Hezbollah with advanced, precision weapons—hitting weapons convoys and more recently bombing locations where weapons are stored or manufactured. War could break out in any number of ways, including by accident.

#### **The Next Round Will Be Worse**

If war breaks out, it will be far more destructive than in 2006. Hezbollah's arsenal is larger and more advanced, so the damage it can do in Israel—despite Israel's greatly improved anti-missile defenses—will be far greater. In 2006, combat in Lebanon and about 4,000 rockets claimed the lives of 50 Israeli civilians and 120 Israel Defense Forces soldiers and caused 300,000 Israelis to flee their homes. As former Israeli military intelligence chief General Amos Yadlin put it, "we will pay a higher price than we did during the Lebanon war of 2006, especially on the home front ... there will be a substantial damage." That damage will lead Israel to strike hard in Lebanon in an effort to stop the attacks as quickly as possible. Major General Nitzan Alon, IDF operations chief, recently warned that in a future Lebanon campaign, Israel would use "maximum force in the minimum amount of time," citing his belief that "we have to use the advantages the IDF has over its enemies as forcefully as possible and as quickly as possible."

In 2006, Israel responded to a Hezbollah ground incursion on July 12 that killed several soldiers and kidnapped two by launching two weeks of air attacks—but launched no ground incursion until early August, when Israeli forces did not invade beyond southern Lebanon—and took pains to limit damage to Lebanese infrastructure. For example, the Beirut airport saw its runways cratered, damage easy to repair by repaving, but Israel left its control tower and terminals intact. The two-week delay in Israeli ground action was critical in allowing for the evacuation of Americans, and it is unlikely to be repeated if there is another war. Last September, the *Jerusalem Post* reported, the IDF held its largest exercise in almost 20 years. The two-week drill mobilized tens of thousands of soldiers from its air, naval and ground forces in preparation for war with Hezbollah. Additional exercises were held in February 2018.

Members of the Israeli governing coalition have warned consistently that the next conflict with Hezbollah will be much bloodier for the Lebanese side. Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman vowed, "If people in Tel Aviv are in bomb shelters, then they will also be in shelters in Beirut." "This time," General Yadlin said, Israel "will not differentiate between Hezbollah and Lebanon." Even more starkly, then-IDF chief of staff Benny Gantz said in 2014 that in any future conflict started by Hezbollah, Israel would take "Lebanon and knock it and everything in it 70-80 years back." And in Washington, Senator Lindsey Graham wrote after a visit to Israel in March 2018 that as Hezbollah continues to stockpile missiles, "Israel will have to attack these rocket sites, which Hezbollah has integrated into civilian infrastructure such as apartment buildings; schools and hospitals."

While such language can be seen as posturing in an effort to deter Hezbollah, it seems almost certain that in another round the damage in Israel and Lebanon will be far greater

than in 2006. And that raises the evacuation question: How many Americans might be in Lebanon, and under even worse conditions than in 2006—is the U.S. prepared to evacuate them?

#### **The Evacuation in 2006 Worked**

The 2006 war began on July 12 when Hezbollah attacked across the Israeli border. Israel responded with artillery fire, airstrikes on the Beirut airport and a naval blockade the next day. Airstrikes on Hezbollah positions and ground fighting displaced a million Lebanese and left more than a thousand (including Hezbollah combatants) dead. Hezbollah's practice of placing missiles and other munitions in heavily populated locations (which continues today) made them Israeli military targets. The war lasted 34 days.

The U.S. initiated its evacuation on July 14, when the Pentagon put Central Command in charge and CENTCOM began moving ships from the Red Sea through the Suez Canal to the Mediterranean. Within a few days, the U.S. government had also begun chartering commercial ships and reaching out to American citizens. The first group of U.S. citizens was evacuated from Beirut to Cyprus by helicopter on July 16 and in one week 10,000 had reached the island. Other Americans were transported by air to the U.S. Air Force base in Incirlik, Turkey. In all, 15,000 Americans were evacuated in three weeks—by August 2—without a single one being killed or injured during the operation. A ceasefire did not come until August 14, after more days of fierce combat.

#### **But the 2006 Evacuation Revealed Problems**

So the 2006 evacuation was an overall success. But according to a 2007 assessment from the Government Accountability Office, the internal federal government watchdog, the operation demonstrated a number of difficulties that called for changes that would be even more important in a larger and more complex future conflict.

The report found that evacuation from Lebanon presented the State Department and Pentagon with several significant challenges. First, it was undertaken during an ongoing conflict in which evacuation routes were blocked. Safely navigating sea routes required difficult coordination with Israeli forces while they conducted a war. And because the crisis was unforeseen, the U.S. military did not have naval assets immediately available for a sea evacuation.

If there is another round between Israel and Hezbollah this year, all those problems will be greatly magnified.

Ultimately, the GAO identified three major shortcomings:

First, the magnitude of the Lebanon crisis taxed State's capacity to respond. Second, State did not communicate effectively with the public, including potential evacuees in Lebanon and their family and friends in the United States. For example, State initially restricted the ability of U.S. Embassy officials in Beirut to convey critical information via the media to Americans seeking to leave Lebanon. Third, State and the Department of Defense's different institutional cultures and systems impeded their ability to work together; among other things, these differences resulted in miscommunications and possible delays in chartering ships and planes to evacuate American citizens.

As it turns out, the 2006 evacuation was precedent-setting in one way: U.S. Embassy employees in Beirut were overwhelmed with calls from U.S. nationals seeking to leave, realized that they could not carry out the operation on their own, and turned to the Pentagon. The State Department was able to carry out the majority of the 80 or more evacuations it undertook all over the world from 2001-2006 using only commercial flights. Not this time.

From July 14-23, State and DOD were able to evacuate nearly 10,000 U.S. nationals to Cyprus. Yet the sudden spike in demand for hotel rooms for the U.S. entities, coupled with the fact that Cyprus was at the height of its summer tourist season, made accommodations scarce. The situation became so desperate that the U.S. Embassy in Nicosia and the Cypriot government "arrange[d] for the Americans to stay at the Nicosia fairgrounds, in large exhibit halls normally used for trade shows."

Generally, the Pentagon's role is restricted to evacuating U.S. nationals to "a safe haven" (often a local military base or embassy). The State Department then supervises the final step: return trips to the United States. Yet the influx of tourists in Cyprus prompted the Pentagon to assist with booking charter and military planes to get the U.S. citizens from safe havens back to the United States. In fact, the military was responsible for most return trips to the United States.

Because of the intensity and scale of the war, the State Department was unable to rely on its existing emergency plans. For instance, the Beirut emergency plan did not account for the possibility that Israel would bomb the airport—which it did right at the outset of the 2006 conflict.

In addition, many U.S. citizens who had never registered with the U.S. Embassy sought evacuation assistance as the war went on. Their numbers and whereabouts were unknown

to embassy personnel and had not been included in the prior emergency planning.

To make matters worse, the GAO report found that the State and DOD have “different institutional cultures and systems, which impeded their ability to work together,” including clashing terminology and methodology. For example, “where State officials might request 10 planes, DOD officials would want to know the precise numbers of people and tonnage of equipment to be transported.” This was compounded by some degree of overlapping duties, resulting in inadvertent self-sabotage: “State and DOD were competing for some of the same commercial planes, thereby creating duplicate requests that gave the perception of fewer available planes for contract.”

The State Department has made several adjustments to expedite future evacuations, working to improve embassies’ communications guidelines, submitting best practices reports to other embassies, and presumably revising the Beirut emergency plan. Still, the prospect of a larger and more intense war ahead leaves many open questions.

#### **Ready for the Next Round?**

Is the United States ready for the next round in Lebanon? By all accounts, there remain something like 15,000-25,000 Americans, and perhaps more, in Lebanon. If war breaks out, every indication is that it will be a fiercer conflict than in 2006. The U.S. Embassy will not have two weeks or more before ground combat begins—and it was in those first two weeks when most Americans were evacuated last time. The airport and seaport are sure to be closed again. Ground routes for getting Americans to safety will be harder to carve out when there is air and ground combat throughout the country.

Of course temporary cease-fires can be tried, and the ports could be opened for hours at a time—but the logistical burden falling on State and DOD, and the U.S. Embassy in Beirut in particular, will be far greater than last time. It can be assumed that the Pentagon will have to take on the same, or even more, responsibilities than in 2006. Has it prepared to use warships or to lease ferries for the evacuation? Is the embassy fully ready with a communications package to reach all Americans at once, perhaps using the technologies that were new and not widespread in 2006? Has the embassy increased the percentage of Americans who have registered, so that it has a far better grasp of who and where they are? Has the United States discussed all the evacuation issues with the Israeli government and military, agreeing now on plans to cope and methods of working together if war starts?

Perhaps war will be avoided, and perhaps there will be a slow and steady buildup of tension during which time Americans can begin to leave safely. But it’s at least as likely that war

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will break out suddenly—stranding thousands of Americans who then desperately seek help to get to safety. The time to work through these problems is right now.

