

BATAL TO CONGRESS: "Syrian agents and special teams freely operate in Lebanon"

Contributed by W. Thomas Smith, Jr.
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Human rights activist Kamal el Batal briefed a U.S. Congressional panel, today, regarding Syria's on

Following are highlights of Batal's address:

⋮ Though some may believe that Syrian forces withdrew from Lebanon following UN Security Council Resolution 1559 (which calls for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon and the disarmament of all militias), the reality is that Syria's intelligence agents and special teams freely operate in Lebanon today. They facilitate, train, arm, control, and direct militias and their allies to serve the aims of the Syrian Regime.

It is almost certain that the Syrian government masterminded and facilitated the majority of the assassinations in Lebanon ⋮

It is no coincidence that all armed groups today are allied to the Syrian regime.

Hezbollah and the Iranian Pasdaran (the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps) are creating more groups and cells to destabilize Lebanon.

Fatah el Islam for example is a Palestinian group fully trained by Hezbollah, armed by Hezbollah and financed by Hezbollah. Of course, all with the approval of Syria that opened the needed supply routes across its territories and into Lebanon.

⋮ weapons are not the only danger in Lebanon. It is neither Hezbollah's rockets nor the allies of Syria who pose the greatest threat to Lebanon. I invite the U.S. Congress to examine the many schools and boy-scout groups run by Hezbollah with the blessing of Syria. These schools teach children, starting from the age of five-years-old, to hate, to wage war, and to commit themselves to martyrdom. Children are taught to hate America and its Democracy, the rule of law and human rights. We may think it is difficult to disarm Hezbollah and its allies, but let us examine how difficult it is going to be to reeducate an entire generation.

The kidnapping, detention and torture of Lebanese people by Syria has created a new lucrative activity for Syria, as parents have been systematically blackmailed, often forced to sell their belongings just to pay for some news of their loved one. Sometimes they were ⋮ and are ⋮ granted visiting permits only to have their visit denied after the long and painful journey into Syria.

As I have stated, we estimate the number of Lebanese detained in Syrian prisons to be a figure in the thousands. The only way to know for sure, and the only way to save the ones who are still alive and to bring back the remains of the ones thrown in mass graves is to pass a new UN Security Council resolution under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, similar to UN Security Council Resolution 1564 passed on 18 September 2004 on Sudan.

We hope that the United States and its democratic allies will help Lebanon's civil society to free itself from the grip of Syrian Baathist and Iranian terror.

⋮ today, Syria's and Iran's proxy army in Lebanon, Hezbollah, is alive and well, and increasing in both political and strategic power. Iran's influence in the Lebanese political process has never been greater, as has Syria's. And various independent sources are reporting that Syrian artillery, tanks, helicopters, and between 8,000 and 10,000 special soldiers are massing on the Syrian side of the north Lebanese border ⋮ this does not include the recent reports of Syrian special operations teams on the ground in Lebanon, and the known Syrian intelligence operations which have continued since the Syrian Army officially withdrew in 2005.

Batal's testimony before the U.S. Congressional Human Rights Caucus comes one day before Lebanese Pres. Michel Sleiman ⋮ currently in the U.S. ⋮ is scheduled to meet with Pres. Bush.

Sleiman ⋮ the pro-Syrian former commander-in-chief of Lebanon's armed forces ⋮ recently returned from Syria. But made no strides toward resolving the issue of Lebanese prisoners in Syria: This, despite the multiple, desperate appeals (to Sleiman) by Lebanese political leaders, NGOs, and the mothers of the missing and imprisoned.

I've had personal interaction with the Lebanese president, and have written about him here and elsewhere.

Batal is co-founder and director of Beirut-based MIRSAD (Multi-Initiative on Rights: Search, Assist & Defend), and the director of Human Rights for the World Council of the Cedars Revolution.

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