

Text of Remarks by Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Jr.,  
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Delivered at the National Anniversary Celebration  
in honor of Former American Hostages Held in Lebanon  
American Task Force for Lebanon  
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Thank you. Robin Higgins called me today to tell me how much she regrets that she cannot be with us this evening. I know she would not mind my passing on her sentiments and greetings.

Speaking personally, I consider it an honor and a great pleasure to share this evening with our returned hostages.

We are gathered tonight at a time of major change: a change of Administrations here in Washington and, it would appear, a change in the dynamics shaping the affairs of nations around the world.

The Cold War is past, new democracies and free nations abound, and the possibilities for peaceful resolution of bitter conflicts are great.

Yet there are new challenges and dangers which already call for the best of our creative energies and willpower if peace and liberty are to prevail.

Lebanon has a special place in this changing tide of history. For two years the Beirut area has been largely spared from the agony of hostilities which devastated the life of the country for 16 terrible years. The legacy of this period will be with us for a long time.

Americans too carry some unhappy memories of Lebanon in the 1980s that time will not soon erase. In December of 1991, when the last of our captives -- Colonel Rich Higgins and William Buckley -- returned from Lebanon to their final resting places on American soil, a grim chapter was closed on a difficult period for both countries.

Now a year has passed. There is a new Parliament, a new Prime Minister, a new government. There is, after all these years, new hope for a free, independent and prosperous Lebanon.

We Americans have long identified with the Lebanese people's belief that they are unique and special. Americans feel the same way about our country.

Indeed, of the many extraordinary things symbolized by America's former hostages, and there are many, surely one of them is this: when an American encounters danger overseas, the United States Government does what it can to help.

The time, expertise, expense, and personal commitment expended by U.S. Government intelligence analysts, policy makers and the military services in an effort to be helpful to our hostages in Lebanon was immeasurable and remains an untold story.

I understand that some of those unsung heroes who spent literally years on this task and this alone are among us tonight, and I salute them. I hope they will have the chance to introduce themselves to the former hostages, if they have not done so previously.

But many Americans in this room -- and conspicuously, the guests of honor -- know something about facing adversity with faith and determination. That quality is one we share with the Lebanese people.

And tonight, as we look back thoughtfully at our darkest hours, let us look forward with equal thoughtfulness to Lebanon's future.

The United States is committed to full implementation of the Taif Accord, in letter and spirit.

There are many hurdles yet to cross: non-Lebanese forces continue to operate in Lebanon, including in the greater Beirut area; some militias, notably Hizballah, remain to be disarmed; the economy awaits reconstitution; key provisions of the Taif Accord, such as the redeployment of Syrian forces to the Biq'a Valley, await fulfillment; and southern Lebanon endures terrible violence in the absence of peace between Lebanon and Israel. It pains me to say this, but Lebanon today is still not safe for Americans to travel.

But if we have learned from our past, we know that change for the better in Lebanon is possible, and we can envision all of those hurdles being overcome, to realize the goal of a Lebanon that enjoys unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

I am persuaded that Lebanon can achieve its goal, and we Americans can help the Lebanese people in this quest, if we remain vigilant, committed, engaged, and, most importantly, if we keep the faith.

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