

# Congressman Gary L. Ackerman Support for Lebanon at Congressional Hearing US Congress

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Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia

Gary L. Ackerman (D-NY), Chairman

You are respectfully requested to attend the following OPEN hearing of the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia, to be held in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building .

Date: Thursday, November 08, 2007 Time: 9:30 AM

Subject: Lebanon on the Brink witnesses: The Honorable C. David Welch, Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State

Statement of Rep. Gary L. Ackerman, Chairman  
House Subcommittee on the Middle East & South Asia  
&ldquo;Lebanon on the Brink&rdquo;  
November 8, 2007

Watch the Video of US Congress Hearing on Lebanon here Webcast:

Secretary Welch, welcome back to the Subcommittee at last. I know you&rsquo;ve been very busy, but we&rsquo;ve missed you.

We&rsquo;re here today to talk about the presidential succession crisis in Lebanon and the implications of this struggle for the national security of the United States. Lebanon truly is on the brink of either the collapse of the Cedar Revolution, or the return of civil war. Like most Lebanese, we want neither. For Lebanon to remain a sovereign and independent state, ruled by a government elected and accountable only to the Lebanese people, the United States and the international community are going to have to act fast.

Lest anyone shrug their shoulders, thinking that Lebanon&rsquo;s misfortunes are just another sad chapter in the dysfunctional history of the Middle East, but nothing about which the United States should worry, I would say it is already too late for complaisance. We should be very clear about the stakes involved in what happens over the next few weeks in Lebanon.

Throughout the world, and certainly throughout the Middle East, Lebanon&rsquo;s ruling majority and the government of Prime Minister Fuad Siniora are perceived as pro-Western, and specifically, as American-backed. We have, for better or worse, put our imprimatur on them. We have provided them with both financial aid and with arms. As surely as Syria and Iran have acted as patrons to Hezbollah, the three confessions that form Lebanon&rsquo;s majority are seen and are understood to be our allies. It would be nice if they were stronger, and if they didn&rsquo;t have their own legacies of violence, corruption, and shifting alliances, but these are the allies we have.

Given the degree to which the United States is detested throughout the Middle East, I&rsquo;m sure they would have preferred to have turned to another country of enormous power, vast wealth and preeminent international influence. There is, of course, no other such country, so until someone invents another United States of America, we&rsquo;re it. And as such, the success and survival of the Cedar Revolution will have a tremendous effect on regional perceptions of our power and influence, and our ability to protect our friends and allies.

When it comes to Iraq, the Bush Administration has frequently pointed out that precipitous departure would embolden terrorist leaders, destabilize the Middle East and encourage aggression by Iran. I would suggest that each of these arguments applies, and applies much better, to Lebanon. While the murderous chaos of Iraq might be explained away as an impossible problem for any country to repair, the collapse of the Cedar Revolution would be widely understood as a clear victory for Syria and Iran over the United States. Failure to protect Lebanon would devastate our credibility in a region already unsettled by our inability to stop the mullah&rsquo;s march toward nuclear weapons, or as yet, to bring the Arab-Israeli conflict any closer to resolution. Our national defense budget is, by itself, three times the size of Iran and Syria&rsquo;s combined GDP. If they succeed, despite our efforts, in returning Lebanon to its former status as a foreign

fiefdom, that failure will not be seen as America just having a bad day.

The fact is the current Lebanese majority has planted its flag in our camp and it has staked its fortunes on the West. They stand, perhaps imperfectly, for the idea of Lebanon as a peaceful, independent and democratic state, whose sovereignty is protected by a single national authority bound by the rule of law. This vision is what America stands for, if it stands for anything. Syria, Iran and their Lebanese terrorist proxies have a different idea.

Having spent 14 years in the minority, I can say from experience that the essence of democratic government is not the rule of the majority; that's mere counting. The test of democracy is whether the minority will participate, lose and accept the outcome as legitimate. It is this idea that is at stake in Lebanon today. Will Lebanon's president be elected according to the Lebanese constitution, or according to the dictates of an aggrieved minority armed by, and allied with, foreign powers? Will Lebanon's majority actually rule, or will that nation's future be decided by bombs and militias and assassinations? Will Lebanon once again become the Paris of the Middle East, or will it again become a war-zone and stagnate as a den of jihadi terrorists, religious zealots, and craven warlords happy to lick the fingers of Ba'athist goons?

There are two mutually inconsistent ideas competing for dominance in Lebanon and, by extension, the entire Middle East. One proposes the supremacy of thugs and clerics, endless violence, sectarian conflict, and perpetual impoverishment and isolation. The other proposes the rule of law, peace among nations, reconciliation between communities, and economic engagement and integration with the rest of the world. Amazingly, right now, it is the second idea, the one that is associated with the United States, that is struggling for survival.

We cannot afford to be neutral in this contest. Our national security depends on the outcome. When Secretary Rice was here two weeks ago I suggested four steps that I believe should be considered urgently. First, America's commitment to Lebanon's sovereignty and independence needs to be reiterated by the President in a major address. Damascus and Tehran and the entire Middle East need to hear explicitly that the United States will not accept the resumption of foreign domination of Lebanon; that we insist that foreign states refrain from interfering in Lebanon's constitutional processes; that we consider the assassinations of Lebanese parliamentarians as acts of international aggression; that we will never sacrifice the Special Tribunal for Lebanon to appease other states; and that we will push for the Special Tribunal to include all assassinations since Rafiq Hariri's in its purview.

Second, the President should immediately impose economic and political sanctions against the Syrian regime, specifically President Assad, his family and his coterie of close associates. I would note the four individuals sanctioned early this week are a good step, but I would suggest that the President has not come close to exhausting the expansive sanctioning powers and authority he has under U.S. law with regard to Syria.

Third, the United States needs to raise the profile of this crisis much higher. The informal group that met at the Istanbul Conference, and produced a very good statement on Lebanon, should be formally constituted as an international contact group with the explicit mission of protecting Lebanon's sovereignty and independence. Further, I still believe the President should appoint a single figure in the United States government to be responsible for managing this crisis to stability. Perhaps Mr. Secretary that person should be you, but at this point, other than the President himself, I don't think that all the parties interested in resolving this crisis know who to call.

Fourth, the House (twice) and the Senate (once) have passed resolutions supporting Lebanon, and pledging our continued readiness to put our money where our mouth is. Mr. Secretary, if you believe we need more resources to prevent disaster, you have to ask for them. The support is here.

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