

# A duty to throw off a tyrannical government

Contributed by Administrator  
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Today - on July 4th - the United States of America celebrates 231 years of independence. Americans throughout our 50 diverse states will gather with families and friends to enjoy summer picnics outdoors. Small towns and large cities alike host festive parades. And as night falls, Americans enjoy concerts of patriotic music and colorful fireworks.

As US ambassador, I've reflected frequently about the struggle of the Lebanese people for freedom and democracy, independence and sovereignty. Observing both the exhilarating and tragic events of the past three years, I appreciate even more the bravery and sacrifices so many Americans made to protect and preserve the unity, independence and democracy of my own country, the United States. To my surprise, I see some similarities in the struggles of our two peoples to achieve genuine independence. Winning freedom and forging a viable union out of diversity, particularly when some are trying to restore the old order, is neither quick nor easy.

On July 4th, 1776, a brave group of men in Philadelphia put their names to a document declaring the United States of America a free and independent nation. Even the most courageous signers of the Declaration of Independence struggled with the decision to break political ties so decisively with Great Britain. But, they also believed it was not just their right and but also their duty to throw off a tyrannical government which had attempted to assert its control through military force and undermine American self-confidence by inflaming tensions and casting doubts about America's capacity for self rule.

Americans recognized that it took more than the stroke of a pen to transform 13 diverse colonies into one strong, prosperous and united country. Finding the correct balance between a strong central government and local rights took 17 years - time for state militias to be integrated into the national army, for Americans to adapt to life without British troops on their soil, and for an American identity to be forged.

Americans also proved their ability to accept the outcome of presidential elections. It wasn't clear what would happen when second President John Adams (representing the Whig Party) lost to rival Republican Party candidate Thomas Jefferson. Would the powerful Whigs accept their defeat or would they fight the democratic transition through undemocratic means? Fortunately for American democracy, the Whig Party accepted the loss and regrouped to fight the next election at the ballot box, not on the battlefield.

When I review the path to American independence, I recognize the challenges and inevitable missteps. But I admire the foresight, courage and sacrifice of those Americans. I understand how fearful or uncertain they must have been about their future when success seemed so unlikely. But now, 231 years later, as we celebrate Independence Day, there is no question that the signers of the Declaration of Independence made the right decision. We know that our potential would never have been realized had we remained under a foreign mandate, no matter how benevolent.

And what about the long list of angry grievances against a "tyrannical" Great Britain that prompted the signers of the Declaration of Independence to act? Independence from British rule did not condemn us to permanently hostile relations. Today, the United States is proud to count the United Kingdom as its strongest ally and partner. But our deep friendship with the United Kingdom, rooted in so many ties between our countries, did not blossom until the British government recognized and respected our sovereignty.

July 4th, 1776, was not the birth of a perfect union, but rather the promise made by 56 men of diverse backgrounds and beliefs to unite for a common goal - a sovereign, independent and democratic United States of America. Our history proves that diversity does not have to mean disunity.

As our Founding Fathers pledged to work with each other to realize their vision, so too do we pledge our support to the Lebanese people as they seek to secure an independent, sovereign, prosperous, democratic and united Lebanon. We know from our own historic experience how difficult it can be to define common goals, build a national consensus and establish a democracy.

But the Lebanese are not alone in their struggle. In celebrating our American independence today, July 4th, we celebrate also the partnership of our two diverse and democratic countries - Lebanon and the United States. The strong ties that bind our peoples today connect also our two countries, now and in the future.

Jeffrey D. Feltman US ambassador to Lebanon, Thursday, July 05, 2007