

# The Latest Developments in Saudi Arabia and Lebanon

Prepared statement by

**Elliott Abrams**

*Senior Fellow for Middle Eastern Studies  
Council on Foreign Relations*

Before the

Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa

*United States House of Representatives  
1st Session, 115th Congress*

Madam Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for inviting me to testify before you today about events regarding Lebanon and Saudi Arabia.

Let me begin with Saudi Arabia.

As you know, several weeks ago the crown prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman, announced the arrests of eleven princes, some of the Kingdom's most prominent businessmen, and some former officials. He also announced several dramatic changes to top government ministries, including the creation of a powerful new anticorruption committee.<sup>1</sup>

The background to these events is the continuing centralization of power in the hands of the crown prince, who is one of King Salman's sons. Over the past two years he has taken over most of the key economic and security posts and has clearly emerged as the most powerful person in the government. The crown prince is

---

<sup>1</sup> Portions of this testimony have been excerpted from Elliott Abrams, "Game of Thrones' Comes to Saudi Arabia," *New York Times*, November 6, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/06/opinion/crown-prince-saudi-arabia.html>, and Elliott Abrams, "Riyadh Realpolitik," *Weekly Standard*, November 17, 2017, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/riyadh-realpolitik/article/2010533>.

also deputy prime minister (under the king, who is also prime minister) and minister of defense. All this at the age of thirty two.

This steady seizure of power has given rise to resistance within and outside the royal family, and Mohammed bin Salman's elevation to crown prince was not unanimously supported when the top royal princes met to approve it. In the Saudi system, power has been passed among the sons of the founder of the modern Saudi kingdom, known as Ibn Saud, since his death in 1953. That made the king more *primus inter pares* than absolute monarch. One king was removed by his brothers (Saud, in 1964), and the system has permitted fiefs: The late King Abdullah was head of the National Guard for decades, and his son Miteb bin Abdullah took it over after his death; the late Prince Nayef served as minister of interior for thirty seven years and his son came after him; the late Prince Sultan was minister of defense for nearly a half century, and his son Khalid was his deputy.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is putting an end to all that, taking some of those posts himself and removing others from the seemingly permanent control of any one branch of the family. All power is going to his branch—to his father, himself and his own allies; one brother is now the new Saudi ambassador to the United States.

Is this centralization of power a good thing for the United States, or even for Saudi Arabia? That question will best be answered retrospectively, in about a decade. What's clear now, though, is that Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has announced ambitious economic and social changes, from allowing women to drive and mix with men in sports stadiums, to selling off a part of the kingdom's key asset, the Aramco oil company, to challenging the ideology of the Wahhabi clerics. He appears to believe that such moves require sheer power, both to overcome resistance and to move the Kingdom's poorly educated and youthful population (roughly half are under the age of 25) of 33 million into the twenty first century.

The crown prince has spoken of a more modern Saudi Arabia, at least when it comes to the role of religion and the rights of women. Last month he called for "a moderate Islam open to the world and all religions."<sup>2</sup> But political liberalization is not in the cards. Indeed, a serious crackdown has been underway for the last two years, including lengthy prison terms for tweets that criticized the Saudi authorities. The message from the palace is clear: get on board or pay the price. That message applies not only to commoners, but to the entire royal family.

The crown prince is reacting to several crises that face the kingdom. The first is economic: with a fast-growing and youthful population, and the decline in oil prices we have seen, the old economic model was going to collapse. No longer could the state throw off enough income in oil revenues to support the entire

---

<sup>2</sup> Elliott C. McLaughlin, "Saudi crown prince promises 'a more moderate Islam,'" *CNN.com*, October 25, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/10/24/middleeast/saudi-arabia-prince-more-moderate-islam/index.html>.

population. Some way would need to be found to create jobs for young men, and women, and make the economy less oil-dependent and more productive. That is the goal of the Saudi Vision 2030 plan. The second, as noted, is the challenge of governance, and the crown prince has turned away from the old brother-to-brother system which in any event the passage of time was rendering impossible. The third is the challenge of Iran.

To the Saudis, recent years have presented a nightmare vision of being sandwiched between an Iranian-dominated Iraq and an Iranian-dominated Yemen, with Iranian-dominated Lebanon and Syria to the west, and with Iranian subversion of the Sunni Gulf states. In their eyes, the last decade has seen extraordinary Iranian advances and a reluctance on the part of the United States to halt them. Thus their more assertive foreign and defense policy, in Yemen, Lebanon, and elsewhere.

It is common to refer to Mohammed bin Salman's actions, at home and abroad, as remarkably bold, assertive, and risky, but I am willing to bet that is not how he sees them. My sense is that he sees himself less as acting than as reacting—to a series of events in the Kingdom and in the region that bring the Kingdom into real danger. That is, a steady-state policy, where the next brother had become king for a few years, where the state continued to live solely on diminishing oil revenues, where the Wahhabi strictures held back the development of a more modern society, and where Iran became the regional hegemon, was simply too dangerous. Inaction was the real danger, in his view—not bold action. So he is taking action. He will have failures and he will make mistakes, but it is very greatly in the interest of the United States that in the main he succeed.

Now I would like to turn to Lebanon.

Since the resignation of Lebanese Prime Minister Sa'ad Hariri was announced from Riyadh on November 4, there has been renewed attention to the situation in Lebanon and Saudi policies toward that country.

What are the Saudis trying to do in Lebanon? Is the new Saudi approach another example of the often-alleged over-reach of the crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman?

Not in my view. On the contrary, the new and tougher Saudi approach seems to me more realistic—and unsurprisingly in line with the new Israeli approach. And both are not actions but reactions, to the reality that Hezbollah is in fact in charge of Lebanon.

First, a bit of history. In the 2006 war between Israel and Lebanon, Israel made a sharp distinction between Hezbollah and Lebanon. Israeli attacks decimated Hezbollah targets, but did not focus on the Lebanese infrastructure. For example, to put the Beirut airport out of use the Israelis hit the runway, making take-offs and landings impossible. They did zero damage to the terminal, hangars, and so on, so that repaving the

runway and opening the airport could be done fast when hostilities ended. Similarly, I recall visiting Beirut with then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice during the conflict and seeing the tall lighthouse in the port. An Israeli missile had gone right through the lighthouse's top and taken out its searchlight. There was no damage to the structure, so that all that was needed was a new searchlight and the lighthouse would instantly be operational again. Israel made a special effort to avoid major damage to the Lebanese national infrastructure, despite claims to the contrary from the Lebanese government.

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* quoted one expert on Hezbollah concluding "This is effectively a coup."<sup>3</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* in 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>4</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.

Lebanon's president must constitutionally be a Christian, but today that man is Michel Aoun, an ally of Hezbollah since 2006. That is why he got to be president in 2016. 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

---

<sup>3</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>4</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](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/27/world/middleeast/hezbollah-iran-syria-israel-lebanon.html?_r=1).

election...you can see Hezbollah being consolidated in terms of its political allies as well as its position in Lebanon.”<sup>5</sup>

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>6</sup>

The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), a recipient of U.S. assistance, 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>7</sup>

Last summer Badran, in an article entitled “Lebanon is Another Name for Hezbollah,” concluded that “The Lebanese state...is worse than a joke. It’s a front.”<sup>8</sup>

Sometimes, it is worse than a joke; it is an insult. A reminder of the way in which Lebanese political culture has been undermined and warped by Hezbollah is the story of Samir Kuntar. Kuntar was a terrorist. CNN described his crimes:

A member of the Palestine Liberation Front, Kuntar led a group of four men who entered Israel from Lebanon by boat in 1979. They killed a police officer who came across them. Then they took a 28-year-old man and his 4-year-old daughter hostage.

---

<sup>5</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>6</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>7</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>8</sup> Tony Badran, “Lebanon is Another Name for Hezbollah,” *Tablet*, July 26, 2017, <http://www.tabletmag.com/scroll/241749/lebanon-is-another-name-for-hezbollah>.

Kuntar shot the father dead at close range in front of his daughter and tossed his body in the sea. He then smashed the girl's head, killing her.<sup>9</sup>

Kuntar was captured by Israel, tried, convicted, and imprisoned, and then released in 2008 in an exchange with Hezbollah for the bodies of two Israeli soldiers captured in 2006. Kuntar returned to Lebanon—and was celebrated as a hero. But this greeting came not only from Hezbollah, which is grotesque enough; it came from the entire Lebanese government, from all parties. Lebanon's president and its prime minister greeted Kuntar as a hero. He was flown from the border to Beirut International Airport, where he was met on a red carpet by the entire cabinet. Kuntar was killed by an Israeli air strike in 2015. But think about a government and a political system that celebrates a Hezbollah murderer this way. That may be the true measure of Hezbollah's influence.

That is the situation to which Mohammed bin Salman is reacting. The key man in maintaining this façade has been Lebanon's prime minister, who must constitutionally be a Sunni and is Saad Hariri. Hariri is the son of Rafik Hariri, the former prime minister assassinated in 2005 (almost certainly in a joint effort by Hezbollah and the Assad regime in Syria). Mohammed bin Salman looks around the region and sees his own country in danger of being sandwiched between Iranian-dominated Iraq and an Iranian-dominated Yemen, while Iran—and Hezbollah—increasingly dominate Syria as well as Lebanon. Saad Hariri has always been subject to Saudi pressures, in large part because his family's fortune was made in Saudi Arabia and depends to this day on Saudi largesse. Mohammed bin Salman must have wondered why he was paying to maintain that front or façade, propping up a Lebanese government that does not govern and instead allows free rein to Hezbollah. Indeed Hezbollah is part of Hariri's coalition government, and his resignation could collapse that coalition. It now appears that he has rescinded his resignation, at least for the moment.

In addition to pressuring Hariri, the Saudis have several ways of pressuring Lebanon economically. The Saudi deposit of \$860 million in the Lebanese Central Bank, meant to stabilize Lebanon's currency, might be withdrawn.<sup>10</sup> Remittances from Lebanese working outside the country are critical for the country's economy, constituting about 15 percent of Lebanon's GDP, and Lebanese working in Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies provide a significant portion of that; those workers could start to be sent home.<sup>11</sup> "80 percent of foreign direct investment in Lebanon comes from the Gulf," and it could decline precipitously.<sup>12</sup> Finally, Gulf tourists are a key part of Lebanon's tourism sector both in numbers and per capita spending. "The number of Saudi tourists to Lebanon increased by 86.77 percent in the first 7 months of 2017 compared to

---

<sup>9</sup> "Lebanon hails militants freed in prisoner swap," *CNN.com*, July 17, 2008, <http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/meast/07/16/israel.swap/>.

<sup>10</sup> Hanin Ghaddar, *PolicyWatch 2891: Saudi Arabia's War on Lebanon*, (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2017), <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/saudi-arabias-war-on-lebanon>.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

the same period last year,” the *Daily Star* of Beirut reported in August, but now the Saudis and other Gulf nations have told their citizens to leave Lebanon.<sup>13</sup> This will hit the tourism industry hard.

Why punish Lebanon? There is no doubt that such measures can affect every Lebanese—but that is the point. 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. They are asking a different question: what will it take for Lebanese to pressure Hezbollah to cut back on its actions and to allow the Lebanese state to govern again? Is it possible that if all Lebanese—not just Sunnis, Christians, and Druze but also Shia—pay a higher price for Hezbollah’s subservience to Iran, Hezbollah might begin to worry about its own political base in Lebanon? One estimate in *Newsweek* puts Hezbollah’s own toll at 2,000-2,500 dead and 7,000 injured in Syria, meaning that every Shia village and most families have suffered some loss.<sup>14</sup> The Shia population is about one million, so about one percent has been injured or killed fighting for Iran in Syria, and every casualty is of course a member of a much larger family group.

The point is, it is not Mohammed bin Salman who is bringing danger to Lebanon; it is not the Saudis who are bringing Lebanon into the region’s wars; it is not Saudi policy that threatens to collapse Lebanon’s coalition politics. It is the actions of Hezbollah, abandoning any national role to act as Iran’s enforcer and foreign legion. What the Saudis are doing is saying, 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.

There is of course no guarantee that this 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.

It remains to be seen if Saad Hariri himself will now seek to limit Hezbollah’s room for maneuver in any way. In the last several years he has not, but his statements since returning to Lebanon have been tougher and have criticized Hezbollah for its involvement in the affairs of other Arab states. What the Saudis, and

---

<sup>13</sup> “Saudi tourists return to Lebanon in droves: report,” *The Daily Star*, August 12, 2017, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Business/Local/2017/Aug-12/415750-saudi-tourists-return-to-lebanon-in-droves-report.ashx>.

<sup>14</sup> Mona Alami, “Will Hezbollah remain in Syria forever?,” *Newsweek*, March 28, 2017, <http://www.newsweek.com/will-hezbollah-remain-syria-forever-573818>.



perhaps Saad Hariri, are asking for is a government in Lebanon that actually governs the country, and does so to advance and protect the interests of Lebanon, not those of Iran.

Are these outrageous demands? On the contrary, they are in fact demanded by UN 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>15</sup>

In other words, what the Saudis are demanding is what the UN Security Council demanded unanimously over a decade ago—and the Lebanese government accepted days later. 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.

This raises, of course, the question of U.S. aid to the Lebanese Armed Forces. On November 6, Senator Ted Cruz commented on this matter:

'The resignation of Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri is the latest consequence of Iran's increasingly pervasive influence in Lebanon through its terrorist proxy Hezbollah,' Sen. Cruz said. 'Given these developments, it is time for the United States to reassess the military assistance we provide to Lebanon, including to the Lebanese Armed Forces, and conduct a formal review of our strategy there. It was just a few days ago that Lebanon's President Aoun yet again threatened Israel, saying, 'All the Lebanese are prepared to fight against Israel.'<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> UN Security Council, Resolution 1701, Middle East, S/RES/1701, ¶3, ¶8, <https://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/resolutions/2006.shtml>.

<sup>16</sup> Office of Senator Ted Cruz, "Sen. Cruz Issues Statement in Response to the Resignation of Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri," press release, November 6, 2017, [https://www.cruz.senate.gov/?p=press\\_release&id=3474](https://www.cruz.senate.gov/?p=press_release&id=3474).



This seems to me the correct approach: to reassess our military assistance and our entire strategy. 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.

On July 25, when Prime Minister Hariri visited the White House, President Donald J. Trump said this:

What the Lebanese Armed Forces have accomplished in recent years is very impressive. In 2014, when ISIS tried to invade northern Lebanon, the Lebanese army beat them back. Since that time, the Lebanese army has been fighting continually to guard Lebanon's border and prevent ISIS and other terrorists—of which there are many—from gaining a foothold inside their country.

The United States military has been proud to help in that fight and will continue to do so. America's assistance can help ensure that the Lebanese army is the only defender Lebanon needs. It's a very effective fighting force.

Threats to the Lebanese people come from inside, as well. Hizballah is a menace to the Lebanese state, the Lebanese people, and the entire region. The group continues to increase its military arsenal, which threatens to start yet another conflict with Israel, constantly fighting them back.<sup>17</sup>

I think we would all agree with the comments on Hezbollah, but I am not sure we would all agree with the comments on the LAF. We've given the LAF over a billion dollars in military aid, including \$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 that total support for the LAF from State Department and Defense Department accounts totaled \$160 million over the previous year.<sup>18</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. According to the most recent report on Lebanon by Congressional Research Service, dated November 9, 2017,

As part of the Trump Administration proposal to cut 12% of overall bilateral aid to the Middle East and North Africa (from FY2016 enacted levels), FMF grants to a number of regional governments—

---

<sup>17</sup> Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by President Trump and Prime Minister Hariri of Lebanon in Joint Press Conference," press release, July 25, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/07/25/remarks-president-trump-and-prime-minister-hariri-lebanon-joint-press>.

<sup>18</sup> Jack Detsch, "US 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>.

including Lebanon—would be halted. FMF has been one of the primary sources of U.S. funding for the LAF, along with CTPF funds. Both the House (H.R. 3362) and Senate (S. 1780) FY2018 State and Foreign Operations appropriations bills envision FMF continuing to Lebanon. The Senate appropriations report (S.Rept. 115-152) recommends \$105 million in FMF to Lebanon...

In October 2017, Ambassador Richard announced the delivery of the first two (of six) A-29 Super Tucano aircraft to the Lebanese military, and stated that U.S. support to the LAF in 2017 totaled \$160 million. Also in October, the Trump Administration notified Congress of its intention to provide more than \$121 million in new Department of Defense support to the LAF Special Forces and LAF Air Force using 10 U.S.C. 333 authority, including helicopters for close air support...

In the 115th Congress, language in proposed aid legislation for Lebanon largely mirrors previous years, with some exceptions reflecting enhanced concern among some Members and the Trump Administration about the LAF's role and operations in Lebanon. In July 2017, the House Appropriations Committee reported its version of the FY2018 State and Foreign Operations appropriations bill (H.R. 3362) without a notwithstanding provision exempting ESF for Lebanon from the LAF deployment certification requirements of Section 1224 of P.L. 107-228. The committee report on the bill also directed the Administration to submit a report on LAF operations. H.R. 3362 was incorporated into the omnibus bill (H.R. 3354) which the House passed in September. The Senate Appropriations Committee reported version of the bill includes a notwithstanding provision for ESF aid to Lebanon (S. 1780). The House version of the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 2810) would require reporting on threats to the United States posed by Hezbollah operations in Syria and Iranian use of commercial aircraft to support Hezbollah and other groups.<sup>19</sup>

There is also the question of LAF coordination with Hezbollah. 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>20</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>21</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Lebanon*, by Carla E. Humud, R44759 (2017), 27-29, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R44759.pdf>.

<sup>20</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>21</sup> Humud, *Lebanon*, 11.

A reassessment of what we've gotten for that money seems essential to me, and it's clear that many in Congress take this view. Is Lebanon closer to meeting the demands of 1701 than it was a decade ago—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, Madam Chairman, for this opportunity to testify.