

## U.S. report: North Korea apparently supplying Iran-backed group

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WASHINGTON &mdash; The United States believes North Korea has become a major supplier to the Iranian-sponsored Hezbollah.

The U.S. Congress raised the prospect that North Korea was providing weapons, technical assistance and military training to Hezbollah. The Congressional Research Service cited reputable sources that Pyongyang equipped Hezbollah with missiles and rockets used during the war against Israel in 2006.

CRS, which provides independent analysis to Congress, discussed the purported North Korean aid to Hezbollah amid plans by the Bush administration to remove Pyongyang from the State Department list of terrorist sponsors. The report, first obtained by the Reuters news agency, cast doubts on claims that North Korea has ended support for groups deemed terrorists, Middle East Newslite reported.

"Questions about the credibility of the claim are relevant in view of the appearance of reports from reputable sources that North Korea has provided arms and possibly training to Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka," the CRS report said.

Hezbollah has been on the State Department list of terrorist organizations. The State Department has asserted that North Korea ended its sponsorship of terrorist groups more than 20 years ago.

CRS said North Korea could have become a major supplier to Hezbollah. The report cited a September 2006 report by Paris Intelligence Online that North Korea provided extensive assistance to Hezbollah.

The North Korean program was said to have begun in the 1980s when Hezbollah fighters were trained in Pyongyang. In 2000, during the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, the cooperation expanded and North Korean engineers were sent to Lebanon to instruct Hezbollah on the construction of underground facilities to store weapons, food and medical equipment.

Pyongyang was also said to have helped install hundreds of remote-controlled underground 122 mm Katyusha rocket launchers throughout southern Lebanon. The network enabled Hezbollah to elevate a Katyusha launcher from a bunker via hydraulic lift, fire a salvo of rockets and then return underground.

"This significantly improved Hezbollah's ability to fight the Israelis," CRS said.

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North Korea may have aided Hezbollah -U.S. report 13 Dec 2007 04:39:16 GMT  
Source: Reuters

By Arshad Mohammed

WASHINGTON, Dec 12 (Reuters) - North Korea may have given arms to Lebanon's Hezbollah and Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers, according to a report compiled for Congress that could complicate U.S. plans to drop Pyongyang from its terrorism blacklist.

The report obtained on Wednesday by Reuters was written by the Congressional Research Service (CRS), which provides independent analysis to Congress, and cited "reputable sources" as saying Pyongyang had given arms and possibly training to the militant groups, which Washington regards as "terrorist" organizations.

As part of a deal to get Pyongyang to give up its pursuit of nuclear weapons, Washington has dangled the possibility of removing North Korea from its list of state sponsors of terrorism if it fully discloses its nuclear programs.

North Korea, which conducted a nuclear test in 2006, has agreed to provide a "complete and correct" declaration of these programs by the end of the year, although analysts there is considerable uncertainty whether it will meet the deadline.

If Pyongyang gives a full accounting, the Bush administration is expected to drop it from the terrorism list, which imposes economic and other sanctions.

The CRS report noted the long-standing U.S. view that North Korea "was not known to have sponsored any terrorist acts since 1987" -- when it was implicated in the bombing of a South Korean airliner -- but suggested this was open to question.

"Questions about the credibility of the claim are relevant in view of the appearance of reports from reputable sources that North Korea has provided arms and possibly training to Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka," the report added.

It said that in September 2006, Paris Intelligence Online, a French Internet publication that specializes in political and economic intelligence, had published details of an extensive North Korean program to give arms and training to Hezbollah.

Hezbollah, a Lebanese militant group and political party, captured two Israeli soldiers in cross-border raid in July 2006, setting off 34-day war with Israel in which about 1,200 Lebanese were killed.

The French publication said the program began in the 1980s with visits by Hezbollah members to North Korea for training and expanded after 2000 with the dispatch of North Koreans to Lebanon to train Hezbollah members how to build underground bunkers to store arms, food and medical facilities.

It said this training "significantly improved Hezbollah's ability to fight the Israelis" during the 2006 war.

The CRS document also cited a report by a prominent South Korean academic, Moon Chung-in, that the Mossad Israeli intelligence agency believed that "vital missile components" used by Hezbollah against Israel came from North Korea.

Lastly, the CRS report said the Sankei Shimbun, a Japanese newspaper, in September 2007 published a report that North Korea had shipped arms to the Tamil Tigers.

The group, whose formal name is the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, is seeking to carve out an independent state in north and east Sri Lanka.

More than 5,000 people have been killed in fighting between the military and LTTE fighters since early 2006 alone, taking the death toll since the war erupted in 1983 to around 70,000.

A U.S. State Department official declined direct comment on the CRS report or what effect it might have on the decision to drop North Korea from the state sponsors of terrorism list.

"For North Korea to be removed from the list, they have got to meet the requirements of the law," said the official, who asked not to be named because of the sensitivity of the matter. "We wouldn't send forth some action to do that unless we were confident that we were meeting the requirements of the law."

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<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/N1268919.htm>

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