

LEBANON AND IRAQ: AFTER THE ELECTIONS

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS
SECOND SESSION

—————
MAY 22, 2018
—————

Serial No. 115–133
—————

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Affairs



Available: <http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/>, <http://docs.house.gov/>,
or <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/>

—————
U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

30–174PDF

WASHINGTON : 2018

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

EDWARD R. ROYCE, California, *Chairman*

CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, New Jersey
ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN, Florida
DANA ROHRABACHER, California
STEVE CHABOT, Ohio
JOE WILSON, South Carolina
MICHAEL T. McCAUL, Texas
TED POE, Texas
DARRELL E. ISSA, California
TOM MARINO, Pennsylvania
MO BROOKS, Alabama
PAUL COOK, California
SCOTT PERRY, Pennsylvania
RON DeSANTIS, Florida
MARK MEADOWS, North Carolina
TED S. YOHO, Florida
ADAM KINZINGER, Illinois
LEE M. ZELDIN, New York
DANIEL M. DONOVAN, Jr., New York
F. JAMES SENSENBRENNER, Jr.,
Wisconsin
ANN WAGNER, Missouri
BRIAN J. MAST, Florida
FRANCIS ROONEY, Florida
BRIAN K. FITZPATRICK, Pennsylvania
THOMAS A. GARRETT, Jr., Virginia
JOHN R. CURTIS, Utah

ELIOT L. ENGEL, New York
BRAD SHERMAN, California
GREGORY W. MEEKS, New York
ALBIO SIRES, New Jersey
GERALD E. CONNOLLY, Virginia
THEODORE E. DEUTCH, Florida
KAREN BASS, California
WILLIAM R. KEATING, Massachusetts
DAVID N. CICILLINE, Rhode Island
AMI BERA, California
LOIS FRANKEL, Florida
TULSI GABBARD, Hawaii
JOAQUIN CASTRO, Texas
ROBIN L. KELLY, Illinois
BRENDAN F. BOYLE, Pennsylvania
DINA TITUS, Nevada
NORMA J. TORRES, California
BRADLEY SCOTT SCHNEIDER, Illinois
THOMAS R. SUOZZI, New York
ADRIANO ESPAILLAT, New York
TED LIEU, California

AMY PORTER, *Chief of Staff* THOMAS SHEEHY, *Staff Director*
JASON STEINBAUM, *Democratic Staff Director*

SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN, Florida, *Chairman*

STEVE CHABOT, Ohio
DARRELL E. ISSA, California
RON DeSANTIS, Florida
MARK MEADOWS, North Carolina
ADAM KINZINGER, Illinois
LEE M. ZELDIN, New York
DANIEL M. DONOVAN, Jr., New York
ANN WAGNER, Missouri
BRIAN J. MAST, Florida
BRIAN K. FITZPATRICK, Pennsylvania
JOHN R. CURTIS, Utah

THEODORE E. DEUTCH, Florida
GERALD E. CONNOLLY, Virginia
DAVID N. CICILLINE, Rhode Island
LOIS FRANKEL, Florida
BRENDAN F. BOYLE, Pennsylvania
TULSI GABBARD, Hawaii
BRADLEY SCOTT SCHNEIDER, Illinois
THOMAS R. SUOZZI, New York
TED LIEU, California

CONTENTS

	Page
WITNESSES	
Michael Doran, Ph.D., senior fellow, The Hudson Institute	7
Ms. Danielle Pletka, senior vice president, Foreign and Defense Policy Studies, American Enterprise Institute	16
Tamara Cofman Wittes, Ph.D., senior fellow, Center for Middle East Policy, The Brookings Institution	24
LETTERS, STATEMENTS, ETC., SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING	
Michael Doran, Ph.D.: Prepared statement	10
Ms. Danielle Pletka: Prepared statement	19
Tamara Cofman Wittes, Ph.D.: Prepared statement	27
APPENDIX	
Hearing notice	48
Hearing minutes	49
Written response from Ms. Danielle Pletka to question submitted for the record by the Honorable Ann Wagner, a Representative in Congress from the State of Missouri	50

LEBANON AND IRAQ: AFTER THE ELECTIONS

TUESDAY, MAY 22, 2018

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:30 p.m., in room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. The subcommittee will come to order. After recognizing myself and Mr. Schneider for our opening statements, I will then recognize other members seeking recognition for 1 minute. We will then hear from our witnesses. Without objection, witnesses, your prepared statements will be made a part of the record and members may have 5 days in which to insert statements and questions for the record, subject to the length limitation and the rules.

The Chair now recognizes herself for 5 minutes.

This month's parliamentary elections in Lebanon and Iraq will have lasting implications not just for their citizens but for the interests of the United States and our allies throughout the Middle East, especially Israel.

In Lebanon, Hezbollah and its allies have gained a majority in Parliament, increasing the Iranian influence and the control over Lebanon's Government. Many of us have been warning about Hezbollah's growing influence in Lebanon for quite a while now, suggesting that tough decisions needed to be made about U.S. assistance, including to the Lebanese Armed Forces, or the LAF.

As I noted in a hearing on Lebanon last year, I've long been concerned over reports of the LAF-Hezbollah cooperation and U.S. commitment to the LAF. U.S. law stipulates that no assistance may be made available to the LAF or Lebanon's internal security forces if they are controlled by a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization. Hezbollah certainly qualifies. While coalitions are still being formed and it is not yet certain which ministries Hezbollah or its allies will control, I hope that this administration, unlike previous administrations from both parties, takes a clear-eyed approach to the LAF and reassesses our security assistance to Lebanon.

Proponents of cooperation with the LAF have long argued that the LAF is the best counterweight against Hezbollah and the best way to weaken the Hezbollah influence. Yet, after years of cooperation there is zero evidence that this policy is working. In fact, we've

only seen Hezbollah's influence grow, including over the LAF. There is no doubt that weakening Hezbollah should be U.S. policy. The question is whether we are implementing the correct policies to do so.

I am still having a hard time understanding why the administration decided to cancel U.S. democracy and governance assistance in the run-up to the elections, assistance that could help support Lebanon's moderate forces. When I asked State about this in October, I was told that the administration would continue to support these programs. Yet, in report after report afterward, we heard that Embassy Beirut decided to cancel them. It is impossible to know what the election results would have been had these programs been continued. But one thing is clear: Moderate forces have lost once again in Lebanon, and Hezbollah and, by extension, Iran, have further consolidated control.

In Iraq, in a slightly different but no less dangerous a scenario, the Sadr alliance surprise win has up-ended the presumed political order there, forcing a lot of people, including both in the U.S. and in Iran, to scramble. Notorious for his anti-American views and leadership of a militia that killed hundreds of American troops in the mid-2000s, Sadr is now portraying himself as a nationalist and a reformer committed to rooting out corruption and protecting Iraqi sovereignty. This is certainly going to put the U.S. in a difficult position as our future relationship with Iraq is now at best in limbo.

There are also a lot of questions about Sadr's relationship with Iran and his professed resistance to Iranian influence. It's unclear just how strongly he believes in stopping Iranian interference in Iraq and even if he's capable or willing to do so. The Iranian Quds Force commander has been making the rounds over the past week, shoring up ties with pro-Iranian politicians in an attempt to forge a more favorable coalition for Tehran—prospects that would severely jeopardize all of the progress and effort that we have put into Iraq.

As of now, it remains to be seen exactly what type of coalition we end up with. I do hope we are doing everything we can to limit or push back against the influence of Iran and, at the same time, we should also be planning on what to do for all possible outcomes.

What is clear, however, is that Iran is not going anywhere anytime soon in the region and, by all accounts, despite whatever complications Sadr may cause, will maintain a tremendous amount of influence. In both Iraq and Lebanon, Iran continues to gain both in power and influence to the detriment of their citizens, regional stability, and U.S. national security interest.

With Secretary Pompeo laying out the administration's Iran strategy just yesterday, I am looking forward to hearing from our witnesses, their critiques as well as their recommendations for rolling back Iranian influence in Lebanon, in Iraq, and throughout the greater Middle East. I am also looking forward to hearing their assessment on how we can get to this point, why the U.S. was unable to make more progress in both countries leading up to the elections, and how we can work with our allies to counter Iran and advance our mutual interests in the region.

Thank you so much, and with that I will yield to my friend, Mr. Schneider, of Illinois.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you, Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, and I want to thank you and Ranking Member Deutch for convening this meeting. In advance, I will thank the witnesses for sharing your perspectives and insights on this important issue.

These elections in Lebanon and Iraq are, obviously, very important for a number of reasons. It has impact in the countries. It's going to have an impact in the region, and the outcomes of this election and the directions these countries take are going to have an impact on United States interests.

The election on May 6th in Lebanon was the first election since 2009. It should have—perhaps could have been an important step forward. But I was very disappointed, personally, by looking at it from the perspective of Congress to see the gains made by political parties affiliated and allied with Hezbollah. I have long been concerned by Hezbollah's operations in Lebanon and its involvement in the country's government. I am even more concerned by Iran's growing influence in the region, as evidenced by these recent events.

I would like to associate myself with Chairwoman Ros-Lehtinen's comments, and I think we need to make sure we are looking not just at the short-term implications of Hezbollah's success but the long-term implications for Lebanon and the region.

As I turn to Iraq, Muqtada al-Sadr's return to prominence—this rise in this election—should be a concern for all of us. The future remains unclear, but the influence of—growing influence of Iran appears almost certain. The common thread between both these elections appears to be Iran and Iran's influence in the region.

I think it's critically important that the United States focus on this and develop a strategy, articulate and share that strategy not just with Congress but the world.

I want to thank the subcommittee for holding today's hearing so we can hear from our witnesses on how best to push back against Iran's increasing malign influence.

We have to find a way to support legitimate aspirations of Lebanese people, the Iraqi people, to create better lives for themselves. We have to do it without propping up organizations like Hezbollah or strengthening Iran's other proxies.

Again, I want to thank the chairman and the ranking member and our witnesses today for your time. And with that, I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Schneider.

Mr. Chabot of Ohio.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for holding this important hearing, and I will be very brief in my statement so that we can get to our witnesses.

As former chairman of this committee and having been on the committee for more than two decades now, I would just note that whereas it's encouraging to see both Lebanon and Iran hold—excuse me, Iraq hold elections that it's concerning to see Iran's growing influence both in Iraq and in Lebanon.

In Lebanon, Hezbollah and their allied factions hold an increasing number of seats there, a majority in Parliament, and despite its political influence Hezbollah, let's face it, remains a terrorist organization that directly threatens our principal ally in the region,

Israel—and it really does threaten the entire stability throughout the region.

The intelligence community, in fact, now believes that Iranian proxies are the primary threat to our personnel in Iraq. So after we spent so much blood and treasure, we must not let Iran reap the benefits of those sacrifices that were made at such a high cost by so many of your troops there, and then the effort that was made to finally destroy, for the most part, ISIS. So let's make sure that Iran is not the entity that ultimately benefits from the blood and the hard work of so many Americans and our allies.

And I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Chabot.

And now, Mr. Kinzinger.

Mr. KINZINGER. Thank you, Madam Chair.

One of my biggest worries is that in the Western world we are kind of tired of defending democracy and freedom and we think we are exhausted. We are not, but we think we are.

We convince ourselves we are sometimes and, in fact, when I came out of Iraq in 2009 that's actually when I made the decision to run for Congress, because I had seen between 2008 and 2009 massive improvements because of the surge in Iraq, and I knew that Iraq could be successful but we'd have to stick with it for a little bit.

And I heard the President at the time—the new President, Obama—say that he wanted to get out of Iraq, and I remember in 2011, in fact, he said we are leaving behind a stable democratic free—all these great adjectives—Iraq and we left.

And pretty soon we had ISIS, we had the collapse of the government and we are back. So my biggest concern right now, Madam Chair, is that as we look at the behavior of Iran in the region I think we've done the right thing by pulling out of the Iran deal because of their bad behavior. But I think it's important that no matter what happens in Iraq we be careful not to leave it behind because I've got another 5 years in the military and people I know are going to be in there even longer. I don't want to go back again. It's better to stay than leave and come back.

So with that, Madam Chair, I thank you for holding this, I thank the guests for being here and I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Kinzinger.

And now I am pleased to yield to our ranking member, Mr. Deutch of Florida.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman, for calling this hearing. I also want to welcome back our panel of experts, all familiar faces to this committee. We appreciate your being here today and we look forward to your insight.

This has been a thought-provoking few weeks in the Middle East, to say the least. We've watched as elections were held in Lebanon and Iraq. Clashes erupted between Israel and Iran on an unprecedented level. The U.S. Embassy moved to Jerusalem, Hamas' violence renewed near Gaza in its aftermath, and the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA—all of this gives us on this committee much to consider and all of this impacts the discussion we are going to be having here today.

Both Lebanon and Iraq are strategic interests to the United States. Both have teetered on fully entering Iran's sphere of influence in recent years, and while the results of the elections invite concern over the success of anti-U.S. Shi'a groups, we commend both countries for holding what we at this time believe to have been fair and honest elections. Democracy as an institution must be led from within and we congratulate Lebanon and Iraq for continuing on the path toward democracy.

Dr. Wittes, you co-led the National Democratic Institute's delegation to observe the Lebanese elections and I look forward to your take on democracy in action as you saw it.

As we wait to see how the elections will impact the formation of new governments in both countries, there are a lot of questions for us to think about in addition to the lingering questions about these countries' stability and the trajectory they're taking. We are concerned about the possible impact of the outcome of these elections to the Lebanese and Iraqi relationships with the United States.

In Lebanon, where the U.S. has dedicated significant assistance in its economic and security sectors, we watched as a very low voter turnout, estimated at less than 50 percent, voted for traditional Hezbollah-allied partners.

And I reiterate my long-standing position that Hezbollah is a terrorist organization in its entirety and efforts to normalize Hezbollah and similar groups under the guise of politics is both misguided and it is dangerous.

Nevertheless, I believe we must remain committed to helping those legitimate government institutions and forces in Lebanon that can counter Hezbollah and, ultimately, Iran's malign influence.

I am deeply concerned about Iran's intentions to promote the conflict between Hezbollah and Israel. The United States must work to prevent Iran from establishing a permanent military presence in Syria from which we have now seen it directly and brazenly attack Israel, and from continuing to transfer weapons and capabilities to Hezbollah in Lebanon.

In Iraq, the recent elections propped up the anti-U.S. cleric, Muqtada al-Sadr, whose violent insurgencies against U.S. forces resulted—has resulted in so many U.S. military deaths and we are deeply concerned by the Iranian voices permeating from Baghdad and the calls for the U.S. to disengage from the region where we have expended so much blood and treasure.

The conventional defeat of ISIS is a tremendous victory but for long-term success to take hold Baghdad and the United States must remain vigilant.

A strong democratic Iraq cannot be achieved under the influence of the tyrannical Iranian regime and Iran's attempts to sway Iraq in its direction are concerning.

Apart from foreign influence concerns, both Lebanon and Iraq have economic and security concerns that cannot be ignored. ISIS and the effort to defeat the group left Iraqi cities in rubble with over 2 million Iraqis displaced.

Lebanon is struggling with the impacts of a mass surge of Syrian refugees. Economic growth is vital to stability in both countries and I am concerned about government services failing to provide for

citizens who may then turn to groups like Hezbollah or ISIS to fill the gap.

We've got to examine the domestic issues and concerns that led to the outcomes produced by these elections if we are going to fully understand how the ultimately formed governments will orient themselves.

There is a great deal to unpack here and I thank our panel of experts for their time and expertise in helping us do that, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Deutch.

And now we turn to Ambassador Wagner for an opening statement.

Mrs. WAGNER. Thank you, Madam Chairman, for hosting this hearing.

It's encouraging to see Iraq and Lebanon hold democratic elections. I am, however, deeply concerned to see Iran's influence increasing steadily, if slowly, in Iraq and Lebanon's governing bodies.

Iran does not hesitate to sow discord in its democratic neighbors to undermine our regional initiatives. Democracy flourishing in the Middle East is good for American interests and long-term stability of the region. It is clear to me that any strategy to contain Iran must include a democratic independent Iraq and Lebanon.

I look forward to hearing from the witnesses and the questions that will ensue. I thank you, Madam Chair, for your indulgence and I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Ambassador Wagner. Mr. Rohrabacher of California.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Yes, thank you very much for holding the hearing today and if we are concerned about Iran—excuse me, Iraq and Lebanon and we are concerned about the expansion of Iranian influence, again, let me remind us, as I have in this hearing room so often, Iran is not our enemy.

The mullah regime in Iran is our enemy, and the reason why we see that we are losing ground—that we are losing ground in Lebanon and in Iraq is because we have let the mullahs off the hook. They don't have any internal worries so they are on the offensive.

When we could be helping the Kurds—there are more Kurds in Iran than there are in Iraq—but we should be helping the Kurds in both Iran and Iraq. There are Baloch. There are people in Iran who hate the mullah regime and they're getting not the type of support that they need, and if we started that strategy we would have the mullah regime probably defeated within a short period of time or at least not engaging in these activities in Lebanon and Iraq that are—that are threatening to our security and the stability of that region.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Rohrabacher.

Seeing no other requests for time, now I am delighted to welcome our panellists.

First, we thank Dr. Michael Doran, senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, where he specializes in Middle East security issues.

Prior to this position, Dr. Doran was a senior fellow at the Brookings Institute, held positions at NYU, Princeton, and the University of Central Florida—finally, a good university—and served as a senior director in the National Security Council.

Thank you so much for being here today, sir. We look forward to your testimony.

And next we are delighted to welcome back Danielle Pletka, senior vice president for foreign and defense policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute and an adjunct professor at Georgetown University.

Prior to this, Ms. Pletka served as a staffer for the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations.

Thank you for being here.

We look forward to your testimony, and we see that your two daughters are there behind you—two out of three. Thank you very much for being here today. We'll try to embarrass you as much as possible, daughters.

And finally, we are delighted to welcome back Dr. Tamara Cofman Wittes. It doesn't matter how many times you come here. I am still going to slaughter your name. Wittes? Wittes—there we go—senior fellow in the Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institute.

Previously, Dr. Wittes served as deputy assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs as well as Middle East specialist at the U.S. Institute of Peace and director of programs at the Middle East Institute.

Thank you so much, all of you, for being here. We look forward to your testimony. As I said, your written statement will be made a part of the record. So please feel free to summarize, and we will begin with you, Dr. Doran.

**STATEMENT OF MICHAEL DORAN, PH.D., SENIOR FELLOW,
THE HUDSON INSTITUTE**

Mr. DORAN. Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch—

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Move your microphone just a little bit.

Mr. DORAN. How's that?

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member—Ranking Member Deutch, members of the committee—of the subcommittee, it's a privilege to speak to you today.

I thank you for the opportunity to testify on the implications of the elections in Iraq and Lebanon. In both countries the results represent a setback for the United States.

In Lebanon, they have, obviously, strengthened the hand of Hezbollah. In Iraq, opinion is divided about the extent to which Muqtada al-Sadr's rise represents a victory for Iran.

Even if the results turn out to be less damaging than the pessimists predict, there is nevertheless little doubt that they complicate American efforts to contain Iran.

These setbacks, however, are but the latest in a long string of Iranian advances and they are by no means the greatest advances. With your permission, I will concentrate on how the United States might, in broad strategic terms, rebound and reverse the trend. I will focus my remarks in particular on the strategic implications of President Trump's decision to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. That decision certainly lays the groundwork for a more effective American policy. It will not, however, prove sufficient to turn the tables on Tehran.

The United States, I will argue, should adopt a two-speed approach to its competition with Iran. I will argue it should adopt a two-speed approach to its competition with Iran—aggressive and uncompromising in some areas such as Syria and Lebanon, where it enjoys a freer hand, and more nuanced in countries such as Lebanon and Iraq, where conditions are not conducive to an unfettered competition.

Yesterday, Secretary Pompeo laid out a broad strategy or a broad policy of rolling back Iranian power throughout the region, not just in the nuclear program, but also in terms of its support for terrorism and its influence in the region. I strongly welcome this approach. I think it correctly defined the Iranian problem and I think it dispensed with a lot of the illusions of the last 4 or 5 years in which we have seen ourselves engaging with moderates in Iraq and strengthening them and bringing them into the family of nations.

And I think that Secretary Pompeo's speech spoke with admirable clarity about the essence of our strategy now, which is one of coercing Iran. Now, the critics of this policy are presenting it as a choice of war over peace but I think that's a false depiction, because what they are calling peace was actually appeasement, as, I think, all of the—everyone who spoke today on the subcommittee said.

Iran has been on the march and, unfortunately, that march has been facilitated by the enrichment of Iran that the JCPOA made possible. So the administration is to be—the administration is to be credited with seeing things clearly and for laying the groundwork for a policy of seriously containing Iran. However, we have to be clear about the fact that Iran is not going to be coerced simply by reimposing the sanctions, which the JCPOA—which the decision about the JCPOA will entail.

Coercion means actual coercive policies—the use of hard power to make Iran pay a price for the—for its military adventurism around the region.

In Secretary Pompeo's remarks, he actually spoke about crushing Hezbollah and proxies. The word was very evocative. It stood out. But I am afraid that it didn't strike fear in the hearts of any Iranian leaders because they have been treated to this kind of frightful rhetoric before and they have developed a number of—a number of clever mechanisms for defeating American hardliners or, let's just say, hardline policies. They have come with ways of waiting us out and wearing us down.

The two-speed strategy that I suggest is one in which we can actually bring hard power to bear against Iran in some arenas and in other arenas, like Lebanon and Iraq, having a somewhat lighter touch. The essence of it, as I describe in my written testimony, is that we should be relying, especially in Syria and in Yemen, on allies who are already in the hard power fight against Iran and Israel, in particular.

I note that our military is very reluctant to get directly involved in the conflict against Iran and it complains that it doesn't have an authorization of force. Given that fact—given the difficult politics around it, I think where we should be focusing our attention in terms of raising the cost to the Iranians across the board is by strengthening the Israelis in Syria and strengthening the Saudis in

Yemen through military support, intelligence support, diplomatic support, and other forms of assistance.

In Iraq and Lebanon in particular I think we have to be aware—we have to admit that our influence has been somewhat diminished and that the complex nature of our interests in those—in those countries will make it difficult for us to carry out a hard-power competition with the Iranians there.

But we have to do much more. Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, you mentioned the—withdrawing support or reviewing support to the LAF. The LAF, in my view, is actually the—should be of secondary concern to us. The primary concern to me is the control or the influence that Iran and Hezbollah have in the banking and finance sector in Lebanon. That's where it would put the emphasis.

I'll just end by saying this—that the Bipartisan Policy Center issued a report on Iran policy recently which laid out three basic options without choosing one of them. Option one was roll back, option two was containment, and option three was modus vivendi. Under the Obama administration, we had a policy that sought modus vivendi with Iran without acknowledging it. The effect was that we realigned our policy from Baghdad to Beirut in parallel with the Iranians. When the Trump administration came in, it didn't have a roll back option in any of the—in Iraq and Syria or in Lebanon.

I don't think that this decision that it has made is going to make roll back possible. I think, however, containment in those—in Lebanon and Iraq is possible. Roll back is possible in Syria. But the administration has yet to announce that it is actually going to engage in that kind of hard power roll back, which I think is absolutely essential to the success.

If we don't raise the price to Iran across the board, then the strategy that they have outlined will not succeed.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Doran follows:]

Hudson Institute

Prepared statement by:

Michael Doran
Senior Fellow
Hudson Institute

Testimony before U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa (Committee on Foreign Affairs)

Lebanon and Iraq: After the Elections
May 22, 2018

Toward a Two-Speed Strategy

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, members of the subcommittee, it is a privilege to speak to you today. I thank you for the opportunity to testify on the implications of the elections in Iraq and Lebanon. In both countries, the results represent a setback for the United States. In Lebanon, they have obviously strengthened the hand of Hezbollah and Iran. In Iraq, opinion is divided about the extent to which Muqtada al-Sadr's rise represents a similar victory for Tehran. Even if the final results turn out to be less damaging than the pessimists now predict, there is little doubt that they will complicate American efforts to contain Iran.

These setbacks are but the latest in a long string of Iranian advances. With your permission, I will concentrate on how the United States might, in broad strategic terms, rebound and reverse the trend. I will focus my remarks, in particular, on the strategic implications of President Trump's decision to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. That decision certainly lays the groundwork for a more effective American policy. It will not, however, prove sufficient to turn the tables on Tehran. The United States, I will argue, should adopt a two-speed strategy in its competition with Iran. It should behave in an aggressive and uncompromising manner in some areas, such as Syria and Yemen, where it enjoys a freer hand; and it should adopt a lighter touch in countries such as Lebanon and Iraq, where conditions are less conducive to an unfettered competition.

Yesterday at the Heritage Foundation, Secretary of State Pompeo announced that the Trump administration intends to shut down Iran's nuclear program and, in addition, to force it to end its military adventurism and support for terrorism. Secretary Pompeo promised to "apply unprecedented financial pressure on the Iranian regime," to work "closely with the Department of Defense and our regional allies to deter Iranian aggression," and to "advocate



Hudson Institute
1201 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. 202 974 2400
Suite 400 info@hudson.org
Washington, D.C. 20004 hudson.org

Hudson Institute

tirelessly for the Iranian people.”

He listed some twelve steps that Iran must take in order for the United States to accept it as a normal member of the family of nations. Iran will not take these steps willingly. Truth be told, the day it complies with all of them will be the day after the Islamic Republic ceases to exist. The Trump administration, that is to say, has announced a policy of long-term, aggressive containment, not unlike the policy the United States adopted toward the Soviet Union in the Cold War.

We must have no illusions. Success will hinge on grinding down the Iranians—on naked coercion. Secretary Pompeo did not shrink from the question of coercion, but he made it sound easier than it will be. “[W]e will track down Iranian operatives and their Hizballah proxies operating around the world and we will crush them,” he said. The word “crush” is certainly evocative, but how believable is it? Taken literally, it implies that American soldiers will soon be fighting on the ground in Lebanon and Iraq against Iran’s proxies. But that’s not going to happen. For years now, leading figures in both political parties—including President Obama and President Trump—have displayed a deep aversion to open-ended military commitments in the Middle East. The United States, one must conclude, will think twice before attacking Iran’s proxies directly. How, then, does the Trump administration propose to “crush” them?

Perhaps Secretary Pompeo used the word to signal of resolve—to warn Iran not to test us. If so, it is doubtful that his words frightened leaders in Tehran. This is not the first time that they have heard frightful rhetoric from Washington. In the past, American leaders have often failed to match their words with deeds; and even when they have, Tehran has frequently managed to wear down American resolve. The prototypical example, of course, is President Reagan’s decision, in 1983, to dispatch the Marines to Beirut as part of a multi-national peacekeeping force. His staying power dissipated quickly, however, after Hizballah, undoubtedly acting on orders from Tehran, drove two truck bombs into the Marines’ barracks, killing 241 Americans and 58 Frenchmen. The US troops withdrew, and the United States exacted no price from Iran for its aggression.

If President Trump’s resolve is to prove more lasting, he must back it up with a sustained set of coercive policies. Economic sanctions will be a key component of such a policy, but they will not do the job alone. Success will also require the use of force.

Finding the right mix of sanctions and force will prove to be a particularly daunting task, thanks to the size of the coalition opposing President Trump’s decision to abandon the nuclear deal. Significant elements of the national security elite (including parts of the military) strongly disapprove of getting tough with Iran. To make matters worse, European allies, China, Russia, some of the president’s domestic political opponents, and an influential segment of the American media stand ready to use the first sign of trouble to convince the American public that the president is leading the country into the abyss.

Hudson Institute

Ask yourself this. Would the equivalent of a Marine Barracks bombing today convince skeptics in the national security elite to line up behind the new policy, or would it renew their commitment to destroy it? The challenge before the president is to bring the requisite force to bear against Iran without supporting the accusation that he is behaving with unprecedented recklessness.

His opponents paint the new policy as a choice of war over peace. The “peace” that they extol, however, was appeasement masquerading as a new relationship between fictive Iranian moderates and the West. In reality, the United States was strengthening the Iranian economy while the Revolutionary Guard Corps went on the offensive, spreading its malignant influence by force throughout the Middle East. This phony peace curtailed none of the Iranian ambitions that the United States and its allies find threatening—including Iran’s nuclear program. On the contrary, it fueled those ambitions. Be that as it may, in the eyes of President Trump’s detractors, the problem that most needs solving is his call to coercion, not Iran’s behavior.

For President Trump’s policy to be successful, he need not match Iran move for move. He need only stress the Iranian system in enough arenas simultaneously to make the total cost of its malignant behavior prohibitively high. The United States certainly has the potential to exact such a price, with a relatively minor exertion on its part, but it will require an integrated approach. Historically, the subordination of policy toward each country in the Middle East to a regional Iran strategy has proven notoriously difficult to pull off. In the recent past, for example, the regional priority has been to counter the Islamic State. Iran policy has always been the second priority, if that. As a result, Iranian-backed militias have enjoyed a permissive environment almost everywhere along the line from Baghdad to Beirut.

Those of us who support the president’s new policy, therefore, must strongly urge him to define countering Iran, not the Islamic State, as the top national priority in the Middle East—and to orient the bureaucracies accordingly. One practical way of nudging the administration in the proper direction is to call for a survey of resources across the executive branch. During the George W. Bush administration, in which I served, the State Department carried out an internal assessment that revealed something remarkable: the Department was devoting more personnel to Norway than to Iran. This state of affairs was, in part, a legacy of the Cold War. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice took immediate steps to bring the allocation of resources into alignment with new priorities.

I strongly suspect that a similar imbalance has once again emerged—and not just or primarily in the State Department. The Obama administration constructed a network of bureaucratic machinery, spanning multiple agencies, to counter the Islamic State. Built as it was on top of the vast counterterrorism apparatus created to fight al-Qaeda, this machinery is now far larger than the actual threat from Sunni terrorism warrants. The Trump administration should call on each agency to survey resources and personnel allocated to the fight against al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, and it should reallocate some percentage of both to the effort to counter Iran.

Hudson Institute

But reallocating resources is the easy part. Much harder is actually changing policy across the Middle East. To bend our minds around the challenge that President Trump faces, it is helpful to consult a recent report, “U.S. Policy Toward Iran: Strategic Options,” prepared by the Middle East task force of the Bipartisan Policy Center. The report makes no recommendations. Its primary value is in offering us the language for describing the three basic policy options that are on offer: rollback, containment, and modus vivendi.

The Trump administration has now clearly adopted a goal of rollback. However, it has yet to institute policies across the Middle East that will certainly achieve its stated goals. The main problem facing the administration is the legacy of the Obama administration, which completely abandoned rollback as a viable strategy. President Obama’s unstated approach, which he and his senior officials denied when queried, was to seek a modus vivendi with Tehran. Due to the complex political crosscurrents in the Middle East, however, President Obama was not able to carry out a uniform modus vivendi policy. But he certainly came close. In Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, his successor inherited a two-speed strategy that limited American options either to containment or modus vivendi. In each case, the rollback option was simply no longer available.

Trump’s moves have begun to revive the rollback option in certain arenas, but it would be unrealistic to expect administration to implement it everywhere. A uniform rollback policy is unattainable. In countries such as, for example, Lebanon and Iraq, basic prudence calls for a lighter touch. Nevertheless, even in those countries it would not be unreasonable to expect President Trump to stiffen American policy. His broad goal should be to develop a new two-speed strategy, one that relied solely on rollback and containment. In the fullness of time, he should work to eliminate modus vivendi as an option anywhere.

Rollback, of course, implies some use of hard power. It is, therefore, most safely pursued in Syria and Yemen, where the United States and its allies are already engaged in military operations. The case of Syria is particularly noteworthy. In his speech yesterday, Secretary Pompeo called on Iran to “withdraw all forces under [its] command throughout the entirety of Syria.” This demand was new and sweeping. It represents, however, a goal that the American military, has repeatedly rejected. The military’s sole mission in Syria, it has frequently reminded us, is simply to defeat the Islamic State.

Devising coercive policies that support the administration’s aggressive political goals is a task that should occupy the attention anyone interested in the success of President Trump’s Iran policy. The most direct way to achieve this goal would be for Congress to authorize the use of military force against Iran in Syria. From a political point of view, however, this option is probably unrealistic. But that fact need not deter us. The United States also has indirect ways of striking at Iran—ways that do not risk drawing the United States into a quagmire.

The easiest of these is to support allies who already in the fight. Secretary Pompeo’s

Hudson Institute

Syria goals are notable for bringing America's declared policy into perfect alignment with Israeli policy. In contrast to the United States, Israel is already engaged in military operations whose stated goal is to drive Iran from Syria. We should therefore ask ourselves what actions we might take to strengthen Israel's hand. Militarily, these might include, on the passive end of the spectrum, positioning our forces so as to deter Russian counterattacks against Israel. On the activist end, they might include arming and training Syrian forces to engage in operations against Iran and its proxies—much as we armed the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

Diplomatically, the United States might associate itself much more directly with the red lines that Israel has announced regarding the Iranian presence in Syria. Israel has, for example, called for pushing Iran and its proxies away from its border on the Golan Heights. Who is prepared to say that Washington has done all in its power to demonstrate to Moscow that it fully supports this goal? In short, a policy of greater coordination with Jerusalem is both possible and desirable.

In Yemen, too, greater coordination with Saudi Arabia is worth pursuing. More to the point, if the United States fails to increase support for allies who are directly engaged militarily action against Iran and its proxies, the new rollback policy will likely remain a pious aspiration rather than a realistic plan.

In Lebanon and Iraq, conditions will not support a hard rollback policy. In these countries the goal should be to shift the policy away from *modus vivendi* and in the direction of containment. In Iraq, the priority, of course, is the dismantlement of the militia infrastructure that the Iranians have built. In Lebanon, many voices have called for an end to American support for the Lebanese Armed Forces. I am much less attracted to this option than to using sanctions to force the Lebanese banking sector to choose between doing business with Hizbollah and Iran or doing business with the United States and its financial institutions. American policy has repeatedly avoided taking this action for fear of destabilizing Lebanon. In practice, however, heeding this fear has amounted to bowing to Hizbollah's blackmail. It has given Iran a free hand with the predictable results than we now face.

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, and members of the subcommittee, allow me to end with a note of caution. Iran will not take a coercive American policy sitting down. It will strike back—and it will do so cleverly. It has ten obvious levers to pull:

- 1) Adopting a charm offensive in Europe.
- 2) Denying America allies inside Middle Eastern countries, by coopting and coercing key interlocutors.
- 3) Using proxies to take Americans and citizens of allied countries hostage.
- 4) Subjecting American troops in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq to attacks.
- 5) Seeking diplomatic assistance from the Russians and the Chinese, who have a vested interest in seeing American coercion fail.

Hudson Institute

- 6) Encouraging Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad to attack Israel.
- 7) Threatening Israel with rocket and missile attacks from Lebanon.
- 8) Precipitating a new nuclear crisis.
- 9) Supporting Sunni terrorist groups even while presenting Tehran as the West's ally against them.
- 10) Assisting the Taliban.

It almost goes without saying that the United States should begin working with its allies now to develop contingency plans for countering these tactics. I say, "almost," because I know from experience in the White House that contingency planning is something we extol much more than we actually conduct. As obvious as these tactics are, they have often taken Western decision makers by surprise, and they have proven effective in wearing down Western resolve.

Thank you again for offering me the privilege of addressing you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much.
Ms. Pletka.

STATEMENT OF MS. DANIELLE PLETKA, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, FOREIGN AND DEFENSE POLICY STUDIES, AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

Ms. PLETKA. Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Mr. Deutch, members of the committee, thank you so much for asking me to join you here today. It's really a pleasure to be back and thank you for embarrassing my children. It's really been my life's work and I am always happy to have help.

A few months ago, I wrote an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal asking whether the United States intended to lose Iraq as we have lost Lebanon. The question really feels all the more apropos today in the wake of the troubling elections we've been talking about here today in both those countries.

So let's skip to the punch line. In both these cases, the United States has, or once had, a chance to challenge Iran at a relatively low cost. But as we have already done in Lebanon and Iraq, too, I fear, we will miss that chance because we are focused elsewhere, myopic about our potential influence, and really too willing to lie to ourselves about the status quo. We are really, apparently, indifferent in too many cases to the march of the Islamic Republic of Iran across the greater Middle East.

Beginning with Lebanon, the results of the election are as depressing as they were predictable. Prime Minister Saad Hariri's party lost and their allies lost about 15 seats, which was a rout rooted in both Lebanon's own dysfunction, Hariri's own lackluster performance and the somewhat bizarre interlude during which he was kidnapped to Saudi Arabia.

The winners were two: A protest vote for the Lebanese forces, which shouldn't be confused with the Lebanese Armed Forces—they picked up seven seats—and the other was Hezbollah with its own party and allies picking up about 15 seats. Tammy noted to me that Walid Jumblatt's party also picked up seats. Where Walid will stand is always a question in everybody's mind, but he has stood with Hezbollah.

This is the same Hezbollah that's amassed an arsenal that would be the envy of many countries. Israel estimates Hezbollah has more than 150,000 rockets in the south of Lebanon, built up in violation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701. Worse still, I understand that Iran is changing its arms transfer modus operandi. Because it recognizes the difficulty of transferring weapons to its proxies over land, through air, over sea, it is instead concentrating on transferring know-how: Rocket, missile building, guidance system, things like that. If Hezbollah or the Houthis or Hamas or any of Iran's many proxies throughout the region have the know-how to build more and more advanced weaponry and the operational latitude to do so, as they do now on Lebanese soil, what does the future hold?

The last elections confirmed for us that the next Government of Lebanon will be run, largely, by Hezbollah, which means, of course, it will be run, largely, by Tehran. I know, as Mike said, that the Treasury Department is concerned about the integrity of Lebanon's

banking system. In addition, we should be worried about the fact that Hezbollah reportedly wants the Interior Ministry, the Public Works Ministry, and the Economy Ministry as for itself using the cash that they can get out of those ministries to ease the burden on their sponsor in Iran, which is having some economic difficulties.

So that leaves for us the Lebanese Armed Forces. The Lebanese military claims not to coordinate with Hezbollah but there's evidence to the contrary. Last year, Hezbollah's military parade in Syria included a U.S. M-113 armored personnel carrier. Did it come from the Lebanese Armed Forces? Intelligence sources in some countries say yes. The U.S. says it doesn't think so. But we know that in southern Lebanon the LAF have allowed Hezbollah to restock, shared intelligence with them, and have jointly manned checkpoints.

Given the weight of the evidence—and there's more, I am pretty sure, in a classified setting—is it not appropriate to worry the Government of Lebanon is effectively itself becoming a proxy of Iran?

In light of that, consider we've given more than \$1.5 billion to Lebanon in security assistance and even more in development and economic support.

Defenders of the U.S. posture in Lebanon including some in the White House, the State Department, and at the Pentagon suggest the LAF are an effective fighting force against ISIS. General Votel, the commander of CENTCOM, has been very insistent on that regard. But if fighting ISIS is our sole standard, why should we not arm and support Hezbollah? They're pretty good at that, too.

That's the challenge we face. The enemy of our enemy isn't always our friend and the same is true, unfortunately, in Iraq.

In part assisted by an alliance with the Iraqi military and the so-called popular mobilization forces, we were able to secure a victory against ISIS in Iraq. But this pact with Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Forces-supported Iraqi units will mean the U.S. and the Government of Iraq ultimately pay a very heavy price, and look no further than the results of these elections in which our ally, Haider al-Abadi, came in third place, trailing the leader of the Popular Mobilization Force's Hadi al-Amiri and Muqtada al-Sadr.

Unlike in Lebanon, we don't know what the outcome of the Iraqi election is going to be and it may not be a slam dunk for Iran. But there's an underlying point here, and that is the lesson unlearned by the United States in Lebanon and, apparently, still unlearned in Iraq today. The Islamic Republic of Iran has a foreign policy model. They do not seek to dominate. They seek to influence and, if necessary, destabilize. They do so through their proxies and, increasingly, through their proxies in Iraq as well. These are Iranian expeditionary forces not only loyal to their own countries but answering to command in Tehran.

If I may have just another 30 seconds.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Without objection, go ahead.

Ms. PLETKA. Iran is no Soviet Union. Its economy is weak and its hold over its own people is tenuous, as you yourselves have noted. But victory after victory in the Middle East should suggest to us that Iran has a winning formula, one that would be—one that could be countered with a serious U.S. strategy of engagement, a

theory of our own victory, and one that would not contemplate an every decade return for war in the Middle East.

We must shore up the Iraqi Government as we fail to shore up the Lebanese against Iran. We must do so without wavering in our commitments, and by offering them choices: Us or them. Us must mean genuine political and economic engagement and leadership. This is what you were talking about that both the Obama administration and, unfortunately, the Trump administration has cut back on. That kind of engagement is far cheaper than war. It must start with aiding the battle against corruption, which erodes confidence in democracy and markets in Beirut and Baghdad, and it must continue with a commitment to institutions of government.

You may well ask, because I know we are going to talk about this, whether that is not what we have done with the Lebanese Armed Forces in Lebanon, and my answer is no.

We've looked away as that country has been sucked into the Iranian vortex, and failed to bolster those who naturally despise Iran and its terrorist proxies.

We've allowed weak leaders to take our money and our weapons while serving a foreign master—perhaps not always directly but, certainly, indirectly.

We've never put it to our nominal allies that they must stand against Iran and Hezbollah, not simply rhetorically but actually. We've never laid the burden on them to prove they're not working with a designated terrorist organization.

I believe we failed in Lebanon and I believe we've lost. Now we are faced with the same choice in Iraq. We can either force these countries to choose between Washington and Tehran, or we can continue to bury our heads in the sand and allow Iran to win again and again.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Pletka follows:]



Statement before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa
On Lebanon and Iraq: After the Elections

Lebanon and Iraq

After the elections

Danielle Pletka
Senior Vice President

May 22, 2018

The American Enterprise Institute (AEI) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, 501(c)(3) educational organization and does not take institutional positions on any issues. The views expressed in this testimony are those of the author.

Lebanon and Iraq: After the Elections

Madam Chairman, Mr. Deutch, Members of the Committee, thank you for asking me join you here today.

A few months ago, I wrote an [op-ed](#) in the Wall Street Journal asking whether the United States intended to lose Iraq as we have lost Lebanon. The question feels all the more apropos today, in the wake of troubling elections in both those countries. And let's skip to the punch line: In both cases, the United States has, or once had a chance to challenge Iran at relatively low cost. But as we have already in Lebanon, and Iraq too, I fear, we will miss that chance because we are focused elsewhere, myopic about our potential influence, too willing to lie to ourselves about the status quo, and apparently indifferent to the march of the Islamic Republic of Iran across the greater Middle East.

Beginning with Lebanon, the results of recent elections are as depressing as they were predictable. Prime Minister Saad Hariri's party and allies lost 15 seats, a rout rooted in both Lebanon's own dysfunction, Hariri's lackluster performance and the bizarre interlude during which he was kidnapped to Saudi Arabia. The winners were two: one a protest vote for the Lebanese Forces (not to be confused with the Lebanese Armed Forces), which picked up seven seats, and the other Hezbollah, with its own party and allies picking up 14 seats.

This is the same Hezbollah that has amassed an arsenal that would be the envy of many countries. Israel estimates Hezbollah has more than 150,000 rockets in the south of Lebanon, built up in violation of UNSC Resolution 1701. Worse still, I understand that Hezbollah is changing its arms transfer modus operandi. Because it recognizes the difficulty of physical weapons transfers to its allies, it is transferring know-how – rocket and missile building, guidance systems and the like. If Hezbollah, or the Houthis, or Hamas, or any of Iran's many other proxies have the know-how to build more and more advanced weaponry, and the operational latitude to do so – as they do on Lebanese soil right now - what does the future hold?

The last elections confirm for us that the next government of Lebanon will be run by Hezbollah. And I fear many of the institutions of Lebanon will soon be as well. Which means they will be run by Tehran.

Here's Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah on Iran and on the Lebanese Armed Forces:

- According to [CRS](#), Nasrallah has 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."
- Hezbollah and the LAF coordinated along the Lebanon Syria border in a major battle last year: [said](#) Nasrallah: "What the Lebanese Army did around Aarsal, on the outskirts of Aarsal, and along the contact line within the Lebanese territories was essential for scoring this victory."
- On Iran, Nasrallah this year [said](#): "We believe in him [Khamenei] higher than the [Lebanese] constitution (some say that he says it is better to act within the framework of the constitution in so and so way). We consider this view *taklif*, legal obligation, and necessary."¹
- In 2016, he [said](#), "Hezbollah's budget, salaries, money, food, drink, weapons, all of this comes from Iran... as long as there is money in Iran, we have money."

¹ This speech has been denied and publications regarding it in Iran scrubbed, but most analysts suggest the denial is more political, because of Lebanese elections, rather than because the speech was not given.

Of course, Nasrallah is a known flunky. But here's what Lebanese President Michel Aoun has said of Hezbollah, a designated foreign terrorist organization:

- "Hezbollah has altered its political stance and has respected Lebanese sovereignty...Nasrallah has said as much in an address: Hezbollah has renounced its project to install an 'Islamic Republic' in Lebanon."
- "Hezbollah are not using their weapons in internal politics. They only ensure our resistance against the State of Israel, which continues to occupy part of our territory and which refuses to apply UN resolutions regarding the Palestinians' right to return."
- "As long as the Lebanese army lacks sufficient power to face Israel, we feel the need for (Hezbollah's) arsenal because it complements the army's role."
- "Iran is present and has its influence in the Middle East and it must be taken into account," he said. The president also stressed that Iran has "no ambitions in Lebanon."

The Lebanese military claims not to coordinate with Hezbollah, but there is evidence to the contrary. Last year, a Hezbollah military parade in Syria included a U.S. M113 armored personnel carrier. Did it come from the Lebanese Armed Forces? Intelligence sources say yes. We also know that in southern Lebanon, the LAF have allowed Hezbollah to restock, shared intelligence with them, and have jointly manned checkpoints.

Given the weight of the evidence —and there is more, I am certain, available in a classified setting—is it not inappropriate to worry that the government of Lebanon is effectively itself becoming a proxy of Iran?

In light of that, consider US assistance programs to Lebanon:

- According to President Trump's FY2018 budget request to Congress, the Administration sought \$103 million in total aid to Lebanon, mostly in economic aid (\$213 million was obligated for Lebanon in FY2016).
- Foreign Military Financing (FMF) has been one of the primary sources of U.S. funding for the LAF, along with Counterterrorism Partnership (CTPF) funds. Both the House (H.R. 3362) and Senate (S. 1780) FY2018 State and Foreign Operations appropriations bills continue FMF funding for Lebanon.
- The Senate appropriations report (S.Rept. 115-152) recommends \$105 million in FMF to Lebanon.
- In August 2017, Embassy Beirut announced the delivery of eight M2A2 Bradley Fighting Vehicles and armored field artillery ammunition supply vehicles to the LAF, the first of a total shipment of 32 Bradleys to be delivered in the coming months. Ambassador Richard also stated that the following defense articles had been provided to the LAF in the past 12 months:
 - 40 M198 howitzers,
 - 50 armored Humvees,
 - an Armed Cessna aircraft with Hellfire missiles,
 - 55 mortar systems,
 - 50 Mark-19 automatic grenade launchers,
 - 1,100 machine guns, including 800 50 caliber machine guns,
 - 4,000 M4 rifles,
 - over 500,000 rounds of ammunition,
 - 320 night vision devices and thermal sights, and

- 360 secure communication radios.

Defenders of the U.S. posture in Lebanon, including some in the White House, State Department and Pentagon, suggest the LAF are an effective fighting force against ISIS. CENTCOM commander Joseph Votel insists that “the Lebanese people are realizing more and more that the LAF, their country’s most trusted and respected institution, is increasingly capable of protecting them from external threats.”

But if fighting ISIS is our sole standard, why not arm and support Hezbollah? They too are an effective fighting force vs ISIS. Why stop there? Why not Iran too?

This is the challenge we face. The enemy of our enemy is not always our friend. And the same is true in Iraq.

In part assisted by an alliance with the Iraqi military and so-called Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF, *Hashd al Shabi*), we were able to secure a victory against ISIS in Iraq. But this pact with Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Forces-supported Iraqi units will mean the United States and the Government of Iraq pay a heavy price too. Look no further than the results of the recent Iraqi elections, in which U.S. ally Haidar al Abadi came in third place, trailing the leader of the PMF, Hadi al Ameri (and his Fatah party), and ex-Shia-Islamist firebrand Muqtada al Sadr.

Unlike in Lebanon, we are far from knowing the likely outcome of the elections in Iraq. Turnout was low, and the parties are incredibly close in seats. Haggling will take months, and none of this should yet be seen as a slam dunk for Tehran.

But there is an underlying point here, that is the lesson unlearned by the United States in Lebanon and apparently still unlearned in Iraq today. The Islamic Republic of Iran has a foreign policy model: they do not seek to dominate, they seek to influence, and if necessary, destabilize. They do so through their proxies – Hezbollah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Houthis in Yemen, and increasingly, through the Hashd al Shabi in Iraq. These are Iranian expeditionary forces, nominally loyal to their own countries, but answering to a command in Tehran.

Iran is no Soviet Union; its economy is weak, its hold over its own people tenuous. But victory after victory in the Middle East should suggest to us that Iran has a winning formula, one that could be countered with a serious U.S. strategy of engagement, a theory of our own victory – and one that would not contemplate an every-decade return for war in the Middle East. We must shore up the Iraqi government as we failed to shore up the Lebanese against Iran. We must do so without wavering in our commitments, and by offering choices: us or them. Us must mean genuine political and economic engagement and leadership, far cheaper than war. It must start with aiding the battle against corruption, which erodes confidence in democracy and markets in both Beirut and Baghdad (as well as every other Arab capital). It must continue with a commitment to institutions of governance.

You may well ask, isn’t that what we have done with the LAF in Lebanon, and my answer is no. We have looked away as the country has been sucked into the Iranian vortex and failed to bolster those who naturally despise Iran and its terrorist proxies. We have allowed weak leaders to take our money and our weapons while serving a foreign master – perhaps not always directly, but certainly indirectly. We have never put it to the LAF that they must stand against Iran and Hezbollah, not simply rhetorically, but actually. We have never laid the burden on them to prove they are not working with a designated terrorist organization.

We failed in Lebanon and we have lost. Now we are faced with the same choice in Iraq. We can either force these countries to choose between Washington and Tehran, or we can continue to bury our heads in the sand. And allow Iran to win and win again. That is up to us.

Thank you.



Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much.
Doctor.

STATEMENT OF TAMARA COFMAN WITTES, PH.D., SENIOR FELLOW, CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST POLICY, THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

Ms. WITTES. Madam Chairman, Ranking Member Deutch, distinguished members of the committee, good afternoon and thank you for inviting me.

I must begin, as always, by noting that I represent only myself before you today. Brookings does not take institutional positions on policy issues and although, as Congressman Deutch noted, I was a leader of the NDI observer delegation in Lebanon, I am not representing NDI today either.

The elections in Iraq and Lebanon earlier this month, I think, present a fragile but important counterpoint to a region in turmoil. Extremists claim that only violence can bring change, and these elections promise another path, and when Lebanon and Iraq pull off free elections under such trying circumstances as these, I think it's harder for strongmen elsewhere to argue that they can't afford the risk to stability of allowing their own peoples a choice in who governs them.

The political outcomes from these votes offer both risks and opportunities for American policy. I think we need to be wary of drawing strong conclusions from ambiguous results and I don't think we have yet lost in either place.

There are some developments worth nurturing. To curtail Iranian influence to advance our own interest in stability and counterterrorism, the U.S. needs to stay engaged using diplomatic and economic tools and working together with regional partners who share our goals of promoting stability and tempering Iranian influence.

The greatest risk for American policy toward Lebanon and Iraq right now would be to embark on blunt force policies either by walking away from the fight or by squeezing these fragile countries into unwelcome crisis. I think those tactics would actually give away American influence and advantage Iran further across the region. Let me describe a couple of trends that I saw in both countries that I think are worth noting and building on.

In both Iraq and Lebanon, elections yielded low turnout—49 percent in Lebanon, 44 percent in Iraq. Both those who voted and those who stayed home expressed impatience with established political movements who are more interested in dividing the spoils of government than in actually governing. And in both places, security gains have increased citizens' appetite for effective governance—for governance that meets their core needs. In both countries the military and the security services are relatively trusted national institutions, certainly compared to other parts of the government, and in both countries we see in public opinion polls nationalism is growing relatively to sectarianism.

And these are trends that present some opportunities for new moderating political forces to emerge. But they also present the risk that if citizen needs aren't addressed, those citizens might just give up on politics and on government as a source of solutions to their problems.

So we have a stake in supporting healthy political competition. Now, in neither country did I see an electoral outcome that significantly shifts the balance of power between Iran's allies and its adversaries.

As I said, that battle is not over. In Iraq, the process of government formation will be much more important, I think, to determining Iran's role than the election itself was. And I think that the U.S. can be clear about the principles it expects a new government to embrace, and we can work with regional partners to create incentives for Iraqi party leaders to move in the right direction.

In Lebanon, I don't think it's quite right to say Hezbollah won these elections. I think, in fact, Hezbollah won the political game a couple of years ago in October 2016 when, a few months after Saudi Arabia cut off its aid to the Lebanese Government and to Hariri's political movement, Hariri cut a deal with Hezbollah to return as prime minister and that's the deal that seems to hold now.

But I have to note that Hezbollah's heavy engagement in Syria has costed over 1,000 battle dead. It's weakened its focus on providing for Shi'a communities in Lebanon, and this political campaign showed that even Hezbollah had trouble getting its loyal voters to the polls, and it faced new independent political challenges it hadn't seen before. I think the failure of Saudi Arabia's "my way or the highway" approach to Lebanon over the last couple of years should be instructive to us now. Walking away from the table is a good way to ensure you lose the game.

And just to slightly correct the view that Dany ascribed to me, it was actually Geagea's Lebanese forces that increased its vote that I was pointing out to you. Jumblatt is about the same.

One final note, if I may, about our approach to Iran and how these elections fit into the picture. Secretary Pompeo's speech yesterday laid out a list of desiderata for changed Iranian policies that I think we can all agree are worthy goals. But a strategy links goals to means and yesterday's speech did not lay out a realistic path by which we can achieve the goals that we seek.

The Trump administration's declaration of maximum pressure on Iran I think is likely to be tested very quickly by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps ratcheting up conflict in existing areas of tension around the region, and while sanctions are important, they have not historically done much to constrain the IRGC's regional activities.

Sadly, those activities are relatively cheap for the IRGC and the Iranian regime. What troubles me is that at the same moment the Trump administration is looking to walk away from key arenas in Syria, abandoning local allies, and freeing up space for both Iranian proxies and Sunni extremists who feed off one another, it's hard for me to understand the recent White House decisions to withdraw our special forces fighting ISIS, to freeze \$200 million in pledged reconstruction assistance, or to cut aid to areas in Idlib Province that have been freed from ISIS rule. So I worry that the determination to neglect our hard-won gains in Syria risks the resurgence of ISIS, cuts directly against our ability to shape this ongoing competition for influence against Iran, and weakens our ability to support our anxious regional partners and protecting their own security against Iranian depredation.

We've got to stay engaged. We need a strategy that's long term and one that combines military and intelligence assets with diplomacy and economic support.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Wittes follows:]

**Testimony of Tamara Cofman Wittes, Ph.D.
Senior Fellow, Center for Middle East Policy
The Brookings Institution**

**before the
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East and Africa
Hearing on Lebanon and Iraq After the Elections
May 22, 2018**

Madam Chairman, Ranking Member Deutch, distinguished members of the subcommittee, good afternoon. Thank you for inviting me to share my analysis with you. I must begin, as always, by noting that I represent only myself before you today; the Brookings Institution does not take any institutional positions on policy issues.

The elections in Iraq and Lebanon earlier this month present a fragile but important counterpoint to a region in turmoil. They offer both risks and opportunities for American policy, and we must be wary of drawing strong conclusions from ambiguous results amidst very dynamic politics in both countries. That said, there are some positive developments worth nurturing in both Iraq and Lebanon. The United States must stay engaged, using diplomatic and economic tools and working together with regional partners who share our goals of promoting stability and tempering Iran's influence. We can encourage sovereignty amidst the region's swirling conflicts, support local democratic development, and over time encourage political shifts toward less sectarian and more effective and responsive domestic governance. The greatest risk for American policy toward Lebanon and Iraq right now would be to embark on blunt-force policies, either by walking away from the fight or by squeezing these fragile countries into unwelcome crisis. Such tactics would give away American influence, advantaging Iran further across the region.

In assessing these electoral outcomes, the committee has asked us to examine their impact on Iran's regional influence and the broader regional geopolitical competition between Iran and its adversaries. To place this in the context of US policy toward Iran: Secretary Pompeo's speech yesterday laid out a list of desiderata for changed Iranian policies that I think we can all agree are worthy goals. But a strategy links goals to means -- and yesterday's speech did not lay out any path by which the United States can actually move toward achieving the goals it seeks. Maximalist demands plus unilateral sanctions do not make up a strategy. I address strategy toward the broader confrontation with Iran below.

Elections Are A Notable Counterpoint to Regional Trends

For Lebanon and Iraq, holding relatively peaceful elections in the face of stressful circumstances is itself a small triumph. After the people-power uprisings of the Arab Spring were hijacked by violence in Syria, Libya, Bahrain, and Yemen; after Egypt's popular overthrow of the Mubarak regime was hijacked first by an elected president who betrayed democratic principles, then by a military coup and a renewed dictatorship; after resurgent monarchs and extremist militias have dominated and driven the region's trajectory for more than half a decade—after all this, a relatively peaceful and relatively open election is truly an event worth celebrating. And we have now seen three, because Tunisia held municipal elections during the same two-week period as Lebanon and Iraq's parliamentary balloting.

Amidst all the violence and zero-sum arguments, these three electoral exercises offer the Arab world a fragile but important counterpoint. Extremists claim that only violence can bring change; these elections promise another path. And seeing Lebanon and Iraq pull off free elections under such trying circumstances, it's harder for strongmen in other Arab states to argue that they can't afford the risk to stability of allowing their own peoples a choice in who governs them. I don't want to overstate this impact, but I do think it's important to recognize the fundamental power of citizens making a democratic choice, even in challenging and constrained circumstances.

Growing Nationalism and Demands for Effective Governance

We also need to examine these elections in the light of local political dynamics. Ultimately, like other democratic elections, these reflect the views and priorities of voters, and we must not dismiss those sentiments if we are to understand the opportunities and risks these outcomes present for US interests.

In both Iraq and Lebanon, elections yielded low turnout.¹ Both those who voted and those who stayed home expressed impatience with established political movements who are more interested in dividing the spoils of government than in actually governing. In both of these divided societies, sectarian politicians have kept the peace in part by taking a “no-losers” approach to forming governments, whereby nearly every faction gets a place at the public trough that it can use to provide patronage to its followers. But this approach is facing some limits, as citizens feel increasingly secure from civil conflict and impatient with patronage politics, and increasingly prioritize basic government effectiveness over loyalty to their sectarian or tribal group. In both

¹ Lebanese turnout was about 49%, as compared to 53% in 2009. Iraq's turnout was about 44% as compared to 60% in 2014.

Iraq and Lebanon, a sense of nationalism opposed to outside interference is also growing, and producing opportunities to weaken the hold of movements rooted in patronage and sectarian identity. Lebanese and Iraqi citizens trust their army and security forces more than they do other public institutions.

In both places, these trends offer the possibility that newer, more independent political forces may emerge -- but they also present the risk that, if they don't see progress, citizens could simply give up on electoral politics and on the government itself as a source of solutions to their day-to-day problems. The alternative to competitive electoral politics in Iraq and Lebanon is not likely to be mere apathy -- it's likely to be more violence. As the United States continues to confront instability across the region, it has a stake in supporting healthy political competition and coalition building, in supporting more effective and responsive governance that addresses the concerns of citizens, and in nurturing new political alternatives not defined by sectarian or militia affiliations.

Lebanon

Lebanon's elections come nine years after the last parliamentary balloting, and five years after they were first scheduled. Between the last elections in 2009 and 2016, Lebanon suffered through a period marked by bombings and armed clashes between political factions allied with and opposed to Syria's Bashar al-Assad, and by political crisis and stalemate that left the country without a president for more than two years. The Syrian war next door, which sent over one million refugees into Lebanon, also led both regional powers and local extremists contending in Syria to try and export their fight to Lebanon. The crisis ended in October 2016 with a compromise between Hezbollah and Saad Hariri's Future Movement by which Hezbollah ally Michel Aoun became president and Hariri returned as prime minister.

The relative stability of Lebanon in the time since that deal was consummated led citizens to demand more effective governance, as evidenced in massive public protests over garbage disposal and the emergence of new citizen movements and independent politicians campaigning against corruption. It also brought modest gains for women's rights and visibility for Lebanon's LGBT community, which faced [an unfortunate setback this week as authorities closed down planned Pride Festival events](#).

As this bottom-up pressure mounted, all the traditional political movements had an interest in elections to renew and legitimate their leadership. They wrote a new electoral law that was like an elephant designed by committee: a hybrid of proportional representation, preferential voting, districts of varying size, and Lebanon's unique confessional allocation of parliamentary seats. The new law was designed to enshrine the power of established parties, and it largely worked as

planned. Thus, the post-election configuration of Lebanese politics, at least with respect to Hezbollah/Iran vs. Hariri/Saudi, is not really meaningfully different from the pre-election configuration.

The events that led to these elections, though, makes clear that the balloting was not a mere procedural exercise. Regardless of their political preferences, voters were highly focused on corruption, jobs, and health care. Even traditional parties had to address these practical concerns over government effectiveness and make new appeals to attract the nearly 800,000 new voters who have come of age since Lebanon's last parliamentary balloting nine years ago. And all of the parties, including Hezbollah, faced trouble getting their loyal voters to the polls. In Baalbek and in the southern Bint Jbeil district, the movement was publicly challenged by independent candidate lists -- and in Bint Jbeil, independent candidate Ali al-Amine proved troublesome enough that Hezbollah sent thugs to beat him badly just two weeks before Election Day.

Indeed, across the country, the escalating demands of Lebanon's citizens for effective government services and the rise of a newly energized civil society led to the emergence of an unprecedented number of independent candidates, who eschewed affiliation with patronage-based, confessional movements and in some places challenged them directly. Although more than 70 independent candidates made it onto ballots, the barriers posed by the electoral system and the high cost of campaigning meant that only one—a prominent female journalist from Beirut—won a seat in the parliament.

New movements in any democracy take time to see electoral gains—the more so in a system as clientelistic and fractured as Lebanon's. While the United States has for years hoped to see alternative Shia movements to Hezbollah and Amal emerge in Lebanon, such efforts remain marginal and face relentless intimidation and harassment from Hezbollah. Still and all, the emergence of trans-confessional, independent politicians and the continued pressure for improved governance mean that there is hope for change in Lebanon. Developments over the nine years since the last parliamentary elections strongly suggest that change in Lebanese politics won't come from above but rather from the grassroots.

Iraq

Iraq's election coming so soon after the territorial defeat of ISIS produced some modest shifts in political outcomes. Leading up to the elections, polling showed that Iraqis perceived their society was more unified, and that sectarian divisions were improving. Economic conditions and corruption were top priorities for voters in choosing candidates. The voter turnout, though, was dramatically lower than previous elections -- which may reflect voter frustration with politics,

but could also reflect the high numbers of internally-displaced people across Iraq and a degree of confusion over new voting procedures.

The election campaign and results showed some impact of these pragmatic priorities amongst voters. The military success and the desire for effective government support in Mosul, the area hardest-hit by ISIS's brutal occupation, led Iraqi Sunnis there to prefer Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's alliance over traditional Sunni parties. But the biggest shift was the re-invention of Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr's political identity, from a militant advocate of poor Shias' interests to the leader of a coalition focused on anti-corruption that included Christian and communist candidates. This broadening of Sadr's political appeal, plus what was reportedly an impressive ground game getting his loyal Shia supporters to the polls, led his coalition to the top with 54 seats.

Pre-election polling also suggested that the appeal of Islamist parties was declining in Shia areas, suggesting the possibility for politicians to find more success in coming years through cross-cutting coalitions that reflect pragmatic policies to meet citizen needs. That may not happen this year, as I discuss below. As in Lebanon, it may take time for politicians feel sufficient incentive to shift toward more responsive platforms. But Iraq has managed to hold elections on schedule and has undergone three peaceful transfers of power between governments; with sustained security and continued electoral exercises, Iraq's politics could begin to shift decisively away from the sectarian-patronage model.

The Effect on Iranian Influence

In neither country, in my estimation, did the electoral outcome significantly shift the balance of power between Iran's allies and its adversaries. The battle to contain and push back Iranian influence is not lost, but neither is it near over. There are few short-term gains to be found in either Iraq or Lebanon, but walking off the playing field would itself be a victory for Iran and its proxies.

In Iraq, the process of government formation will be more important to determining Iran's role than the election itself was. Parties must compete to assemble any 165 members of the 329-seat parliament to nominate a candidate for prime minister and assemble a government. Early indications are that Moqtada al-Sadr is seeking a coalition with current prime minister Haider al-Abadi's Victory Alliance as the nucleus for a governing bloc that would leave strongly pro-Iranian movements outside the government. But government formation in Iraq is a tricky process, and subject to many twists and turns; moreover, as in Lebanon, party alliances can be fleeting and subject to change. There is an important role for outsiders in shaping the

environment in which political leaders make their calculations to coalesce in various ways. While the United States cannot determine the outcome of Iraq's government negotiations, it does have influence -- especially working in concert with Gulf Arab states who have assiduously courted Abadi, Sistani and Al-Sadr in the past months, and who are hoping to gain from closer economic ties to Iraq. A wise posture for the U.S. government would be to stay engaged and be clear about the principles it expects a new government to uphold -- continued counterterrorism efforts and security cooperation with Washington, maintaining Iraq's neutrality in regional conflicts, resolving conflicts with the Kurdish region, and advancing reforms to boost the economy -- and work with Arab partners to advance the vision of a sovereign Iraq integrated within the Arab world.

It's quite possible that Iraqi political leaders will conclude that the most stable and productive government for their purposes is another "unity" government in which many movements, including those linked to pro-Iranian militias, divide the spoils of government jobs and contracts amongst their loyal followers. This would not be an ideal outcome from the American perspective, but it's not markedly different from the status quo, and would somewhat constrain pro-Iranian factions by virtue of their desire to stay within the consensus necessary to keep the government together and their patronage streams intact. It would, however, continue to retard necessary reforms in Baghdad and could exacerbate voter alienation.

In Lebanon, the narrative of most Western media reports (Reuters, New York Times, and Washington Post, for instance), that Hezbollah won these elections, is not quite right. Yes, Hezbollah and its ally Amal increased their seat total by two. Yes, Hariri's Future Movement lost one-third of its seats. But neither of these outcomes really alter the balance of power in Beirut, and the likely result is another government headed by Hariri and including Hezbollah.

It's more accurate to say that Hezbollah "won" the game of Lebanese politics (for now, because in Lebanon no victory is ever final), not on Election Day 2018, but in October 2016, when it worked with Hariri to end the stalemate that had left Lebanon with no president for two-and-a-half years. That compromise—in which Hezbollah ally Michel Aoun became president and Hariri reclaimed the prime ministry—ended a period of violence and political crisis. As was true in October 2016, so now: Hariri's leadership of Lebanon's government will depend on Hezbollah's acquiescence; and Hezbollah will continue to wield a veto over government decisions it does not see as in its interests.

It's worth noting that, about six months before the compromise was announced, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as part of King Salman's more assertive regional policy, cut aid to Lebanon's government and to Sunni leader Saad Hariri's Future Movement. In so doing, the Saudis essentially abandoned the playing field and left Hariri dependent on Hezbollah's consent to take

power. Last fall, Saudi Arabia's brash crown prince took this "my-way-or-the-highway" approach a step further, trying to force a confrontation with Iran and Hezbollah by kidnapping Hariri and coercing his resignation on live television. The gambit failed, and Hariri returned to his office in Beirut, further weakened and leaning further on Hezbollah. The failure of the Saudi approach during this period should instruct the United States in its approach now: walking away from Lebanon does not weaken Hezbollah, but it does weaken Hezbollah's adversaries.

Hezbollah's success in maintaining its veto over Lebanese politics, however, does not mean that Hezbollah faces no challenges to its hegemony, with its ally Amal, over Lebanon's Shia population. The movement's heavy engagement in Syria has cost it over 1000 battle dead, and weakened its focus on providing for local communities. In the Bekaa Valley and Baalbek, this political campaign showed some relative softening of support for Hezbollah, and showed clearly that the movement had to work harder than normal to mobilize its supporters to go to the polls.

Most importantly, looking forward, is that the old March 8th and March 14th, pro-Hezbollah and anti-Hezbollah coalitions from the 2005 and 2009 elections have fractured. The real political movement may emerge amongst the Christian parties. Samir Geagea's Lebanese Forces movement was the upset success story of the election, more than doubling its seat total to fifteen with a [platform that explicitly challenges Hezbollah's weapons](#). Meanwhile, Lebanese President Michel Aoun has stepped down from leading the Free Patriotic Movement, and the ambitious new party leader and foreign minister, Gebran Bassil, is being courted by Geagea and may loosen the party's alliance with Hezbollah.

Impact of US Noncompliance With the JCPOA

As noted above, there is still not strategy from the Trump Administration to contain Iranian influence or halt its dangerous behavior, merely an intention to punish Iran with sanctions. Additional American sanctions will very likely deter international investment in Iran and weaken the Iranian economy -- but it will not do much to constrain the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) from its regional activities. The IRGC has its own businesses that profit from no-bid contracts with the government worth billions of dollars. Its regional and international adventurism also present many opportunities for profit. One study [estimated](#) that during the period of President Ahmedinejad, the IRGC earned about \$13 billion per year in oil smuggling alone. Indeed, the IRGC faced no cash shortage when it brought foreign fighters and its own troops to Syria to bolster a beleaguered Bashar al-Assad at the height of international sanctions. So additional US sanctions will not likely do much to dampen Iranian regional adventures. Moreover, the weaker the government revenue stream becomes and the more domestic pressure

it faces, the more powerful the IRGC will become as the regime's last line of defense against domestic dissent as well as external enemies.

The Trump Administration's declaration of a maximum pressure campaign to reverse Iran's overall foreign policy approach is likely to be tested immediately by the Islamic Republic, probably by ratcheting up conflict in existing areas of tension around the region in ways that will discomfit our allies and test America's willingness to respond. All things considered, I suspect we might see that testing first in Yemen, where escalation is cheapest and Iran would suffer the fewest consequences from any retaliation in theatre. Syria is another possibility, although there Iran must carefully calibrate its actions to avoid an unwanted escalation of its confrontation with Israel. So far, Iran and Saudi Arabia have both preferred to maintain political stability in Lebanon and Iraq, having more to gain from political maneuvering than outright coercion -- but that could change.

What troubles me is that, at the same moment that it provokes this increased challenge, the Trump Administration seeks to walk away from important arenas like Syria, abandoning the playing field at a crucial moment. Either in terms of counterterrorism or in terms of containing Iran, it's hard to understand the recent decisions to establish an arbitrary deadline for the withdrawal of our special forces fighting ISIS, to freeze the \$200 million pledged for Syrian reconstruction earlier this year, to cut aid to areas in Idlib province liberated from ISIS, and to cut off the lifesaving assistance to the White Helmets. President Trump's determination to walk away from our hard-won gains in Syria cuts directly against the U.S. ability to shape the ongoing competition for influence in the Middle East and to support our partners in protecting their own security against Iranian depredations.

America's regional partners are resolute in their desire to confront the Iranian challenge, but they are understandably anxious about the Administration's commitment to stand with them. They see the lack of strategy as well, and their anxiety is deepened by the president's clear intent to withdraw both American forces and American economic support from areas where we are still not done fighting ISIS. Walking away leaves our local partners against ISIS in Syria without options, left to cut their own deals with Assad and Iran or, even worse, with Al Nusra.

A concerted strategy to reduce Iranian influence in the region, as [I laid out to you when I testified in November](#), is a long-term strategy. It would combine clear expectations with determined, integrated effort using military, intelligence, economic, and diplomatic tools and would seek to rally diverse international support for these elements:

- It would press for resolution of the bitter civil conflicts in Yemen and Syria where Iran has found ready purchase and has room to entrench itself further;

- It would secure the victory against ISIS in both Iraq and Syria through political and economic stabilization, because Sunni extremism and Shia extremism feed off of one another;
- It would mobilize international diplomacy, including through mechanisms like the UNSC, to expose Iranian violations of international laws and norms, and to punish specific behavior;
- It would leverage U.S. and partner country influence in places like Lebanon and Iraq to support alternatives to sectarian politics; and
- It would pursue tight intelligence and security cooperation with our partners to expose, interdict, and roll up Iranian activities.

Sadly, such a comprehensive strategy seems nowhere on the horizon.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Dr. Doran, Ms. Pletka, and Dr. Wittes. Got them all now.

I would like to get your opinion on U.S. policy on our aid to Iraq. If the Sadr organization or any Iranian-linked entity continues to control Iraq's Interior Ministry, is it in the interests of the United States to continue aiding Iraq's interior security force?

Mr. DORAN. I think it is. I think in the—in the short term we don't know who Sadr is and it's really a competition now between us and Iran over the direction of Sadr. I think it would be too early to make any kind of precipitous change to the policy until we can stand Sadr before a couple of tests and see which way things are going.

You know, when you look at the core experiences of the Iranian regime, it all goes back to the Iran-Iraq war and the threats that emanated from Iraq. So the key desire of the Iranians I think—the key strategic desire is to make sure that there isn't an independent Iraqi military that can ever threaten Iran again. And that's got to be the key area of competition, and my fear is the same is Tammy's, that if we leave the game we are just going to hand it over to them.

The fact of the matter is we have to play the game a little bit more like they do, which is when the Iraqis do something that the Iranians don't like, the Iranians threaten their lives or the lives of their loved ones. When the Iraqis do something that we don't like, we send a demarche.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Well, let's not adopt their strategy, though.

Mr. DORAN. We have to threaten things that the Iranians hold dear. How's that?

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. All right. That's better. Thank you.

Ms. Pletka.

Ms. PLETKA. I am going to make a slightly less bloodthirsty comment than Mike. I mean, Muqtad al-Sadr has tried to refashion himself as an anti-corruption crusader. I am not quite sure it's true but, on the other hand, it's certainly a role that's much needed to be filled in Iraq, as I think we could probably all agree.

You know, one of the things that was very interesting that happened in Lebanon some years back—two decades back—was that Lebanon had been riven into very—in the wake of the civil war had been riven into all of these different militias who answered to different sects and to different religious parties and to different political parties and to different outside powers.

It's not an unanalogous situation to the one that we see in Iraq today, although Iran is the dominant player for sure, and the one thing that I believe we could do to some good effect is to try to help the Iraqi military become a military that serves the government and the people of Iraq and not the people and its masters in the IRGC. That's something that they're only going to be able to do with our support. So I think that that engagement is vital.

I think that the right way to think about this is competition. We actually do need to compete with Iran on the territory that they designate is important to them in order to ensure that the people stand with us—an infinitely preferable ally than with the Iranians.

Ms. WITTES. Just briefly, I think Dany's correct to say that that Lebanese model of a government is essentially a patronage mecha-

nism for the parties within it. That is the model that Iraqi Governments have followed for the last several cycles. It's possible they don't need to follow that model this time and I think that there is actually increased pressure from voters to see a more effective government and that's why Sadr kind of rebranded himself in this campaign. So I think that that gives us something we can build on if we can create the incentives.

The other thing I would say is that I think all of these Iraqi parties know that this government is not going to yield enough patronage for them if security is not maintained. They all know that they need effective internal security and they know that they need American help to do it. I think that that does give us quite a bit of leverage if we maintain those relationships.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much.

Mr. Deutch.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I was struck, Ms. Pletka, by the way you described Iran's interests, seeking not to destabilize—seeking not to dominate but to destabilize and influence, and which then made me think that that seems to be the same approach that some other countries take. It's the Russian approach.

And I read through the secretary's speech again just now and I would like to just couch this discussion—take a step out and view it through Iran's activities in Syria—Iran, on the ground in Syria, attempting and very clearly—in Syria perhaps it might be different, much closer to domination than destabilisation.

But the Russians very clearly are interested in destabilization in Syria, a policy that extends throughout the region, I would think, and I would like you just to speak to that combination and the fact, as Dr. Wittes says, that a strategy needs to show us how we are going to satisfy our goals and what means we are going to use to satisfy those goals.

And if we are not—if we are talking about the outcome of the elections but we are not talking about what's happening Syria and the role that Russia plays, then is it even worth having a conversation about Iran at all if we ignore that critical relationship?

Ms. PLETKA. I couldn't agree with you more. Let me be honest, I don't think that any strategy that looks at Iran can be through a soda straw in which we—this, to my mind, was what was wrong with the JCPOA. The JCPOA was something that compartmentalized certain things in Iran and left others in their baskets to be dealt with later but, of course, they weren't dealt with later.

Now, you know, we can talk about whether that was a good choice or the right way done but that is, in some ways, water under the bridge. But we are about to depart on a new strategy toward the Iranians that is going to crush them and their regime and their economy.

Isn't the right place to start in Syria? This has been inexplicable to me since 2011, frankly. There are those who suggest that there's an opportunity for us in Yemen. I think that's a slightly more complex environment. The Saudis and the Emiratis are there. But for as long as the Iranians are victorious in Syria, whether it's for themselves or for their allies in the Assad regime, we are not going to be rolling them back.

And your note about the Russians is exactly correct. The Russians are opportunists. The Russians are there because we are not. The Russians have stepped in not because the costs are high to them but because the opportunities are disproportionate to the costs, and we have not done enough to raise the cost to the Russians for their adventures overseas.

So—

Mr. DEUTCH. So, Dr. Wittes, what is the right approach then, particularly vis-a-vis Russia? How is it—what—in the strategy that you're looking for, in the strategy that all of us are waiting for, what should that strategy—how does that strategy include Russia? How do we—and then—and then how does that affect the way we deal with Iran in Lebanon and in Iraq?

Ms. WITTES. You know, I think for a number of years the Russians have played this double game with the U.S. and the West in Syria where they have simultaneously taken advantage of all the opportunities that Dany just laid out, but in addition to that, said, well, when push comes to shove, we can help deliver the Iranians on a solution here—we can constrain them. And the question I've always had is even were they willing, which they have yet to really demonstrate they are willing to do, could they, in fact, deliver Iran. And this week, I think, is instructive in that regard where you had a clear statement out of Moscow about the need for foreign forces to depart Syria, and the Iranians turned around immediately and said, well, I don't know who you're talking about—we are not going anywhere.

So, you know, it may be that American strategy needs to push the Russians to make a choice and then see that the Iranians are not actually going to go along with their preferences and, therefore, that Russia needs to work with us to contain Iran's role here.

Mr. DEUTCH. I just want to make sure I understand America's role. America should push Russia to make what choice?

Ms. WITTES. Rather than simultaneously saying to us, "We'll deliver the Iranians," and saying to the Iranians, "We'll get the West off your back," that they need to make a clear—that they need to repeat what they did this week. They need to make some clear—set some clear expectations and some clear constraints on the Iranians. Now, they have incentive to do that right now because of this prospect of escalation between Israel and Iran, because Israel has made so clear that it will not tolerate IRGC embedding themselves near the Israeli border, and this is threatening Russia's own gains in Syria.

Why is it there? It's there because it wants a permanent military presence. It wants to play spoiler against us and it wants to make money in Syria's reconstruction. And if there ends up being a hot Iranian-Israeli war over Syrian territory, Russia is not going to make any money. So I think this is actually a moment where we can push them to push the Iranians, and they will see they cannot deliver Iran and they're going to have to take a harder stance.

Mr. DEUTCH. And doesn't that have to be—does that have to be a public pronouncement and if it needs to be a public pronouncement wouldn't that be the kind of—the kind of pronouncement—the kind of pressure to make a decision that would belong in, say, a big speech about Iran policy also?

Ms. WITTES. Yes.

To me, one of the biggest missing pieces of the speech from Secretary Pompeo this week was that coalition. He kept talking about an international coalition that agrees with our goals, that's going to work with us to advance their goals—our goals, and yet he could not specify any track of American policy or activity beyond we are going to go out to capitals and talk to them that would actually produce that result.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you.

Thanks, Madam Chairman.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much.

Ambassador Wagner.

Mrs. WAGNER. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Dr. Doran, I appreciate your book, "Ike's Gamble," on what the U.S. can learn from Eisenhower's administration as we examine how to treat our friends and partners in the region.

I am curious what you think about Iraq's election results and I am even more curious to hear your thoughts on the impact that President Trump's Iran deal decision will have on our friends in the region.

Mr. DORAN. Thanks for mentioning my book. [Laughter.]

For me, the main takeaway from the Iraq election is that Iraq cannot be the primary arena in which we are pushing back against the Iranians. But it is absolutely—it is absolutely vital that we engage in very significant competition with the Iranians in Iraq but more so that there are—there are arenas in which we have—we have aggressive unfettered competition with the Iranians. If we don't show all of our allies in the region that we are really serious about rolling back Iranian power, not just—not just causing them some pain but rolling them back, I am afraid we'll lose the competition.

There was actually in my—in my book, since you mentioned it, one of my favourite moments in the—in Eisenhower's experience with the Middle East came in 1958 after the Iraqi revolution, which took Iraq away from the West, and Eisenhower decided to intervene in Lebanon.

And he met with Sam Rayburn, and Sam Rayburn said, I'm—you know, Mr. President, I am worried about two things. Number one, I am worried about the Russians—that this will provoke them, and number two, I am worried that our—we are going to alienate Arab public opinion, both of which are important, and I am afraid—actually, three things—I am also afraid that there's no end game, basically, and that this will all end badly.

And Eisenhower said—and I think it was a great moment of tremendous honesty—he said, "Oh, it's going to end badly—I can assure you of that."

The only question is, does it end badly with us reassuring our allies that we are with them against their enemy or does it end badly with us not supporting our—not supporting our allies?

Mrs. WAGNER. Thank you.

Mr. DORAN. And that's the situation that we are in now. We have to demonstrate to the region that we really mean business. Reimposing the sanctions is good but we have to really push back against the Iranians where they are pushing hard, which is Syria.

Mrs. WAGNER. Thank you. I agree.

Dr. Wittes, you just returned from observing Lebanon's elections. I am sure we both agree that Lebanon's successful elections are a promising sign for Middle East democracy.

But the real source of democratic longevity is bottom-up support, and that takes a long time to develop. Are Lebanon's young people engaged in the democratic process? And to what extent has Iran and Hezbollah stunted democratic growth in Lebanon?

Ms. WITTES. Thank you, Congresswoman Wagner. That's a fantastic question.

I would say that over the years I have been visiting Lebanon, and I also observed the 2009 elections, there's been quite a flowering of civic engagement and activism among Lebanese youth. The main domestic observer organization, LADE, is basically a youth-run organization. The Lebanese Transparency Association also represents that rising generation of Lebanese, and there were about 800,000 new voters. The age of voting is 21 in Lebanon, and because it had been 9 years since the last election, 800,000 new voters had entered the rolls.

So all of the parties had to respond to the frustration that young people were expressing—that these tired sectarian patronage systems were not meeting their needs—and I think that does offer the opportunity for shift away from sectarian politics to something that's more focused on government effectiveness.

Now, the U.S. Government has made long-term investments in Lebanese civil society and youth engagement and empowerment, in civic education, and sadly, those investments have flagged in the last year and I really do believe those are important and worthwhile to sustain.

Mrs. WAGNER. Great. Well, thank you for that answer.

And I am about out of time. Ms. Pletka, I have a question to you but I will spare your daughters and I—Madam Chairman, I will—I will submit it for the record and I thank our witnesses very much and I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Madam Ambassador.

Mr. Schneider of Illinois.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you, Madam Chairman, and again, thank you to the witnesses for sharing your perspectives today.

Dr. Wittes, I will start with you. You made the statement that the strategy should be linked to goals—links goals to means, and that in this region the United States appears to lack a strategy.

I will start with you but I will open the whole panel: What are the implications of not having a strategy and the consequences that if we don't get one shortly we are going to face?

Ms. WITTES. Well, thank you.

I think the primary consequence, in addition to simply being ineffective in achieving our goals, is in our relationships with those in the region who rely on their partnerships with us and on our support.

And over the course of the last 5 months, I've been to Saudi Arabia twice. I've been to Kuwait. I've been to Lebanon. I will be in Israel next month. And I would say that I hear across the board anxiety about American policy and American leadership. The intentions are there. The rhetoric sounds great. None of them loved the

Iran deal, although the Gulf accepted it and I think all of them had some anxieties about letting it go.

But what they really want to know is are you there for us for the long haul—can we count on you when it matters, and there, I think, there are real anxieties emerging and I would say that the recent Trump administration decisions on Syria have piqued that anxiety even farther.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Ms. Pletka.

Ms. PLETKA. The consequences of not having a strategy are, you know, as we've all described, which is that we—our allies in the region are full of doubt that people who are fundamentally well intentioned at any particular level, whether in governance or in economics or in civil society, are worried that there's not going to be a power that stands by them and that those who are there are going to—are going to take advantage of our absence in order to push the region back toward the direction of autocracy, or worse, in the case of Iraq and, I would say, in Lebanon as well.

But there's another problem here and that's a problem of continuity from the Obama administration. Barack Obama famously told the Saudis that they were going to need to learn to share the region with the Iranians, as if somehow the two of them should split everything up while we go home. That's not a policy and it's not a strategy, and it was a mistake then and, unfortunately, subcontracting to our allies in the region to do what they think is right in the absence of a strategy is not a great idea either.

The bottom line is—and I hope all of us, actually, agree on this no matter where we stand on the political spectrum—the bottom line is that there is no substitute for U.S. leadership. Our values, the things we stand for—and that does not mean as, I think, our previous President too often insisted, a choice between abandoning the region and war. It really means engagement. It means standing up for the kinds of things that matter to the future of the region in the long term so we don't to go back. Good governance, markets—you know, those are the things that matter and we need a strategy to get to those things.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. I agree with you, and if I could take a step to Dr. Doran—that might be the segue to you. I think—and I don't want to put words in your mouth, but I think what I heard you say is that we should allow Israel to push back against Iran and Syria. I will raise the question. Absent a strategy, is Israel confronting Iran on the border between Israel and Syria has one dynamic and the United States working with our allies in the region to keep Iran out of Syria has another dynamic. I think the former carries as lot more risk and negative consequence than the latter. I would welcome your thoughts on that.

Mr. DORAN. Yes. In an ideal world, I would prefer that the United States defined the end state that it wants in Syria, and put together the coalition to achieve it, assigned roles and missions, and so on.

But after watching our politics over the last—over the last 5 years, I doubt that's going to happen and I see, on both sides of the political aisle, not a lot of appetite for nation building in Syria. So I worked from the assumption that that's—that that's the base-

line and I have to work within that parameter and that's why I—that's why I am talking about supporting the Israelis.

I was struck a couple months ago—then Secretary of State Tillerson made a statement—a prepared statement about our Iran policy in which he said that the United States was working to counter Iran across the region, and then General Votel, the commander of U.S. CENTCOM, was testifying before Congress and was asked what the military is going to counter Iran in Syria, and he said it's not a U.S. military mission to counter Iran in Syria.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. I think what he said was he hasn't been given instructions.

Mr. DORAN. So but it's also clear to me that the military doesn't really want to do it. So—

Mr. SCHNEIDER. And I am out of time.

Mr. DORAN. The basic line—the basic point is, if we are not going to do it directly then the next best thing is to support our allies who will.

And yesterday Secretary Pompeo said we want an Iran—we want Syria devoid of Iranians. So do the Israelis. So let's associate ourselves directly with Israeli red lines and support them.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Well, I agree with that. I agree that we need to support Israel. It's our most important ally in the region, one of our most important allies in the world.

But I would just argue that it would be better if Israel doesn't have to confront an Iran with permanent bases in Syria, and instead we work with Israel and our other allies to make sure that Iran can't establish that permanent presence in Syria.

Mr. DORAN. I totally agree with you.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much.

Mr. Rohrabacher of California.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. You know we discuss the Middle East it seems so mind boggling in its various parts and I think that we have gotten so far away from trying to deal with reality in order to keep in place lines that were drawn by colonialists 100 years ago.

Here we have—basically, we are, you know, on the verge of war. Not on the verge of war—we are engaged, dramatically engaged, with violent and warlike activities, all based on alliances—on these lines that were drawn.

Correct me if I am wrong, but Iraq was not a country until the colonialists made it a country, and here we are talking about how we are going to keep faith with Iraq. There is no Iraq. The fact is is that there are different nationality groups in Iraq that have—that are—that go many centuries.

To be very bold, I think that perhaps if we are ever going to have peace in that region or be a force for peace in the region, it's not going to be because we are taking sides and we are involved with the unrelenting confusion and chaos that we've seen going on there.

We don't need to say that we support the Iraqis. But what we do need is to find those nationalities that are at play. The Kurds are a nationality. They are people who recognize themselves as Kurds. The Iraqis don't see themselves that way. Am I wrong?

They see themselves as Kurds. They have various different groups within Iraq and that's how they see themselves.

In Lebanon, we know that you have had—well, you had the Druze, you had the Muslims, and you had Christians. I don't know—I guess it's been a good thing to try to keep Lebanon together.

But I remember when I was in the White House when Ronald Reagan sent the Marines into Beirut and I remember that my brother's best friend, who joined the Marine Corps right after they graduated from Camp Lejeune High School, was blown to bits in that little incident, and Ronald Reagan knew immediately that was not the right tactic to use.

And that's when he worked with—and I am going to brag here—he worked with myself and a number of people, maybe five or six others, who established an alternative strategy to sending American troops everywhere and that was called the Reagan Doctrine, and it seems to me it worked because it brought down our primary enemy, which was the Soviet Union.

I guess my question to you folks is that, number one, there is a Persian entity that—a nationality. You have Iran but, again, we are trying to deal transactionally with a nation-state that doesn't exist.

You have got Baloch. You have got Kurds. You do have a Persian heart of Iran. Should we not be going into the reality of trying to—instead of trying to deal transactionally with what are actually nonnations with this—with the colonial leftover designations of territory under what jurisdiction, wouldn't it be better for us to try to restructure and work with those people on restructuring borders by siding with those nationalities like Persians as compared to the Iranian mullah regime, like the Kurds, like the various Christian—there's Christian elements there in Syria as well and we know—I guess we are trying to work with them.

I don't know if that makes any sense to you or not, but what doesn't make sense to me is what we are doing—when hearing over and again, oh, we are siding with that group. We are going to hope that this group wins the election and there's no, really, substance historically to any of the groups that we are talking about.

So, as I say, as compared to selecting the Persians, selecting the Baloch, selecting the Kurds, selecting those groups—the Druze, who are people who have a real nationality about them.

And sorry if I've gone on too long on this question but if you want to have a comment to show me how naive I am, thinking that we can deal with a Kurdish nation instead of Iraq.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. You did take up the entire 5 minutes with the question but we'll have—who's the designated answerer? Dr. Doran.

Mr. DORAN. I won't take more than 10 minutes.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Okay.

Mr. DORAN. The—

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Pardon me. I am sorry for going on too long.

Mr. DORAN. I don't—I don't actually agree with you in this sense that, yes, those states were created by the—by the colonialists. But they've been there for a century and that's what we've got. And any attempt to redraw the borders is going to be highly controversial,

and it's going to affect the lives of millions and it's going to be an act of imperialism at least as great as the act that created those states to begin with. And it's only going to hold if the United States military is there in force to hold it. And so, I mean, you're talking about another George W. Bush style invasion of the region in order to redraw the—redraw the boundaries.

So I think we are stuck with what we've got, which is working with those states which are recognized but also recognizing, as you say, that there are some state actors who have—some state actors who have their own—their own independent organization and ability to influence things. So it's—you know, it's an art of balancing the two. But redrawing the boundaries I don't think will get us out of the—get us out of the fire.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well, at least we should be dealing with people who we can make—who are our—could be our friends in order to defeat the primary enemy, which is what happened when we defeated the Soviet Union.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Rohrabacher.

Mr. Cicilline of Rhode Island.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to our witnesses.

I would like to first turn to Iraq and ask you, Dr. Wittes, is it possible for the U.S. to work with al-Sadr and his allies if they do form a government in terms of achieving our short and long-term objectives in Iraq? And what are your assessments of his true motivations and where do his loyalties lie? And assuming his coalition does take control of the government, can the U.S. be expected to work in concert with the same coalition who murdered American troops and our partners in droves during the height of the Iraq war? Do we have any mutual interests that would make that a possibility, and what's your assessment?

Ms. WITTES. Well, Congressman, I think it's a crucial question. I don't think there's an obvious answer.

But I would say that yes, I think we do have some interests in common. We'll have to see how Muqtad al-Sadr chooses to play his cards.

He has demonstrated a great deal of political agility—let me put it that way—over the years. He's quite an opportunist, and he now sees the political opportunity in moving away from militancy, moving away from Iran declaring independence, moving against the corruption visible in other parties, including some of the traditional Shi'a parties that are more closely allied with the popular mobilization units, the militias, and more closely allied with Tehran.

So let's see what we can do—let's see, first of all, what his intentions are in terms of government alliances and then let's see how we can work with that.

I think our interests are, number one, maintaining security and counterterrorism cooperation with the Iraqi Government; number two, an Iraqi Government that is committed to neutrality and regional conflicts for—to give you a very specific example, we do not want an Iraqi Government that would be willing to tolerate these Iraqi militias helping transfer militias into Syria, for example. That simply is something we can't afford to see again. We want an Iraqi Government that will work to resolve the conflict with Kurdistan

and we want an Iraqi Government that will advance reform, especially in the economy.

I—at least what we hear from al-Sadr right now I think is encouraging on all of those fronts and I think we need to press for clarity.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you.

And what is your opinion with respect to Iranian goals in Iraq, and what are they doing to achieve those objectives?

Ms. WITTES. So I think their goals are a few. Fundamentally, I agree with Dany that they are more interested in having a veto than in having overwhelming control.

But I think that the situation in Syria is such that they now seek to use Iraq as well as a sort of staging ground and that's something that we must prevent. I think there's also money, frankly, to be made there both for them and for their allies and I think that we need to ensure that that doesn't destabilize the country.

And so, you know, the goal, from an American perspective, of an Iraqi Government that is neutral in regional conflicts itself is a goal that heads off Iranian interests. It's a goal that will require Iraqi Shi'a parties in a coalition government to push back against Iranian requests on a number of important fronts and I think that's worth investing in.

Mr. CICILLINE. And, finally, the Iranian representative, obviously, vying of Iranian interests in Baghdad is General Soleimani, the head of the Quds Force.

Considering al-Sadr's anti-Iran stance, do you think General Soleimani can successfully vie for a pro-Iran Government, and if not, if they're not successful in securing a pro-Iranian Government in Baghdad, what will the ramifications be for Iran's land bridge and what are the implications of that?

Ms. WITTES. Okay. So here we get into a little bit of speculation in Iraqi politics, which is very, very unpredictable.

I think there are two major possibilities for government formation. One would be a Sadr alliance with Abadi that might exclude all, if not most, of those more pro-Iranian political factions.

It's possible they could also put together a big unity government. But I think Sadr's initial inclination is an alliance with Abadi that would keep some of those guys out. I think what Soleimani would probably like to do is put together a grand coalition of pro-Iranian Shi'a parties, bring in some other non-Shi'a parties who want to feed at the government trough, and keep Sadr out.

And so it's—to me, I think there's a bit of a zero sum there, and I think Sadr is going to be looking to see what's on the table, not only for himself and his political allies, but for an Iraqi Government in which he would participate.

Our Gulf allies, for example have put on the table significant potential economic investments. The Saudis have done, I think, a very creditable job of courting Sadr over the last year, including welcoming him in the kingdom. They've opened a consulate in Basra. They've opened their border to trade with Iraq. The Kuwaitis are also suggesting that they could do a lot more business in southern Iraq.

And so there are incentives in play and I think the American role here is important as well. I think it's important that we not make

the mistake of saying, well, our counterterrorism fight against ISIS is over—let's cut economic engagement—let's cut diplomatic engagement—let's go home.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you very much.

I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Cicilline.

Thank you to our witnesses and let's hope for the best. But we fear the worst about the implications of these elections.

Thank you so much and with that, the subcommittee is adjourned.

Thank you. Bye, daughters.

[Whereupon, at 3:54 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

**SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128**

**Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa
Heena Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Chairman**

May 17, 2018

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held by the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at <http://www.ForeignAffairs.house.gov>).

DATE: Tuesday, May 22, 2018

TIME: 2:30 p.m.

SUBJECT: Lebanon and Iraq: After the Elections

WITNESSES: Michael Doran, Ph.D.
Senior Fellow
The Hudson Institute

Ms. Danielle Pletka
Senior Vice President
Foreign and Defense Policy Studies
American Enterprise Institute

Tamara Cofman Wittes, Ph.D.
Senior Fellow
Center for Middle East Policy
The Brookings Institution

By Direction of the Chairman

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5921 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON Middle East and North Africa HEARING

Day Tuesday Date 05/22/18 Room 2172

Starting Time 2:36 PM Ending Time 3:54 PM

Recesses (to) (to) (to) (to) (to) (to)

Presiding Member(s)

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session
Executive (closed) Session
Televised

Electronically Recorded (taped)
Stenographic Record

TITLE OF HEARING:

Lebanon and Iraq: After the Elections

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

GOP Members: Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Reps. Chabot, DeSantis, Kinzinger, Zeldin, Donovan, Wagner, Dem Members: Ranking Member Deutch, Reps. Connolly, Cicilline, Schneider, Lieu

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: (Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)


Rep. Rohrabacher

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes No
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)

QFR submitted by Rep. Wagner for Ms. Pletka.

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____
or
TIME ADJOURNED 3:54 PM


Subcommittee Staff Associate

Questions for the Record Submitted to Ms. Danielle Pletka by
Representative Ann Wagner
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa
May 22, 2018

Question:

Ms. Pletka, Iraq hopes to finance its reconstruction through foreign direct investment, particularly in infrastructure. Iraq is a risky destination for U.S. investors. What steps, if any, should the U.S. government take to help Iraq make its markets more hospitable to American firms?

Answer:

The most straightforward answer is one that applies not only to Iraq. The single most important determinant of positive investment climate is rule of law. Iraq has been unpredictable from a security standpoint, but sadly predictable when it comes to economics; the nation is being crushed by consumption and more must be done to rein it in.