

MEMMO

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Syria's Terrorist Support Destabilizing Region

Syria continues to play a major destabilizing force in the Middle East. The Syrian regime maintains close relations with Iran, facilitating and augmenting Tehran's support of Hizballah and other radical Islamist groups, including Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Syria also is actively undermining Lebanon's independence and sovereignty and facilitating the insurgency against the United States in Iraq. The international community, led by the United States, must hold Syria accountable for its sponsorship of terrorism and its continuous violations of its neighbors' sovereignty.

Syria harbors and supports terrorists who seek the destruction of the United States and Israel.

- Syria gives safe haven to Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal, who ordered the kidnapping of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit that sparked the current conflict in Gaza.
- Syria continues to host the offices of Hamas and 10 other Palestinian terrorist groups despite Syrian President Bashar Assad's May 2003 promise to Secretary of State Colin Powell to close the offices.
- Assad openly hosts conferences of terrorist leaders, including a summit in January 2006 in which Meshaal and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad participated.
- Syria foments terrorism in Jordan and was complicit in Hamas' attempt to smuggle weapons from Syria into Jordan and to recruit Jordanians for "military training" in Syria.

Syria undermines Lebanon's sovereignty by arming Hizballah and by refusing to recognize Lebanon's borders.

- Syria continues to arm Hizballah in Lebanon in violation of U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1559 and 1701. Hizballah provoked the recent hostilities when it used Syrian-supplied weapons to attack the Jewish state—without the consent of the Lebanese government.
- Assad recently threatened to strangle Lebanon by closing the border if troops from the U.N. were deployed to stop Hizballah.
- Assad refuses to recognize Lebanon's sovereignty, declining to demarcate Syria's border with Lebanon and to open a Syrian embassy in Beirut, as outlined in U.N. Resolution 1680.
- A continuing official U.N. investigation implicated top Syrian officials in the 2005 assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.
- Since the assassination of Hariri, Syria has been implicated in the killings of other Lebanese figures who seek true independence for that nation.

Syria fuels the insurgency in Iraq and has strengthened its ties with Iran.

- Syria aids insurgent attacks against American forces in Iraq by maintaining training camps and repeatedly ignoring U.S. requests to seal its border with Iraq.
- Syria gives safe haven to high-level officials from Saddam Hussein's regime who are providing logistical and operational support to terrorists in Iraq.
- Syria and Iran recently signed a mutual defense pact, with Iran promising to join any war in which Syria is involved and threatening to "make the Zionist regime face unimaginable losses."

Stronger U.S. sanctions on Syria are needed to end the regime's support of terrorism.

- The U.S should use all the tools at its disposal to support international efforts to ensure Syrian compliance with the U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1680 and 1701, which respectively call for Syria to normalize relations with Lebanon and abide by an arms embargo on Hizballah.
- The administration to date has invoked only two of the possible sanctions allowed under the Syria Accountability Act. President Bush should impose the full range of sanctions, including a ban on U.S. businesses from investing in Syria and reducing diplomatic contacts with Damascus.
- The Bush administration also should use its authority under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act to further increase financial pressure on Assad and his regime, including freezing assets of Syrian leaders and blocking Syrian access to the U.S. financial system.

Basic Facts Summary

- Syria undermines Lebanon's democracy by arming Hizballah and by refusing to recognize Lebanon's borders.
- Syria harbors and supports terrorists who seek the destruction of the United States and Israel.
- Syria fuels the insurgency in Iraq and has strengthened its ties with Iran.
- Stronger U.S. sanctions on Syria are needed to end the regime's support of terrorism.