

MEMMO

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Syria Must Change Policies to Be Legitimate Partner

Syria continues to play a major destabilizing role in the Middle East. The Syrian regime maintains close relations with Iran, supports the terrorist groups Hizballah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad and facilitates the insurgency against American and coalition forces in Iraq. Syria also openly defies international law by actively undermining Lebanon's independence and sovereignty. The international community, led by the United States, should continue to hold Syria accountable for its actions and press it to change its destructive policies.

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

- Syria continues to arm Hizballah and to permit the shipment of Iranian arms through its territory in violation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701, which ended last summer's war between Hizballah and Israel. Hizballah provoked the fighting when it used weapons supplied by Syria and Iran to attack the Jewish state.
- U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon recently warned that weapons smuggling could "destabilize the situation in Lebanon," and called on Security Council members to consider an independent assessment mission to monitor arms transfers along the Syrian-Lebanese border.
- Syria is blocking efforts by a U.N. team to investigate the role of top Syrian officials in the 2005 assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and the murder of other anti-Syrian figures. It also is backing Hizballah's demonstrations in Beirut, preventing the Lebanese government from approving an international tribunal to try those accused in the Hariri assassination.
- Syrian President Bashar al-Assad refuses to recognize Lebanon's sovereignty, declining to demarcate Syria's border with Lebanon and to open a Syrian embassy in Beirut, as called for in U.N. Security Council Resolution 1680.

Syria harbors and supports numerous terrorist organizations.

- Syria continues to host the offices of Hamas and 10 other Palestinian terrorist groups despite Assad's May 2003 promise to then-Secretary of State Colin Powell to close them.
- Assad openly hosts conferences of terrorist leaders, including one in January 2006 in which Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal, who lives in Damascus, and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad both participated.
- Top Jordanian officials have charged that Syrian territory is being used to plan attacks in Jordan. Prime Minister Marouf al-Bakhit last year accused Hamas of attempting to smuggle weapons from Syria into Jordan, while Jordan said a 2005 al-Qaeda plot to attack intelligence headquarters in Amman had been planned in part in Syria.

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 last year signed a mutual defense pact, with Iran promising to join any war in which Syria is involved.

The international community should continue pressing Syria to change its destructive policies before it can be considered a legitimate partner.

- Following a recent meeting with Assad, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi said "the test will be whether Syria ceases its support for terrorism, engages in a productive and realistic effort to resolve its differences and live in peace with the state of Israel, and acts to stop the flow of foreign fighters into Iraq."
- Likewise, President Bush has made clear what steps Syria must take to prove its desire to act as a positive force for regional stability. "Stop destabilizing the Siniora government [in Lebanon]," the president said in December. "... [S]top allowing money and arms to cross your border into Iraq. Don't provide safe haven for terrorist groups."
- Syria has repeatedly reneged on key commitments made to American and international leaders. Easing international pressure on Syria before it takes such steps and as it is blocking U.N. efforts to investigate its role in the assassination of Hariri and others could relieve Damascus from the need to end its destructive actions.
- The United States should use all the tools at its disposal, such as the Syrian Accountability Act, to support international efforts to change Syrian behavior.
- These efforts include ensuring Syrian compliance with 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.

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.
- The international community should continue pressing Syria to change its destructive policies before it can be considered a legitimate partner.