



Update on the Situation in the Middle East and Other Matters

Ambassador John R. Bolton, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations

Remarks to the media following a Security Council Stakeout
New York City
August 16, 2006

USUN PRESS RELEASE #207

Ambassador Bolton: Good morning. Good morning.

Reporter: A senior UN official said yesterday that even without additional troops for UNIFIL, the Lebanese army could deploy into the south and Israel could start withdrawing if there is the political will. Do you believe that this is realistic? And do you believe there is political will to accomplish this sooner rather than later?

Ambassador Bolton: Well, there are a lot of "coulds" and "ifs" in your question. The real strategic imperative here is that as the withdrawal of Israeli forces proceeds, that there is established an adequate security presence both by the government of Lebanon and by the enhanced UNIFIL that prevents Hezbollah from re-infiltrating. Now, the circumstances under which that will take place, I think, are up to the judgment of the people on the ground. But it was certainly our feeling in the Security Council that the Lebanese Cabinet decision of eight or nine days ago now to deploy 15,000 troops from the Lebanese armed forces, plus the authorization of the enhancement of UNIFIL to 15,000, created a sufficiently sized force that that would be a basis on which one could conclude that security could be established. That's 30,000. UNIFIL now has 2,000 and we don't know when the Lebanese armed forces will deploy. But as I say, the mechanism that the resolution sets up is that all of this parallel activity of the deployment of the international force, the deployment of the Lebanese armed forces and the withdrawal of the Israeli forces is to take place in parallel and in a coordinated fashion. So I think the commanders on the ground as much as anything else have to make a judgment whether the situation at some point is ripe for this parallel action to begin and whether that is sufficient to preclude the vacuum from being created. That's the real question. It's not "could" or "would" or "if" or "maybe"; it's will the Israeli withdrawal create a vacuum that allows Hezbollah to reenter, which is what we want to avoid.

Reporter: Ambassador, can you say anything further today concretely and more specifically about what type of support the U.S. will be offering, perhaps in tomorrow's meeting, logistical or otherwise?

Ambassador Bolton: Not at this point, no. Not at this point.

Reporter: How is the Lebanese army going to get to the south with so many bridges burned and so many roads clogged? Are they going to go by sea? Is someone going to help them? Are we doing anything?

Ambassador Bolton: Fortunately for them, the Lebanese armed forces are not dependent on my logistical advice and I suspect that they know the country, they know the geography, they know the terrain, they know what their logistical needs are. And that's one of the things that clearly needs to be worked out with the commander of UNIFIL and the enhanced UNIFIL force and the military leadership of the IDF. And they have met already once at Nekura, the three of them together, and I believe had an exchange of views on this subject. And I think this is really a case where operational decisions on the ground are going to be critical, and the pace at which the LAF can deploy and the size and scope of that deployment will depend on factors that they will have to play out. But I know that we and the U.K. and I'm sure the French and others would like to assist the Lebanese armed forces, and I think steps are under way to see if that can be done. But I think it would be a mistake to try and answer operational, logistical and deployment questions from here in New York.

Reporter: Mr. Ambassador, the Syrian president said that this has been a victory for Syria and the resistance, and there seems to be rhetorical escalation that's having effects on Lebanon. Do you have any comments on the Syrian position? Do you expect new things from them at this point?

Ambassador Bolton: Well, I think the -- at least part of the rhetoric from the Syrian president's speech yesterday was not helpful, as it was reported to us by our Embassy in Damascus. President al-Assad called for getting rid of Israel, and that's certainly not a very helpful statement and something that mirrors what President Ahmadinejad of Iran has said in past months as well. I think that that kind of language is very unhelpful.

Reporter: Are you happy with the pace of planning five days after the resolution was passed on getting troops over there?

Ambassador Bolton: The responsibility for the planning is the Secretariat's. They have requested and we are supplying a U.S. logistician. They've requested logistics planners from France and I think Italy as well who are being made available to them, and, you know, the pace at which this goes depends on the UN Secretariat and the potential troop contributors.

Reporter: Ambassador, there seems to be a sticking point in Beirut still over the degree to which Hezbollah is disarmed and by whom. And as I understand it, there may be some agreement coming out of the Lebanese government cabinet this afternoon that it would be -- that Hezbollah would be asked not to carry weapons, not to fire weapons from bunkers, but they would not be required to move weapons out of southern Lebanon. In those circumstances, do you think contributing countries are going to feel comfortable deploying? And would that kind of compromise on Hezbollah weapons be satisfactory to the United States?

Ambassador Bolton: I think, in terms of the potential troop contributing countries, you have to ask them. In terms of the end state that we're seeking, I think that's spelled out in Resolution 1559, which is that there's only going to be one legitimate government of Lebanon and that armed militia groups, including Hezbollah, if you want to call them an armed militia group, as opposed to calling them terrorists -- have to be disarmed as well. And so that's the objective that we're seeking. Why don't I just take one more here, because I need to --

Reporter: I was just going to ask you about the Israeli foreign minister, who's coming here today. Are you planning to see her? And what's your understanding of why she's flown all this way to come and see the Secretary General?

Ambassador Bolton: I will be seeing her, I think, after the Secretary General this morning. And I assume it's to have a conversation about the circumstances, the follow on to 1701 and what the next steps are. That's certainly what I'll be prepared to talk about with her, or any -- she's the Foreign Minister. I'll talk about whatever she wants to talk about. Okay? All right. Thanks a lot.

Released on August 16, 2006

 [BACK TO TOP](#)

Published by the U.S. Department of State Website at <http://www.state.gov> maintained by the Bureau of Public Affairs.