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Introduction and Moderator:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. INDYK: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the Saban Center at Brookings. We are very glad to have Jeff Feltman, Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman, who is the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs to address our policy forum today. For those of you who are new to Brookings lunches, the first rule is that you eat while we talk. So please enjoy your meal.

At the beginning of the year we decided that we needed to do a more focused discussion on Lebanon and the crisis in Lebanon and its many dimensions. This has proved to be more difficult than we imagined and it is becoming a movable feast. We had originally planned to do a major symposium, but then in each case some of the key speakers were unable to turn up, so we have ended up improvising to a series of Lebanon. The first one we had was with a group of Lebanese experts and many of you were there I think for that about a month ago. Today we are very honored to have former U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon to address is. And Marwan

Hamada, a minister in the Lebanese government who was supposed to join us today but could not do so because he was required to be part of a quorum for a cabinet meeting, the cabinet in Lebanon is in such a state now that all the ministers have to be there, otherwise they cannot meet. So he sent his sincere apologies. He is going to be here toward the month and we will have another luncheon on Lebanon to give him an opportunity to address you then.

So Jeff is going to do a solo performance today which I am actually very happy about because Jeff in his time in Lebanon which is more than 3 years I believe --

MR. FELTMAN: Three-and-a-half years.

MR. INDYK: Three-and-a-half years, has in effect become Mister Lebanon for the U.S. government. My feeling of pride in this has been very large and you might wonder why I should be taking pride in it, because I feel like I discovered Jeffrey Feltman when he was Gaza economic officer at the embassy in Tel Aviv when I first became ambassador there. He was a

young Foreign Service officer who immediately impressed me by his knowledge of what was happening in Gaza and his passion for wanting to make a difference there, a passion which no matter how difficult the circumstances he never has lost, and that makes him a fairly unique person and a unique Foreign Service officer. When I came back to Israel for the second time, President Clinton sent me back to work on trying to get the comprehensive deal at the end of the Clinton administration, I used all of my powers as the previous Assistant Secretary of State to summon Jeff from his comfortable seat in Tunis where he was serving as the political counselor back to Israel to work with me as my partner in the effort to support President Clinton's attempt to achieve a comprehensive peace.

When I left Israel, Jeff moved up to the consulate where he was the number two person handling the Palestinians in the consulate in Jerusalem. Then for reasons that we do not need to go into now, the consul was withdrawn and Jeff became the number one.

MR. FELTMAN: Acting.

MR. INDYK: Acting, in charge of the Palestinian account as the acting consul in Jerusalem. This does not quite capture the meteoric rise in Jeff's career that came about as a result of this unique combination of knowledge, judgment, and passion for the job. And to the immense credit of the Bush administration, they recognized this and took him out of Jerusalem and sent him to Lebanon at a critical moment in U.S. policy. The president decided to promote democracy in Lebanon and soon after he went to Lebanon, Mr. Hariri was assassinated, and since then of course Jeff has been in the heart of the action and the heart of the crisis and I know that he was been the most trusted adviser to the secretary of state and to the president in the formulation of U.S. policy toward Lebanon in all of these years.

So I am delighted to have the chance to post you here, Jeff, to introduce you and to have you talk about experience in Lebanon and where we go from here. Jeff's remarks will be on the record, believe it or

not, and we are very, very eager to hear what you have to say. Welcome.

MR. FELTMAN: Martin, thank you. When I look at Lebanon today I am not sure if I want to be responsible for the policy that we have pursued there. But seriously, it is very much of an honor to be here today hosted by not only my former supervisor but my friend Martin Indyk. And really, Martin's guidance and leadership significantly shaped my career, and while Martin was out of government by the time that President Bush nominated me to be Ambassador to Lebanon, I do not believe that I would have achieved that position had Martin not inspired me, challenged me, and had confidence in me over the years. I am also pleased to see so many other friends here whose work on Lebanon and U.S. policy generally I deeply respect and admire.

I am sorry to have missed the earlier sessions on Lebanon, the January session, et cetera. My tour in Beirut was extended a few more weeks when I should have been here talking to all of you in January

after my tour had already been extended a few months beyond what was supposed to be a July 2007 departure. So while I am late for my lunch, I am pleased to be here just a few days after a significant anniversary in Lebanon's history.

When I look back over the 3 years that I had the honor to experience in Lebanon since the March 14, 2005, Cedar Revolution and I consider the list of positive developments and negative developments, it strikes me that the positive developments came about mostly when the international community and the Lebanese themselves were working together and backing goals that were defined by the Lebanese. The negative developments on the other hand seemed to be linked to actions undertaken by parties and players allied with Syria and Iran, actions that were contravention of that consensus by the majority of Lebanese regional and international actors.

In trying to explain this I will resist the temptation to drag you too far down Jeff's memory lane about Lebanon, but yet as I prepared to leave my

posting there, I came across two messages that I had sent to Washington that I would like to mention for I think they illustrate on the one hand how much has changed in Lebanon, and on the other hand how much has not. One of these diplomatic cables from Sunday, March 13, 2005, barely 1 month after the assassination of Rafiq Hariri, described my meeting that day with Terje Roed-Larsen, the U.N. representative who was charged with monitoring and promoting the implementation of U.N. Security Resolution 1559; 1559 I think everybody knows was passed on September 2, 2004, the day before Lebanon's parliament rubber stamped the extension of President Emil Lahoud in office and it codified among other objectives the international demand for Syrian troops to leave Lebanon.

Terje Larsen, when he met me on March 13 years ago had just visited Damascus. I saw him that evening and he had just come back from Damascus. While there he had what sounded to be a very tough meeting with Bashar al-Assad about the assassination

of Prime Minister Hariri and about 1559's requirement for troop withdrawal. Terje who I know from the time when Martin and Terje worked on the Israeli-Palestinian issues together discussed just how could the international community promote that Syrian troop withdrawal in time for Lebanon's legislative elections that were scheduled for later in the spring. Having Syrian troops deployed throughout Lebanon during that election period would obviously have distorted those elections and it was something that Prime Minister Hariri himself had talked about a lot in the 6 months I had the honor to work with him.

So Terje and I in our meeting tried to identify what the tools including drawing on the domestic and international outrage over the murder of Rafiq Hariri that would persuade the Syrians that the time had come to pull back their troops, to pull their troops to the Bekaa Valley. That was much that Terje and I thought could be achieved in March 13, 2005, if we were lucky, a pullback to the Bekaa Valley. We were counting on a new pro-independence parliamentary

majority to help achieve 1559's demand for the full withdrawal of Syrian troops beyond Lebanon's border. So there nothing at all in my cable of March 13, 2005, about the fact that the following day more than a third of Lebanon's population would turn out in a mass demonstration that changed Lebanon's history.

Terje and I knew there was going to be a demonstration the next day, just as there had been a demonstration every Monday since the murder of Rafiq Hariri, and we knew that these popular demonstrations were capable of achieving great change. They had already achieved something significant with the resignation of Prime Minister Omar Karami 2 weeks earlier on February 28 and the collapse of what former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage had called the made in Damascus cabinet, a cabinet it is worth remembering that included such notorious Syrian stooges as Wiam Wahab, Abdel-Rahim Mrad, and Assem Qanso, all three of whom were subsequently sanctioned by the U.S. government for their attempts to destabilize Lebanon on behalf of Syria. Terje and I

knew all this, and yet what we saw as difficult but potentially achievable, an initial pullback of the Syrian troops to the Bekaa Valley, fell far short of what the Lebanese people themselves would demand and would in fact get. Syria's troops after being in Lebanon for nearly 30 years withdrew fully 6 weeks later, 6 weeks after that March 14 demonstration. Based on what I wrote to Washington, this outcome was apparently unimaginable to Terje and to me. Martin describes Mister Lebanon. I did not foresee this only 1 day before the March 14 demonstration.

This anecdote symbolizes to me one of the key facts underlying the international support of Lebanon over these few years. The international community has been supporting an agenda defined by the Lebanese themselves and not imposed from the outside with the combination of the broad Lebanese domestic desire and the international backing that leads to success. Resolution 1559 was adopted in September 2004, yet the international community by itself had not by early spring found a way to promote

implementation. On the other hand, I suspect that had the international community been looking the other way when the Lebanese people turned out en masse on March 14, 2005, the outcome of that demonstration would have been far less happy. It took the international community and the Lebanese together for those achievements. There is a hypothetical question about what the Syrian intelligence operatives in Syrian infiltrated Lebanese security organs might have done on March 14, 2005, had Lebanon lacked international backing, but it is worth remembering that the crackdown on Lebanese demonstrators protesting the censorship and closure of independent Murr Television-MTV a few years earlier.

By July 2005, the second cable I would like to cite is much had changed in Lebanon. The Syrian troops had withdrawn. The Syrian intelligence offices had closed down. The giant billboards that were along Beirut -- extolling the benevolence of Syria and the Assad family had disappeared. Lebanon's Syrian-aligned security chiefs had been replaced, a U.N.

investigative committee set up to look into Rafiq Hariri's murder promised justice and truth, and parliamentary elections led to a new pro-independence parliamentary majority.

Fouad Siniora through the consultative process defined by Lebanon's constitution was the prime minister designate in July 2005. He was assembling his cabinet in July 2005 in consultation with his supporters and in consultation with the bloc that Rafiq Hariri had put together, and I met with Prime Minister-designate Siniora in his private residence. According to the cable I transmitted, Siniora was having trouble in July 2005 because President Emil Lahoud was threatening to withhold his signatory power regarding the formation of the cabinet unless Siniora would promise Syria's allies a blocking third, that is, veto power over major decisions in the cabinet, and in the context of the political stalemate in Lebanon, that sounds very familiar even today.

But at the time that Siniora had mentioned this to me and despite the fact that I had been in

Lebanon nearly a year by that point, that blocking third, I had a vague idea of what it was, but it was unfamiliar in practice to me because for the previous two cabinets with whom I had experience, that of Rafiq Hariri and the government of Omar Karami, I will put Najib Makati's aside because it was a transitional government, and for the cabinets that my immediate predecessors had dealt with, Syria had called the shots. The blocking third was adopted at Taif Accord in order to help end Lebanon's civil war by replacing the previous Maronite confessional veto, Christian confessional veto, with a numerical veto for major decisions, but it had not really been relevant under the Syrian occupation because Syria decided who would be inside the cabinet and Syria carefully ensured the powerful players like Rafiq Hariri could not rely on a large number of cabinet allies in order to deviate from Syria's wishes in any significant way.

Siniora of course eventually got Lahoud to sign the cabinet formation decree and his cabinet received an overwhelming parliamentary vote of

confidence. Rather than confront the concept of a blocking third, the Siniora cabinet in practice operated by consensus with well over four-thousand cabinet decrees, something like four-thousand eight-hundred-and-something cabinet decrees, adopted by consensus between July 2005 and the walkout of the Syrian-aligned ministers on November 11, 2006. Before that November 2006 walkout, there was only one decision in the cabinet not taken by consensus in fact.

On December 12, 2005, Member of Parliament, March 14 leader, the newspaper publisher Gibran Tuani was assassinated in the fifth such murder or attempted murder since Rafiq Hariri's assassination. As one would expect in the assassination of such a national figure, Siniora summoned an emergency cabinet session for that night. The cabinet authorized a request by Siniora to U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan to ask the then existing U.N. International Independent Investigation Commission, the Melis Commission at the time, set up to investigate Rafiq Hariri's murder.

The cabinet asked this commission to also help with the investigation of other crimes including Gibran Tueni's murder as well. The letter also asked the U.N. to consider setting up a special tribunal to try anyone accused in the Rafiq Hariri murder which is another example of how the international community rallied behind what was originally a Lebanese demand.

All of this was too much for Syria's allies inside Siniora's cabinet. Ministers from Hizballah and Amal, along with one ally of Emil Lahoud, walked out. They used the excuse of protocol. They said they lacked sufficient time to study such an initiative as a letter to the U.N. Secretary General. The ministers returned after 6 weeks. This was just a dress rehearsal for what happened on November 11, 2006, the walkout almost a year later. In the second walkout, the same ministers again citing protocol claimed to be surprised when Siniora scheduled a cabinet meeting for the following Monday, 2 days later, to consider the draft agreement and statutes for the special tribunal that had long been discussed

between Lebanese and U.N. experts. Given that Lebanese national dialogue which was a roundtable meeting of the leading politicians and chaired by Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri had already unanimously endorsed the special tribunal, protocol concerns strike me as a weak pretext for attempting to destroy a cabinet that had operated by consensus, that had achieved an end to the summer 2006 war, and that would still today enjoy a parliamentary vote of confidence.

The ongoing attempts to discredit and marginalize the cabinet is only one of a series of steps that are undertaken by Syria's allies to paralyze Lebanon's constitutional institutions one by one. Nabih Berri has prevented parliament from meeting for well over a year. Syria's allies have prevented the election of a president, cherry picking from Lebanon's constitution to give quasi-legal justifications for their positions. Given that the major forces behind these steps are Amal, Hizballah, and a variety of pro-Syrian politicians like Suleiman Frangieh and Wiam Wahab, all of this would be easily

described as a Syrian attempt to turn back the clock were it not for the participation of Michel Aoun.

During my time in Lebanon it was never clear to me whether Aoun has knowingly promoted Syria's agenda in Lebanon or whether his ambitions blind him to the fact that he has provided a Christian cover for Hizballah's state-within-a-state law-defying status. But one thing is clear. Hizballah, Amal, and Michel Aoun believe that they can get away with rejecting the reality that there is a parliamentary majority, and they are too impatient to wait for the 2009 legislative elections just over a year away to test their popular support. Without question, at a popular level today, Lebanon is deeply divided. It is not simply a deep division between the March 14 led parliamentary majority and the March 8 dominated parliamentary minority. There is also a significant part of the population that is frankly disgusted with both, that is worried about economic issues, that is concerned with rising tension and clashes, and weary of a political impasse that at times seems really far

removed from the daily challenges faced by the population. Many, many young Lebanese feel disaffected from politics. These divisions will no doubt be reflected in the results of the 2009 legislative elections.

Lebanon has a tragic history of political divisions turning violent as various groups look to outsiders to help against other Lebanese. Yet deep as the current divisions are, I do not think that the Lebanese perhaps with the exception of Hizballah's leadership and Hizballah's core support think so differently from one another when they outline their hopes and their desires for Lebanon. I believe that a Christian follower of Michel Aoun and a typical Sunni follower of Rafiq and Saad Hariri coming from quite different histories would agree on many fundamentals. They would agree that Lebanon needs a strong state, an end to political assassinations, respect for law and communal harmony, more attention to job creation and social issues, avoidance of war with its stronger neighbors, and so on. I would say that there is even

agreement despite these political divisions about overall relations with Syria, that they should be positive but based on mutual recognition and no interference in the internal affairs of the other.

What I see as a convergence of views about aspirations for a better Lebanon from a wide part of the political spectrum is something that we in the international community can work with. It seems to me that we should all be backing efforts to strengthen Lebanon as a state and as a state for all of its citizens. The U.S. for example follows this practice. We support the army, the police, the judiciary, the municipal governments to name a few. The \$1 billion of assistance that I have often talked about in the last year in Lebanon is virtually all going toward state institutions being delivered in a transparent way. If asked we would certainly be willing as well to provide expert support in much needed electoral reform. Politically I would argue that we in the international community should be talking to the Lebanese about Lebanon and not the Syrians about

Lebanon. Yes, without question some of the Lebanese players will look to Syria. They will look for instruction from Syria. They will look for signals from Syria. But let us in the international community hold these leaders up to higher standards than they may hold themselves. Let us treat them as national decision makers in the hopes that they either become so or that they are replaced by those who can become national leaders.

I talk about a consensus I see among many Lebanese about what Lebanon should look like, but unfortunately I do not see Hizballah as part of this consensus. Hizballah's recent glorification of Imad Mugniyah is a reminder not only of Hizballah's bloody past but what type of person is a hero in the inner circles of Hizballah. Hizballah seems to be aiming at maintaining its militaristic, theocratic, state-within-a-state status in parallel with trying to use arguments like the blocking third in order to gain control of state institutions as well. Hizballah accepts no oversight over its own decisions including

questions of war and peace that affect all of Lebanon. Yet it uses its demand for consensus and the strange consensual power-sharing arrangements of Lebanon itself in an attempt to gain veto power over decisions by the state so that the state has no power to second-guess Hizballah, but Hizballah is trying to make sure to use Lebanon's unusual confessional power-sharing arrangements in order to gain power over what the state does. Hizballah's methods are at times breaktakingly cynical such as when Hizballah protested transparent cabinet proposals to privatize Lebanon's outdated telephone network while continuing secretly to build its own private telecommunications network across the country so that in my view Hizballah is thus Lebanon's biggest challenge.

I have seen and heard in the time that I was in Lebanon various proposals to incorporate Hizballah more solidly into the state the theory being that Hizballah would then have more of a stake in the state, Hizballah would be more of a normal player in the state. While Michel Aoun still believes his

understandings document might yet work in this regard, this approach has so far failed with Hizballah taking advantage for example of its ministerial portfolio even after its ministers resigned and without showing any increase toward the state institutions. Hizballah made the unilateral decision that took Lebanon to war in 2006 while its ministers sat inside the cabinet and during a national dialogue process in which Hassan Nasrallah was a key player. I cannot imagine that the followers of Michel Aoun really share Hizballah's infatuation with Imad Mugniyah, the strengthening of Hizballah's state-within-a-state status, and the power of Hizballah unilaterally to drag Lebanon into war with Israel.

Returning to my theme that international and Lebanese efforts combined lead to success, I note that the international community in Resolutions 1559 and 1680 have already called for the disarming of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias. In Resolution 1701 that ended the war between Hizballah and Israel, the international community went one step further to

put in place a legally binding embargo on the shipments of weapons to Lebanon without the permission of the Lebanese government. The international community is working to build up the capacity of the state to defend itself. And I have to wonder in looking at the history of the past few years if there is going to have to be some kind of corresponding Lebanese public demand for an end to Hizballah's armed activities in the same way that Lebanese outrage over Rafiq Hariri's murder led to the Syrian army withdrawal and Lebanese horror over Fatah al-Islam terrorists providing the Lebanese armed forces with the political backing needed to enter the Nahr al-Bared camp. These were sort of red lines that people thought were unimaginable when I arrived in Lebanon, that the Lebanese army would enter Palestinian camps and the Syrian army withdrawal from Lebanon. No one thought these were possible, but yet they happened.

In terms of Lebanese politics, it seems to me that Hizballah does not need its arms to maintain its status as a popular organized and disciplined

movement that has a deep grassroots following. Its arms in other words remain part of Iranian and Syrian foreign policy and not due to Lebanese internal politics, and it may not be as far fetched as it seems for the Lebanese to come to an agreement about Hizballah's arms. Since Michel Aoun's followers probably would be horrified at living under a state controlled by the equivalent of Iranian mullahs, maybe there is an opportunity to rebuild bridges between March 14 leaders and followers of Michel Aoun with the goal of strengthening the state and at last dismantling militias. Maybe Hizballah leaders can finally recognize that there is impatience among the general population with South Lebanon being used as a proxy for Iranian and Syrian mischief that causes such suffering among the Lebanese. It is worth noting in fact that Hizballah perhaps seeking a distraction took Lebanon to war in summer 2006 just before the national dialogue I referred to was supposed to discuss the issue of Hizballah's arms.

As for the United States, we have worked over the past several years to establish an international and regional coalition to support Lebanon. The Lebanese have deep-rooted paranoia that they will ultimately pay the price for some broader regional deal and that Lebanese sovereignty will be traded away in return for Syrian behavioral changes. I cannot tell you how many people in Lebanon at the time I was there kept waiting for the U.S. to deliver Lebanon back to Syria in return for something. While I am proud that we have stood with the Lebanese people as they demanded an end to occupation and injustice, perhaps the most significant accomplishment in my view of the Bush administration vis-à-vis Lebanon is that we now have an independent policy toward Lebanon for perhaps the first time in our history. This does not ignore or contradict the Lebanese aspects of a broader regional context, but Lebanon is no longer viewed simply or exclusively in the context of our relations with Israel or our concerns with Syria or our concerns on Iran or our views on the peace process. Yes of

course we will continue to see Lebanon in those contexts, but we also now as well look at Lebanon as Lebanon. While the exact tactics may change with the transition of the administration, I believe, and this is based on wide consultations including with 60 congressional delegations of both parties to Lebanon while I was there, that our support for Lebanon has now become a bipartisan cornerstone of our foreign policy similar to the bipartisan backing for countries like Jordan. Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. INDYK: Thank you Jeff very much. I thought that there were a number of very interesting points that you made along the way there and I just wanted to explore two of them if I could. But before I do, I remiss in not formally welcoming Ambassador Antoine Shadid, the Lebanese Ambassador to the United States. We are very glad to have you here, sir.

The first one relates to this what I will call a very strong hint on your part that March 14 and Aoun should somehow find a way to build on what you

have identified as common interests and my presumption there is that this would be designed in effect to split Aoun away from Hizballah. Let me put it this way. Do you see any indications that Aoun would actually be willing to engage in that sort of thing? And if he did, what would be his price? Because his price up to now seems to be the presidency for himself and is that something that March 14 could accept?

My second question relates to your concluding point about the way in which U.S. policy now has changed as a result of everything that has happened during the last 3 or 4 years and the focus is now on Lebanon as an independent country. If in a new administration, this is of course hypothetical so it is difficult for you to respond to but I will just assert that, decides that it wants to take advantage of the fact that both the Syrian government and the government of Israel want to begin peace negotiations, it seems to me that that principle that has become part of U.S. policy over the last 4 years is immediately placed in jeopardy not by the United

States, but by Syria and Israel since Israel's interest is in having someone disarm Hizballah and to prevent it from being a factor in Israel's security picture with Lebanon. That is Israel's own real interest as I understand it. It does not have the same policy as the United States has toward an independent Lebanon and that what they want is a responsible address that is going to control Hizballah. And the Lebanese, if you follow the logic of this scenario, would inevitably in their paranoia about being sacrificed on the alter of an Israeli-Syrian deal will inevitably fear that that is what has got to transpire. In those circumstances I wonder whether the principle that has developed is not actually going to be jeopardized by the dynamic of a new Israeli-Syrian negotiation.

MR. FELTMAN: There is actually a linkage between these two questions. You may not see it yourself, and I hope I can draw it. On the question of Michel Aoun, if I generalize shamelessly as one does in these sorts of fora, General Aoun benefits

from I would say two different types of supporters. One, supporters who have stayed with him, have stuck with him through his career through his time as prime minister, acting chief of state, who in some cases were with him in exile or at least supported him in exile. They are is sort of an inner group of Aoun supporters. But beyond that, Aoun also benefits from a worry among Christians about their role in Lebanon in the future who listen to his rhetoric, let's be frank, about Sunni power, Sunni financial power, Sunni regional demographics and feel nervous about their own role inside Lebanon. It is that group I think March 14 needs to do a better job of reaching. I do not believe that that group of Aoun supporters, the people who are with Aoun because they do not see anything better, that they seen Aoun as the best guarantee for their future inside Lebanon, I do not believe that they would like living under a Hizballah-dominated regime any more than they would like living under a Fatah al-Islam-dominated regime, and that is where the government and March 14 need to do a better job of

reaching out in my view because the natural place for the followers of Michel Aoun are with Western-oriented policies. When you see the Christians leaving Lebanon, they are not going to Tehran. They are not going to Damascus. They are going to Paris. They are coming to North America. They are in some cases going to the Gulf for economic opportunities or they go to places like Dubai. This alliance between the Aoun bloc and Hizballah does not strike me as a natural alliance based on what I know from my time in Lebanon.

This plays into presidential policies as Martin noticed. Aoun has presidential ambitions. We all recognize that. He is also on public record supporting the consensus candidate of Michel Suleiman. But there is a problem here. As soon as Michel Suleiman was elected, many of those Christians who are worried about their role in Lebanon I believe would shift to supporting President Michel Suleiman so that Michel Aoun's bloc becomes smaller, Michel Aoun's support shrinks with the election of Michel Suleiman. Yes, Aoun will still have support without question but

he becomes less of a valuable asset for Hizballah at this point in that Hizballah no longer is able to claim such a large Christian cover for its activities. So I do not know about an alliance between March 14 and General Aoun, but I believe the principles for which March 14 stand are much more in alignment with the desires of many of the supporters of Aoun than Hizballah's principles are.

Martin, you mentioned the possibility of what happens if Israel-Syrian track is reignited. You are right, the Lebanese are very paranoid about this. This comes up a lot. The Lebanese are reading between the lines of all the Israeli media all the time looking for signs that there is some kind of Israeli-Syrian deal that will come at the expense of Lebanon that we will then somehow bless. This is a fear among many Lebanese. I think that it is something that need to certainly be monitoring. I do not believe that there is necessarily a contradiction, that we should be able to support an independent Lebanon and support an Israeli-Syrian peace process that is credible. I

do not know all the mechanisms to do that, but I do not think we that we should look at these as contradictory goals. Israel's view toward Lebanon is naturally shaped by Israel's security concerns. The United States has a different view about Lebanon in that we are not living next door and that we do have a commitment to Lebanese independence and democracy, messy as it is right now. But I think that the Lebanese have discovered the power of their own voices. One of the accomplishments of March 14 inside Lebanon was to get the international community to notice what it was they were demanding, but Lebanese Americans while they also are divided just like the Lebanese are in Lebanon, there is a much stronger Lebanese American lobby now than there was when I went to Lebanon and I think that this has some influence on our own political developments. The reason why I said that there is a connection between the question of Michel Aoun and his group and his followers and the question that you raised, Martin, is because if there would be more unity inside Lebanon, if the people who

philosophically should be together would draw together, it would make it much harder for us to do anything that would undermine the wishes of those people and right now the divisions inside Lebanon lead to the vulnerability that you describe.

MR. INDYK: Thank you. I have a list now of people who want to intervene in the conversation starting with Judith Kipper, Robin Wright, and Amal -- please indicate and I will take your names down. Judith, please.

MS. KIPPER: Jeff, thank you. It is great to see you and have you back in Washington. Let's go back if we could before your time in Lebanon because history did not start with Hariri's assassination or with some of the events that you have talked about, and remember it didn't even start in 1982 when the Israeli's invasion of Lebanon gave birth to Hizballah and a lot of other negative things inside Lebanon. In your remarks you talked about the Sunni and the Christians, March 14, Aoun's movement, and Hizballah. You did not talk about the Shia community which is

very large, maybe the largest community in Lebanon, who continue to be the least privileged, who are not accepted in the mainstream by either the city Sunnis or the mountain Christians, and it is not going to be possible no matter what Aoun does, and I am very doubtful that you can do anything with Aoun, but it is not going to be possible for Lebanon to move forward in a stable, peaceful way without the Shia community being included. Perhaps the majority of the Shia have some sympathy and/or support for Hizballah. Maybe not. I think it is hard to tell. But they cannot be ignored because the three or four Nasrallahs say boo and somebody else says something and they do this or that.

I would also just add to that the Iraq war and the absence of American diplomacy for the last 7 years in the region has given Iran position in both Syria and Lebanon that it does not deserve, that we do not want, and that is much larger than is necessary. And it seems to me that only by working with the Shia community and drawing them into the larger mainstream

of Lebanese politics are we going to see some kind of dynamic that will ultimately allow the Lebanese to live together because that is the only way they are going to survive.

MR. FELTMAN: Judith, you bring up a very important point. As you say, history did not start with the murder of Rafiq Hariri, but I would say that history changed because of the murder of Rafiq Hariri. I think we all recognize that traditionally in Lebanese politics the Shia were the underprivileged, the disenfranchised class, relatively speaking inside and that has led to a politics now based on the politics of resentment. There is a sense of victimhood that Hizballah uses to great impact for its own benefit. I do not think in fact in recent years that the disenfranchisement has not been as bad as it was in history because in fact Hizballah and Amal have been able to manipulate the role of the state in a way that does benefit their population in a fairly significant way. The problem for us as the U.S. government is that Hizballah and Amal are the ones

that are using the institutions of the state in order to benefit their own political organizations.

I will take one example, the war of 2006. When the war ended, the cabinet was then united if we all remember. The Shia ministers, Emil Lahoud's allies and ministers, were still in the cabinet at that time, and there was a discussion of how to run the reconstruction for the south. I think that all of us would have loved to have seen some transparent, independent, credible organization be responsible for administering the funds that were used for reconstruction that came in from the Gulf States, et cetera. With the Shia ministers still inside the cabinet, they were able to make sure that the council for the south dominated by Nabih Berri was able to play not the same role perhaps that it played previously, but able to play the decisive role in where reconstruction monies would go so that the Shia political parties in the cabinet defined where the money would go for reconstruction. It is an example of how the two main Shia political blocs use the

history of disenfranchisement in Lebanon in order to build up popular support and populist resentment against the rest of Lebanon, but in fact it is no longer the case. The parliament is closed. Why? Because the two main Shia political parties have forced it to close. Downtown Beirut has been closed down for a sit-in for more than a year. Why? Because the two main Shia political parties have closed it down. So there is the myth and the reality. The reality is that the Shia did suffer in the past, but myth is that they are still doing so today and that is not in fact the case.

You are right that the Shia have to play a role in Lebanon. You cannot talk about a multi-confessional diverse Lebanon without having a Shia role inside Lebanon, without having the Shia play the proper political role. As I said, I think in fact they have been doing so. An issue we talk about a lot internationally and domestically with the Lebanese is how do you break the duopoly of Amal and Hizballah on Shia politics? How do you make sure that there is

space for other Shia leaders to emerge and for other Shia points of view to come out? If you take the Maronites or if you take the Christians, there are a lot of political opinions. Many of them have come together around two blocs, March 14 or Michel Aoun, but within those blocs there is a lot of variety of opinion, and it is not the same with the duopoly. It is a challenge and I do not have a perfect answer for you, but I do believe that the Shia political role as exercised by Amal and Hizballah has actually been far more powerful than any other single bloc.

MR. INDYK: Robin Wright, author of "Dreams and Shadows"?

MS. WRIGHT: Thank you. I have two quick questions, the first on Hizballah. Hassan Nasrallah is not a braggart, but after the car bombing of Imad Mugniyah he made some very specific threats against Israel. How do you expect that to play out? Do you foresee any kind of repeat of the 2006 war or do you think it will play out in a different way? And secondly, how strong do you think al-Qaeda and its

surrogates are in Lebanon today and what kind of support base do you think they can tap into?

MR. FELTMAN: Both good questions as I would expect from Robin Wright, author of "Dreams and Shadows" and the -- article too. I think we should all take Hassan Nasrallah's warnings quite seriously. If you look at the history of Hizballah, if you look at what Hizballah has done in similar circumstances before, we should take Hassan Nasrallah's threats quite seriously. I believe that the Israelis certainly are. I think that Nasrallah though is somewhat in a bind. He needs Michel Aoun in order to have Hizballah's goals in Lebanon be seen as something national, not something insular, not something Hizballah, not something Shia, not something the Iranian-Syrian agenda. He needs to have Michel Aoun. If he does something where he or his organization has clearly blown up embassies, targeted civilians, something like that, the bad old days of the 1990s, I think that he really does risk the alliance with Michel Aoun. I do not know about Michel Aoun himself,

but I do not believe that Michel Aoun's followers would want to be seen as being a tool in an international terrorist organization. He also has a problem with the Europeans and others who have not been as explicit as we have in defining Hizballah as a terrorist organization despite the history. So I think that Nasrallah must be calculating what are the options by which he gets to have his terrorist cake and eat it too by which he can maintain his alliance with Aoun and prove that they are capable of acting in retaliation as they have before. So I do not know what the answer is. It is something that I think we all have to look at it.

On the one hand I suppose you could say that doing something like in summer 2006 would allow him to maintain the alliances inside Lebanon because Israel is almost in a separate category, that it is still politically incorrect in Lebanon to try to describe Israel as anything else but an enemy. But he has the problem of UNIFIL, and Nabih Berri if you have noticed has come out repeatedly publicly calling for the

protection of UNIFIL, calling for the retention of UNIFIL as expanded under 1701. I would imagine that Nasrallah is weighing a lot of different considerations in looking at this picture.

MR. INDYK: Could you just explain what is Nabih Berri's interest in UNIFIL?

MR. FELTMAN: If I can go off the record for just a second a little bit, Nabih Berri has described himself --

MR. INDYK: We need to be very clear here.

MR. FELTMAN: I would like to say one thing and not be quoted on it if I could. Nabih Berri has called himself the father of 1701 in meetings that I have attended with him and it is because of this UNIFIL connection. Now I will go back to normal. I think in the case of UNIFIL, Nabih Berri is wearing his Lebanese leader hat very firmly. He sees UNIFIL as having provided a measure of security in the south that has been lacking for quite some time, that he sees this as providing a measure of protection to a population that he hopes will still support his

movement and his political direction. I think that is his interest in UNIFIL.

In terms of al-Qaeda, I think as we have seen with some of the clashes inside the Palestinian camps like Ain al-Hilweh, as we have seen in some of the people who were picked up in the Nahr al-Bared battles and some of the people who were killed in the Nahr al-Bared battle, there is a danger in Lebanon of al-Qaeda cells. I am not saying big al-Qaeda. I am not talking about direction from people associated with Osama bin Laden. I am talking fellow travelers and sympathizers. Part of this is stemming from the lawlessness that is inside the Palestinian camps, part of this can be exploited by those who would like to do Lebanon harm with particular concern in northern Lebanon in the Akkar region adjoining Syria where there is a lot of poverty, a lot of the same sort of sense of disenfranchisement that people talk about in the south also exists among the Sunni population in the north. I believe that March 14 political leaders like Saad Hariri and the government have been trying

to do things to address this. Certainly the international donor community is starting to look with greater concern about the poverty in the north in the same way that we have looked at the poverty in the south after Israel's withdrawal in 2000 but there is certainly a danger of al-Qaeda type organizations taking deeper root among Sunni pockets inside Lebanon.

MS. : Hello, Mr. Feltman. It is very nice to see you because it brings to mind very nice memories of my boss and I remember in particular the meeting we had the three of us in his house in -- 2 months before he was killed 2 days before Christmas and for 2 hours we sat in front of the fire and he talked about elections.

MR. FELTMAN: Yes.

MS. : And if you remember how confident he was that he was going to win these elections no matter how they --

MR. FELTMAN: Yes. And he did.

MS. : And he did even after he died.

MR. FELTMAN: Yes.

MS. : My question is, there is so much talk now from Hizballah and the opposition that you will never get the majority again, we are going to win the elections. I was wondering what's your assessment of these elections notwithstanding any kind of election law we're going to have. Do you think the majority still has the power on the ground to win these elections? And what kinds should be done or have not been done to make sure that these elections could yield the results that the majority wants? And is this the only way that the balance of power is going to change in the country and maybe we will see an end to the crisis? Or do you think there is something in the region that should give so we will see an end to the crisis? Thank you?

MR. FELTMAN: The last time I saw Rafiq Hariri was on February 12.

MS. : I was in Washington.

MR. FELTMAN: You were in Washington. On February 12, 2005, Rafiq Hariri and I were both paying

a condolence call on Robert Raman at the same time. Robert Raman's father who had been army commander had died and we happened to be at the church at the same time paying a condolence call. And Rafiq Hariri took me aside and we had been having many, many, many discussions about the election law, of course there are still discussions about the election law, what's the right sort of election law for Lebanon, and Rafiq Hariri who was a great calculator and was always calculating what different election laws would mean for the support that his bloc would get and blocs who are aligned with him. And he took me aside at the condolence call for Robert Raman for a small meeting and said, Jeff, I have figured it out. If we go for the 2000 election law, if we go for a government election law, if we go for a district election law like 1960, whatever election law it is, we are going to win. It does not matter. And he was very, very confident 2 days before he was murdered that this election law thing did not really matter, he was going to tell his bloc not to fall on their swords over one

type of election or the other because he had done the math and they were going to prevail, and the parliamentary session that he was leaving on the day he was killed as a parliamentary session to discuss the election law.

Let's hope that there are 2009 elections. There need to be 2009 elections. Right now one can think of the hurdles to 2009 elections, you need a law, you need the ministry of interior to administer, you need lots of things, but I do not think if you had the 2009 elections on schedule or even earlier that either side is going to win a knock-out, drag-out victory. I certainly hope the majority will win, I believe that the majority will win, but I do not believe that they will in such a significant way that the questions that we are all talking about will be more easily resolved than they are now. I forget what else I was going to say.

MR. INDYK: Regional --

MR. FELTMAN: Actually before I go back to that, if you listen to the March 8 politicians and

Michel Aoun, they all talk about the false majority and they talk about the fact that they would win elections now and all this kind of stuff. I do not believe that they really think that inside because it would not be so important for them to cripple the institutions of the state if they thought March 14 was really going to lose in the way that they say they predict because right now one of the powers of March 14 is the state because March 14 is the dominant power in the state institutions. So therefore in order to make March 14 not look credible, the opposition has worked very, very hard to cripple the of the institutions of the state I think out of fear that they realize that March 14 would still have a majority.

MR. INDYK: Do you want to address the regional dynamic here?

MR. FELTMAN: Let's wait.

MR. INDYK: Just as my own footnote, and you do not have to comment on this, but I suspect had Rafiq Hariri not talked so much about how he had it

figured out how he was going to win, he actually might have survived because those who killed him figured it out too and it was unacceptable that he would win. At least that's my take on it. Rafi Danziger?

MR. DANZIGER: I have seen some troubling reports on Hizballah's situation militarily about having replenished their arsenal through the open Syrian border and even about them moving south in force being in all the towns and villages south of the Litani, and even other reports saying that there is some kind of implicit cooperation between Hizballah and UNIFIL since the attack by a non-Hizballah group on UNIFIL and even reports that UNIFIL sometimes asks Hizballah to escort some of their patrols in southern Lebanon. How much truth is there in all those press reports? What is really going on in southern Lebanon? What is the security situation and to what extent UNIFIL as well as the Lebanese army be relied upon to maintain security in the south?

MR. FELTMAN: One of our goals internationally is that the Lebanese army does take

control of Lebanon's security and that's one of the reasons why the United States over the past year and a half has provided about \$330 million worth of equipment, training, and spare parts, and our commitment to the army will continue but we are not there yet. I would say that there have been some significant improvements in the Lebanese army's deployment and performance, et cetera. Again who would have thought even a year ago that you would have the Lebanese army entering one of the Palestinian camps in order to root out a Sunni extremist group and that would have the support of all parts of the population with the exception again of Hassan Nasrallah? We believe the reports of arms smuggling continuing across the Syrian border into Lebanon are true. We find them to be credible, we find them disturbing and credible, and that is one reason why we have been such a strong supporter of various missions to look at this problem and address this problem. I assure you it was one of the topics that I talked about with Prime Minister Siniora regularly, the

problem of arms smuggling across the Syrian-Lebanese border, and it is also an example of ongoing Syrian interference in Lebanon. In some ways it was easier back when I used to talk to Prime Minister Hariri about Syrian interference in Lebanon when you could point to the Syrian military intelligence offices in Anjar or you could point to the Syrian troops in the hills above Beirut. They were obvious examples of Syrian interference in Lebanon. Today it is less hard. How much is Hizballah Syrian, how much is Hizballah Iranian, how much is Hizballah local Shia political groups? But the arms smuggling is definitely something we can point to and particularly via some of these Palestinian rejectionist camps in the Bekaa Valley.

In terms of UNIFIL in the south, in general we think the situation in the south is better than it was prior to the 2006 war with Israel. It would be far more difficult for Hizballah to pull off the sort of kidnapping stunt across the Israeli border into Israel that they pulled off in 2006 that provoked the

war. In general it is better to have the Lebanese army starting to exercise some responsibilities in the south, it is better to have more UNIFIL troops there. Of course the UNIFIL contributing countries are concerned about force protection issues. There have been attacks against them. The situation is far from perfect. But in general, are we better with UNIFIL and Lebanese army forces in the south? I would answer strongly yes.

MR. : I agree with you that forcing the withdrawal of Syrian troops, the holding of free and fair elections, even the creation of a UNIFIL on steroids were major accomplishments, but the Syrians have been putting out the word for some time, leaving the tribunal aside, claiming that Lebanon is too strategically vital for Syria to be left alone, that they cannot and they will not allow the U.S., Israel, or for that matter any other outside power to dominate Lebanon. So in effect de facto we have to dominate Lebanon because we do not want anybody else to do it and there is a vacuum if we are not there.

Meanwhile, killings have continued with impunity. Most people in this room would assume that Syria had some hand or some influence in all these killings. And the U.S. government quite frankly does not seem to have any answers to this. At one time some years ago there was talk in neoconservative circles and within the U.S. government about regime change, that if they did not change behavior then the regime would have to be changed. You do not really hear that anymore. My sense is that the leadership circles in Syria are actually a bit smug these days believing that they have ridden out the worst of the storm and that time is on their side. Indeed, the other day one of the Arab satellite channels asked me to go on when the "Cole" was put 60 miles offshore and explain it. I said I could not explain it, I have no explanation for it whatsoever. Could you comment on what levers the U.S. has either on its own or working through international institutions to get Syria to back off to a much greater extent than it has been willing to do up to now?

MR. FELTMAN: In terms of Lebanon, what we have tried to do is use whatever tools we have ourselves as part of an international coalition in support of the goals as defined by the majority in Lebanon itself. We are using the U.N. institutions whether we are talking about the Security Council, whether we are talking about UNIFIL, or now the special tribunal that was set up of international character. We are trying to use our own resources to support the institutions of the state so that the state is strong enough to withstand the kind of interference that you described. We are often described as being partisan in the struggle in Lebanon and if partisan means standing on the side of independent Lebanon, standing on the side of a parliament that operates, and standing on the side of an army that is able to secure its own territory, I am happy to be accused of the charge of being partisan. We are trying to operate transparently as opposed to those who would import rockets via Syria to a foreign-funded militia.

I do not think, Ted, that there is any single step that will persuade the Syrians to keep their hands off Lebanon. I think this is going to be an ongoing issue that we all have to deal with inside Lebanon and outside Lebanon. But I have to ask what is it that the Syrians really fear from Lebanon. If Michel Sulieman were elected president of Lebanon today, does anybody really think that Michel Sulieman as president of Lebanon would somehow be anti-Syrian? This was not something that made us feel particularly warm and fuzzy, but do you remember when Prime Minister Siniora and his cabinet received their vote of confidence in the parliament in late July 2005, what was the first thing he did in office? He went to Damascus. He traveled to Damascus for consultations with Syrian cabinet counterparts. There are a lot of historic family, business, economic, religious ties between Lebanon and Syria. It would be unrealistic for us to say that there is on Syrian influence in Lebanon just as it would be unrealistic to say given the long history between the Maronites and the French

that there is no French influence in Lebanon, but the Syrians seem to require a much higher degree of interference than would be warranted in Syrian national interests. I do not believe that any government of Lebanon would be governing as an anti-Syrian government in a way that would provoke conflict with Syria and I do not believe Michel Sulieman poses any danger to Syria. The problem is how does Syria define its interests. The problem is not will the Lebanese government do something anti-Syrian, the problem is that Syria defines its interest as a higher degree of control inside Lebanon than the Lebanese people themselves or the international community can tolerate.

MR. INDYK: I am happy to say that we have in our midst a new Saban Center Visiting Fellow, the Charles and Andrea Bronfman Visiting Fellow, Itamar Rabinovich who has the next question.

MR. RABINOVICH: This is more of a comment than I question if I may predicated on Martin's point about Lebanon being a potential victim of potential

prospective Israeli-Syrian deal, not that a deal is imminent. I would be less concerned with the issue for the following reasons. It is true that in the 1990s when Israel and Syria negotiated seriously with U.S. shepherding, the implicit assumption was that part of what Syria would get out of the deal would be American-Israeli recognition explicit or implicit in its ongoing hegemony in Lebanon. The U.S. was not particularly interested and Israel as a result of 1982 had lost the more profound interest in having Lebanon as a kindred neighbor so saw it through a very narrow security lens and if Syria were to provide security then fine. Presently it is different. There is a sense that I think as you have very eloquently described, this is now major issue, self-standing and unrelated to other issues. The Israeli-Syrian negotiation if it is renewed will have to be trilateral and the Syrians are not interested bilaterally, they want the United States in so that American position will be reflected in the negotiations. Furthermore, a new factor in the

equation is Iran and the Israeli view of Iranian preponderance. There is no way that an Israeli government is going to make a deal with Syria and give up the Golan Heights with Syria remaining a very close ally if not to say a subordinate ally of Iran. If Syria is willing to distance itself from Iran as part of an overall package with the U.S. and Israel, then of course Lebanon becomes the beneficiary and that could be sorted out in a way that is not feasible now. So the issue is a real issue, but I think there is a way of dealing with it.

MR. FELTMAN: Thank you, ambassador. That is a good perspective. Thank you.

MR. INDYK: The next is Gary Mitchell from the "Mitchell Report."

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you. Mister Ambassador, this question has come up in a couple of earlier questions but I want to come at it in a slightly different way, and it is very simply this. Other than the Lebanese themselves, to whom is this new focus of American foreign policy, a sort of

Lebanon only foreign policy, to whom other than the Lebanese is that important? And to what U.S. strategic interest does that shift in policy address itself?

MR. FELTMAN: Let me be clear that Lebanon is still viewed in the U.S. government as part of the broader regional issue, Lebanon is still viewed in terms of a relationship with Israel, and it is still viewed in terms of a relationship with Syria, a relationship with Iran, and with the peace process more generally. What I was trying to say perhaps a bit inarticulately was that there is no contradiction between having a foreign policy that looks at Lebanon as Lebanon and also sees how Lebanon fits into our regional calculations. I think if you look at most countries with which we have a major commitment in the world, it is the same thing, we have a policy that is tailored for that country as that country and we also see how that country fits into our broader regional strategy and our broader regional interests. So I do not think there is not a contradiction in looking at

Lebanon as Lebanon while also seeing how Lebanon fits into our thinking on Israel, Syria, Iran, the peace process, the Palestinians, Mediterranean policy, what-have-you.

I guess our basic calculation is that having the Lebanese in charge of Lebanon is better overall than having an outside power inside in control of Lebanon. I am not saying this is easy. We have talked about the divisions inside Lebanon, and I am talking not only of divisions because of other outside powers that are playing in the Lebanese field, but because of differences among the Lebanese themselves. But I am convinced having served there that Lebanon as a multi-confessional, open economic state which we hope will be at peace with its neighbors with the state in control is something that is in U.S. interests to help the Lebanese achieve.

MR. INDYK: There was somebody down here. Could you introduce yourself, please?

MS. YACUBIAN: Mona Yacubian, U.S. Institute of Peace. Two questions for you. The first is I am

wondering if you could offer your assessment of the security situation in Lebanon today which is being characterized as very dangerous with the stalemate the longer it continues could easily deteriorate into greater violence if not even civil war, and there are those who are in particular pointing to the period after the Arab summit in Damascus. And then a second related question is your thoughts on the delicate balance of U.S. policy in Lebanon in such a precarious situation and in particular how certain policy decisions taken in support of March 14 may in fact contribute to a greater sense of instability.

MR. FELTMAN: Thanks, Mona. First of all, in terms of the ongoing stalemate, what I see as the major problem of the ongoing stalemate are the opportunity costs, opportunity costs in terms of the economic and the financial markets, opportunity costs in terms of getting young people committed to staying in Lebanon to help build Lebanon's future. The stalemate is contributing to a deterioration that has great opportunity costs. I am less concerned with the

risks of outright civil war. Certainly the risks are there, certainly there have been some very frightening clashes, but I think that there are some powerful brakes on the possibility of outright civil war in a way that Lebanon went through so tragically in the 1970s and 1980s. First of all, the Lebanese themselves recognize the dangers. They have lived through it. They remember it. And I do not think that any group has the illusion that they could win. Hizballah is the most powerful military organization in the country in terms of its arms. Would Hizballah want to win such a war in which it would be widely reviled in the Arab world for having provoked a Sunni-Shia clash, and its resistance aura would be destroyed by fighting on the streets. Does Iran which is providing the money and weapons for Hizballah want Hizballah to go into that sort of war? I do not think so, and I think that you can do the same with the Christians. Do the Christians believe that they could win a civil war as I thought many of them believed in the 1970s? The first thing is that the Lebanese will

put a brake on this kind of danger. I think the outside powers like Iran also would put a brake on this kind of power.

There have been some frightening clashes over the last past year and if you look at some of the things that have happened: two young followers of Walid Jumblatt murdered that could have easily led to widespread civil clashes; the January protests last year that shut down the city and led to some deaths; the January protests 2 days later at universities, all of these could have escalated into a civil war type atmosphere except that the Lebanese leaders from all sides of the political spectrum stepped back and calmed down their supporters instead of inciting them. I think that we can probably predict with accuracy that there will be more security problems and security clashes in Lebanon but I do not believe that it is going to result in all-out civil war for the reasons I said and I hope I am right.

MR. INDYK: Last question from George --

MR. : The issue is in the Middle East how to make the opposition part of the solution and not part of the problem. I am very encouraged by today's newspaper reports that we are going to start talking to Hamas through the Egyptians. Is there any chance that we can do this with Hizballah in Lebanon?

MR. FELTMAN: On April 18 we will face the twenty-fifth anniversary of when the embassy on the Corniche was blown up by proto-Hizballah. In the all we face the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Marine barracks being blown up. Next year we face the twenty-fifth anniversary of the second embassy in Beirut being blown up. I do not believe you are going to see any sort of rapprochement or dialogue between us and Hizballah. We have seen no indications that the behavior that so appalls us about Hizballah is changing whether we are talking about posing a threat to Lebanon's neighbors, whether we are talking about what they are doing inside Lebanon security-wide, whether we are talking about their terrorists threats more generally, I just do not see that happening. We

do talk to other parts of the March 8 opposition in Lebanon, we do talk to people who are allied with Syria inside, but for a lot of reasons we are not having a dialogue with Hizballah.

MR. : Hamas? What can you tell us?

MR. FELTMAN: We the United States government are also not having a dialogue with Hamas.

MR. INDYK: Thanks for clarifying that. Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in saying a very special thank you to Jeff for his articulate assessment and analysis of Lebanon's crisis today and U.S. policy toward it and for his willingness to engage in such a candid conversation with all of us. We are very grateful to you, Jeff. Thank you.

(Applause)

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