

Statement of Dorothy C. Shea
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Lebanese Republic
Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
December 17, 2019

Chairman, Ranking Member, distinguished Members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as the President's nominee to serve as U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon. I am grateful to President Trump and Secretary of State Pompeo for putting me forward for this position. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with you and your colleagues to advance U.S. interests in Lebanon and the region.

I am grateful to be joined today by several members of my family, whose love and support for me throughout my career has been critical to my resilience and my overall success. I was raised a few miles from here, in Falls Church, Virginia, the youngest of six children. I grew up hearing stories about my father Brandan Shea's Army service in World War II, and afterwards in Paris as part of the Marshall Plan; he later went on to work for the Department of Defense as a civilian for many years. My mother Audrey Martin Shea's work also took her overseas from time to time. Their stories, together with the curiosity that was sparked when my family hosted Japanese exchange students for a couple of successive summers, spurred my interest in international relations. Little did I imagine that one day I would be sitting before you in this chamber as an ambassadorial nominee.

I joined the Foreign Service 28 years ago, and every day of my public service has been an honor and privilege. I did not necessarily think I would make a career out of the Foreign Service. But, I realized early on that the key components for job satisfaction for me were that I continue to learn, to be challenged, and to be able to contribute in some way, however small, to the greater good. I reasoned that as long as those criteria were met, I would stick with this peripatetic career. Sure enough, in every job I have had as a Foreign Service Officer, those criteria have been met. Indeed, I believe each job has helped prepare me to serve in the next position of greater responsibility. In a couple of the above-mentioned jobs, I had the opportunity to travel to Lebanon. One such position was as a Pearson Fellow with this very Committee. It was a great honor to cover Middle East issues for the then-Ranking Member Richard Lugar. I am lucky to count as friends those who were colleagues from my time with the Committee, some of whom are here today. I would also like to acknowledge Foreign Service mentors who have taught me so much over the years; they set the standard for leadership that I attempt to emulate every day.

At the core of our interests in Lebanon are efforts to ensure a stable and prosperous nation with whom we can effectively partner to advance vital national security interests in the country and region. Working with the international community and the Lebanese people to address its now faltering stability is at the heart of U.S. interests in the Middle East and remains critical to ensuring our success in our efforts to defeat ISIS, foster regional stability, and counter Iran's destabilizing influence in the region.

Since 2005, when the end of the Syrian military occupation of Lebanon created a strategic opportunity to increase U.S. impact and dilute the influence of the Iran/Syria/Hizballah

axis, our strategy has been broadly consistent: supporting constructive political voices responsive to the needs of the Lebanese people and building the capacity of Lebanese state institutions, including the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF).

The spillover from the Syria conflict – including the movement of over one million Syrian refugees into Lebanon and deadly incursions by ISIS – injected new urgency into our approach, while unprecedented nationwide protests have presented new possibilities for responsiveness and reform.

On October 17, broad-based protests began in Lebanon. In a country known for its multi-religious character, these protests have been unprecedented in their truly national nature, with involvement of Lebanese citizens across the nation, across sects, and across socio-economic levels. Demonstrators have been calling for an end to the endemic corruption and economic mismanagement that has plagued Lebanon for decades. The United States supports the right of Lebanon’s citizens to protest peacefully and has called for their continued protection.

These protests continue throughout the country today. The message from the protesters is loud and clear: the Lebanese people have had enough of their leaders prospering while the rest of the country struggles under crushing debt and in the absence of the most basic services, including trash removal, electricity, and clean water. They are demanding far-reaching reforms. They have called for a new government committed to meeting those demands, leading to the resignation of the cabinet on October 29. Unfortunately, Lebanon’s political leadership has failed to act expeditiously to respond to those calls for reform and the government remains in “caretaker” status today.

Until Lebanon’s political leaders embrace the need for real and lasting reform, no government can succeed. But if leaders do embrace change, we stand ready to work with the government and people to rebuild Lebanon’s shattered economy. The composition of the new government is a matter for the Lebanese people, not for the United States, to decide. We will work with anyone who is dedicated to reform and will put the interests of the Lebanese people first.

Lebanon’s economic difficulties are profound; it will not be easy to enact the structural reforms necessary to increase public investment, lower public debt, and diversify its economy. Several sectors of the economy will need to be completely revamped, because they generate massive debt and fail to collect adequate revenue, while failing to deliver satisfactory services.

A new Lebanese government also needs to pass measures that markedly improve transparency and root out corruption so they can regain the confidence of Lebanon’s citizens and the international community. If confirmed, I look forward to working with such a government to advance good governance, transparency, and economic reform.

As my colleague Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs Joey Hood testified before this Committee on December 4, the United States is committed to a vision of shared prosperity, regional and global security and stability, and a lasting partnership with the people of Lebanon.

I believe that American foreign policy is most informed and effective when there is close communication and collaboration between the executive and legislative branches of government. If confirmed, I pledge to continue our close cooperation on these critical foreign policy issues.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished Members of the Committee, I thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to taking your questions.