

Outreach at State includes terror backers

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WASHINGTON — Members of Congress have voiced concerns that the State Department has been embracing Muslim groups that support Al Qaida, Hamas and Hizbullah.

A leading U.S. analyst claimed the State Department has financed those who support a violent Islamic agenda, Middle East Newsline reported. Steven Emerson, executive director of the Washington-based Investigative Project on Terrorism, said the department was using extremist groups as part of an outreach to the Muslim community in the United States and abroad.

"The question is: why should the State Department spend U.S. taxpayer dollars to work with Islamists who actively oppose the foreign policy goals of the United States and subscribe to a supremacist, oppressive ideology?" Emerson asked in testimony to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade.

"The fundamental question boils down to: Is the State Department using the Islamists to advance its agenda, or are the Islamists using the State Department to advance their own?"

In testimony on July 31, Emerson urged Congress to review the State Department's interaction with such organizations as the Council on American-Islamic Relations, Palestinian American Research Center, Islamic Society of North America and Citizen Exchange Program. He said the department must also come under congressional oversight for its hosting of Muslims convicted or indicted in terrorism cases.

Members of the House and Senate have expressed concern over the State Department's outreach to pro-jihad groups. Sen. Tom Coburn and Sen. John Kyl, Republicans from Oklahoma and Arizona, respectively, urged Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to stop funding groups that support what the senators termed a radical Islamic ideology.

The senators cited the Islamic Society of North America, which with State Department help received grants of \$500,000. ISNA has been identified as an unindicted co-conspirator in a Hamas fundraising trial.

"We are sure you would agree that Americans should not have to fund their enemies in the form of misguided 'outreach' efforts," the senators asked in a letter to Ms. Rice.

During the hearing, opposed by several Muslim groups, House subcommittee chairman Rep. Brad Sherman said he would examine proposals to reform State Department outreach funding. Sherman, a California Democrat, said prospective grant recipients could be asked to disclose their connections to Hamas, Hizbullah or the Muslim Brotherhood.

"I don't think you can cleanse an organization just because they haven't sinned recently," Sherman said. "It has to be a renunciation of support for terrorism."

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