

**Senate Foreign Relations Committee**  
**Senator Richard G. Lugar**  
**Statement for Hearing on**  
**Syria: Options and Implications for Lebanon and the Region**  
**November 8, 2007**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for this opportunity to engage in an important discussion regarding recent developments in Lebanon and Syria. I join my colleagues in thanking Secretary Welch and our three accomplished witnesses on the second panel.

The hopes of the United States and most of the international community for Lebanon are clear. We seek a sovereign, democratic, and prosperous Lebanon at peace with its neighbors and free from foreign interference. These widely-shared goals, however, are endangered by the present political crisis involving the selection of the next Lebanese President. President Emile Lahoud's term expires on November 24th, yet elections have been postponed several times. If the election that is scheduled for next week does not take place and the current President's term expires without selecting a replacement, it is possible two parallel governments could be established. Such a development would dramatically heighten tensions in Lebanon.

The United States and the international community must be unwavering and unambiguous in our support for the democratic process in Lebanon and in our opposition to political intimidation. In accordance with U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1559 and 1701, as well as U.S. Senate Resolutions 328 and 353, the United States should work with other nations to support a fair political process in Lebanon free of violence.

While a compromise selection for President may be the most effective short-term solution to the immediate crisis in Lebanon, much more is required to resolve the deeper conflicts undermining stability in that nation. Many of the maladies that plague Lebanon find their roots outside Lebanon's borders.

The nature of the conflict in Lebanon underscores two important points for U.S. policy. First, the U.S. cannot seek to address individual crises in an ad hoc and isolated manner. The U.S. cannot indefinitely jump from crisis to crisis narrowly focusing on the immediate sources of conflict, ignoring the larger regional conflicts that serve as the underlying catalysts. American policy should be based upon a comprehensive and proactive strategy—grounded in U.S. vital interests—that recognizes the transnational nature of the challenges in the Middle East. In Lebanon, for example, it is difficult to imagine a durable solution to the instability and political paralysis that does not involve progress toward an Arab-Israeli peace settlement. As long as the Arab-Israeli crisis persists, Hezbollah will continue to exploit Arab-Israeli tensions as a pretext to maintain its arms. This is not to suggest that an Arab-Israeli settlement will be a panacea for Lebanon's problems. However, a solution to the Arab-Israeli crisis will increase the chances of attaining political reconciliation and stability in Lebanon, as well as the broader Middle East.

Second, after years of abjuring direct talks with Syria, the U.S. has little to show for its strategy. The refusal to engage in meaningful and regular discussions with the Syrians freezes in place a dangerous status quo. The purpose of talks should not be to change our posture toward Syria. Nor should we compromise vital interests or strike ethereal bargains that cannot be verified. In fact, we should be pressing Damascus on human rights issues, such as its ban on foreign travel by political dissidents. For example, the case of Riad Seif, a prominent political dissident who is being denied the opportunity to travel outside Syria for treatment of prostate cancer, requires immediate resolution.

If we lack the flexibility to communicate with Syria, we increase the chances of miscalculation, undercut our ability to take advantage of any favorable situations, and potentially limit the regional leverage with which we can confront the Damascus government. We also should be mindful that although Iran and Syria cooperate closely, their interests diverge in many cases, opening regional diplomatic opportunities.

I look forward to the benefit of our witnesses' insights on these and other issues related to Syria and Lebanon.

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