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House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia
“Update on the Situation in Lebanon”

Rayburn House Office Building, Room 2172

Tuesday, July 29, 2008 4pm

The Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs invited **Jeffrey Feltman**, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs in the U.S. Department of State to discuss the current political situation in Lebanon in light of the recent Doha Agreement. **Rep. Gary Ackerman** made opening remarks.

Rep. Ackerman began by noting that the consequences of the Doha Agreement are not yet clear, and that the future of Lebanon is not yet settled. Ackerman noted that while Hizbullah has managed to force “a new, and unjust political status quo,” he will not accept a future Lebanon run by “a gang of vicious thugs.” Ackerman derided the Bush administration’s failure to prevent recent events, stating that **“the U.S. cannot continue to shape events in region by reading the newspaper.”** “The reality in Lebanon is what it is, regardless of our likes and dislikes, and we have to go back to work on building up the strength of our allies.”

Rep. Pence lamented the “hero’s welcome” given to the return of Hizbullah terrorists in the recent exchange with Israel. Pence argued that incorporation of Hizbullah into the Lebanese government has failed to moderate their positions, and that as long as Lebanon continues to be “an example of foreign occupation” (Iran, Syria), that Hizbullah’s position in the government will continue to be legitimized. **Pence recommended totally isolation of Hizbullah.**

Rep. Wilson warned that Lebanon is at the center of a power struggle, in which Iran hopes to spread instability by supporting Hizbullah in order to undermine U.S. efforts and gain influence.

Jeffrey Feltman stated that Lebanon’s **spring 2009 Parliamentary elections will be crucial**, and that the election of President Sulieman, and the formation of a new cabinet under Prime Minister Siniora are “a welcome development.” The new government will need to pass an election law, as required by the Doha Agreement, as well as numerous internationally required reforms.

Feltman voiced **concern regarding Hizbullah**, as arms cross over the Syrian border, as the group has made statements asserting that it will not give up its weapons, and as it undermines government institutions. The U.S. will continue to pressure Syria to normalize its diplomatic relationship with Lebanon.

In regard to Sheba'a Farms, the U.S. supports the implementation of U.N. Security Resolution 1701. In addition, the U.S. continues to strengthen the Lebanese army.

When asked by Rep. Ackerman how the engagement with Syria, Feltman responded that the Bush administration **continues to limit its engagement until Syria complies** with its international obligations, ends the transfer of weapons over the border, stops foreign fighters from entering Iraq, and ends its rejection of Israel.

When as by Rep. Wilson about Lebanon's army, Feltman explained that the U.S. was making a **long-term investment into the state and its security**, in "a national institution that has universal respect." The force is about the size of the New York Police Department, but it faces many security problems including Palestinian refugees and Sunni extremists.

When asked about the likely outcome of the Spring 2009 Provincial elections, Feltman argued that it was agreed at Doha to use smaller voting districts, but that the parliament is likely to be similar in distribution as is today: **reflecting a deeply divided body politic.**