

Washington, Damascus Renew Security Cooperation

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Washington's security cooperation with Damascus on counterterrorism issues has been resumed after ties had been strained since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, the U.S. Embassy in Damascus announced.

The embassy revealed in a statement broadcast by the German national news agency that Daniel Benjamin, the U.S. State Department's coordinator for counterterrorism, met with a group of Syrian officials to discuss "shared counterterrorism concerns and threats."

The statement described Syria's role as "constructive," stressing that "Syria can play a constructive role in mitigating these and other threats in cooperation with regional states and the United States."

The renewal of security cooperation between Damascus and Washington kicked off two days after William Burns, the undersecretary for political affairs and third-ranking U.S. diplomat held talks with Syrian President Bashar Assad.

"There are challenges on the road but my meeting with President Assad leaves me hopeful that we can make progress together in the interest of both our countries," Burns said.

U.S. President Barack Obama had promised to appoint a new ambassador to Damascus, ending a five-year hiatus.

Washington recalled its ambassador in 2005 following the assassination of former Lebanese premier Rafik Hariri. That killing was widely blamed on Syria, which has roundly denied any involvement.

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