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PRESS RELEASES

**Transcript: Statement of U.S. Department of State
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs
David Satterfield
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Beirut, Lebanon February 28, 2005**

28 February 2005



*Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs David Satterfield at the
Ministry of Foreign Affairs*

OFFICIAL TEXT

(Begin text)

Let me open with a few words regarding my meeting with Minister Hammoud. We discussed the issues confronting Lebanon and the region, following up on the discussions held here by Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs Burns. I made clear to the Minister the strong interest of the United States and the international community in seeing the full application of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1559, including the complete withdrawal of Syrian forces, including military intelligence, from Lebanon.

We see UNSCR 1559 as completely consistent with both the letter and the spirit of the Taif Accord, concluded 15 years ago. It is time for that Accord--in its full measure--to be applied. It is time for the Taif Accord--in all of its aspects--to be fully implemented here in Lebanon. That would serve not only the interests of the Lebanese people, but also the interests of Syria as well. We want to see in Lebanon the establishment of a political climate of freedom: freedom of expression, freedom of political views, and freedom of decision. The time has come for the Lebanese people to be able to face their own national decisions--decisions, which Lebanon must be able to take in an atmosphere free from threats and intimidation.

We want to see free and fair elections take place this spring. It is important that

steps take place on the ground prior to those elections, including implementation of UNSCR 1559, which establishes a climate to allow the Lebanese people to breathe, and gives them confidence that the decisions taken during the elections genuinely reflect their views. This is important for Lebanon, first and foremost, but it is important for the international community as well. It does not threaten the interest of any country to see Lebanon free, sovereign, and independent. That is the goal of the United States.

I reiterated a point that I made yesterday, that the United States does not support any one group or personalities. Rather, it supports the principle of opposition and freedom of political expression. The United States supports the principle of opposition to a government--and it supports it not just in this country--but around the world. There has been a march of freedom and democracy throughout the broader Middle East from Afghanistan to the Palestinian areas. There have been elections, freedom of expression, choices made in liberty by peoples throughout the region. Lebanon should not be isolated from that march. At long last, Lebanon, too, with its long history of freedoms and democratic expression, should be allowed to fully rejoin the community of nations. That is what the United States and the international community are seeking.

But we come here at a moment of tragedy. Former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri has been murdered. The Lebanese people have seen too much of such murders and assassinations. A resolution is needed for the sake of the Lebanese people. This is a national tragedy; it is an international tragedy. The United States, the United Nations Security Council, the international community, call on the Government of Lebanon to do everything possible, in coordination with the UN team dispatched here by the UN Secretary General, to investigate fully and determine the circumstances and responsibility for this terrible act of murder. We hope very much that at last full, credible closure can be reached on this issue, too.

QUESTIONS:

Q. What is your comment on talk that Prime Minister Hariri was assassinated because he was behind UNCR 1559?

A. I am not going to make any comments. This is something for the investigating team of the United Nations to report to the Security Council. I can only say that no Lebanese citizen should have to live in fear for expressing his or her political views.

Q. Is there a deadline for the withdrawal of the Syrian forces from Lebanon?

A. UN Security Council Resolution 1559 calls for a withdrawal of Syrians forces from Lebanon "fawran" (immediately). We want to see positive steps taken on the ground to indicate that there is acceptance of that principle, which is fully consistent with the spirit of the Taif accord, now fifteen years old.

Q. Information yesterday included a (inaudible) passed on by Syria and which led to the arrest of Sabawi al-Tikriti. How does that affect the relation between the United States and Syria and how does that affect your request to Syria to implement UNSCR 1559?

A. We have several issues that we have raised with the Government of Syria during the course of the past two years, and in direct conversation with Syrian President Bashar Al Assad, including discussions in January conducted by Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage. Those discussions focused on Iraq, the presence and transit through Syrian territory of former regime elements engaged in active support for the brutal insurgency there, concern about the presence on Syria territory, and transit through Syrian territory, of Palestinian groups, as well as others, involved in terrorism and violence, and concerns regarding Lebanon and implementation of UNSCR 1559. We want to see from the Syrian government concrete steps that address all of these issues.

I am not going to comment on the Sabaawi case other than to note that there is no interest served for the Government of Syria, or for the people of Syria, in allowing the vicious insurgency in Iraq to continue. Syria should share with the rest of the Middle East, and with the rest of the international community, the hopes that we have for a stable, prosperous, and free Iraq.

Q. There is an intersection between UNSCR 1559 and the other UN Resolutions such as 242 and 338 especially with relation to the Palestinian refugees here in Lebanon. On the American agenda, what is your plan to implement the other resolutions?

A. We are very concerned at seeing the process of peace making progress in this region. For four years, Israelis and Palestinians have suffered far too much from violence, far too much from terror, far too much from lack of hope and confidence in the future. But that is changing. Israelis and Palestinians are discussing with each other how to resume progress, focusing initially on withdrawal from Gaza and from cities in the West Bank, but also moving beyond that back to the Roadmap for peace, which leads to the vision expressed by President Bush of two states, a viable, sovereign and democratic Palestine living side-by-side in peace and security with Israel. The opportunity for peace between Israelis and Palestinians exists, but that opportunity is threatened as always by acts of terror and violence. They must stop and all those in the region who provide support or facilitation to those acts of violence and terror must be held responsible for that support. It should not be in the interest of any state in this region to try to prevent a comprehensive resolution to this conflict.

We want to see a comprehensive peace based on UNSC Resolutions 242 and 338, including peace between Syria and Lebanon and Israel. That is in the interest of all the countries concerned. It is in the interest of the United States; it is in the interest of the global community. But I must say, as long as there is a continued refusal by the Government of Syria to take steps against groups and states which operate from and through its territory, or that are engaged in acts of violence and terror, it would be extremely difficult--if not impossible--to see peace advanced on the Syrian track. It is very simple: Peace-making and support for terror and violence can't go hand in hand.

Q. Damascus says, especially FM Shara'a, that they are in agreement with Terje Roed-Larsen on the steps to implement UNSCR 1559. Do you believe or do you have any information that Larsen during his first phase of action is pursuing the track that the U.S. is demanding for implementing UNSCR 1559?

A. The United Nations Security Council has endorsed UNSC Resolution 1559. UNSC Resolution 1559 calls for the complete withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon, and it is the mission of Ambassador Roed-Larsen to secure the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1559 in full. I have no other comment to make on that.

Q. Why did you meet with only Foreign Minister Hammoud while in Lebanon?

A. I had meetings that were appropriate in this country. I am not going to comment further.

Q. What is your comment on the timing of your visit while demonstrations are taking place and the Parliament is meeting to discuss a motion of no confidence in the government?

A. There is no coincidence between my visit and the developments going on in the "Majles" (parliament). My visit here was timed according to developments in Washington.

Q. Sir, how do you evaluate now the democracy in Lebanon?

A. We have great confidence in, and great hope, that the people of Lebanon, and the spirit of freedom which Lebanon has traditionally embodied even during the most difficult times of this nation's troubled past. Lebanon should be as it has been in the past--an example for the region in how peoples can live together in peace, can co-exist with each other and can move forward together towards a better future. We have confidence in Lebanon and in the Lebanese.

Q. What are the measures that you might take or the UN might take in case Syria does not implement UNSCR 1559?

A. I can't speak with respect to the Security Council. The Council will await, of course, the various reports that the Secretary General will receive from the commission, which is now present here, from Ambassador Larsen after his next round of consultations. Decisions in the Council reflect what action transpires on the ground. The President and Secretary of State Rice have made it clear that we want to see a better relationship between the United States and Syria but that better relationship depends on Syria acting concretely in those areas--Iraq, terror and violence, Lebanon and UNSC Resolution 1559--that we have addressed.

Thank you very much.

(End text)

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