

Terrorist Organizations, Weak Border Control with Iraq

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ROTHMAN CONDEMNS SYRIAN GOVERNMENT FOR FUNDING TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS, WEAK BORDER CONTROL WITH IRAQ

--Grills Syrian Ambassador During Meeting; Signs Onto Letter Sent to Ambassador Criticizing Syria's Support for to the Insurgency in Iraq --

(Washington, DC) -Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ) grilled the Syrian Ambassador to the United States, Imad Moustapha, during a meeting in the Congressman's Washington D.C. office, about Syria's strong connection to the insurgency in Iraq and ties to the recent assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri. Rothman stressed to the Ambassador the need for Syria to dramatically improve its efforts to prevent terrorists from infiltrating into Iraq and to support the U.S. in its efforts to build a democratic and stable Iraq. Rothman met with the Syrian Ambassador at a time when there has been growing dissatisfaction in Washington over Syria's unwillingness to improve its border security with Iraq. The weak border security enables Jihadists, who use the Damascus airport as a transit point before joining the insurgency in Iraq, to travel without any restraints.

"Syrian cooperation is essential to ultimately securing the long-term stability of Iraq and the entire Middle East," said Rothman. "It will be extremely difficult for Iraq to maintain a free and secure society while money, weapons, and enemy combatants continue to stream across Syria's border into Iraq. It is past time that Syria be held accountable for its poor border security and its role in continuing to support the insurgents in Iraq. There is a great deal that the Syrian government can do to limit the power and influence of the insurgency. Thus far their efforts have been unsatisfactory to say the least."

In September, Congressman Rothman joined 56 of his House colleagues in writing a letter to the Syrian Ambassador outlining U.S. grievances with Syria's policies and practices towards Iraq. The letter urged Syria to enforce its border control with Iraq, ensure transparency and security of financial transactions, and demonstrate positive engagement in stabilizing the Middle East. The Syrian Ambassador responded to the letter on October 5th and addressed each point in depth, but made no attempt to ensure that Syria is taking steps to improve its level of cooperation with the U.S. and the United Nations (U.N.).

Adding to the mounting tension, caused by Syria's lack of cooperation with the U.S. is the ongoing inquiry into the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri. The U.N. recently passed a resolution demanding that Syria fully cooperate with the U.N. investigation of the assassination or face unspecified "further action." Detlev Mehlis, the German prosecutor conducting the United Nations inquiry, has pointed to Syrian security officials as prime suspects in the Feb. 14 bombing that killed Hariri and 22 others. In October, Rothman co-sponsored H.Res. 510, which supports the findings of the Mehlis report, condemns the Syrian government for its evident involvement in the assassination of the former Prime Minister, and demands Syrian compliance with the Mehlis Commission and the U.N.

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