

Ackerman wants aid to Lebanon to be suspended immediately

Contributed by Congressman Gary Ackerman
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Until it is clear that the Government of Lebanon is not a flunky to Tehran or Damascus.

News from Congressman Gary Ackerman
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ACKERMAN DELIVERS STATEMENT ON CRISIS ON LEBANON DURING HOUSE HEARING

U.S. Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-NY), the Ranking Democrat on the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia, today delivered the following opening statement on Lebanon during a hearing convened by the Foreign Affairs Committee entitled Recent Developments in Egypt and Lebanon: Implications for U.S. Policy and Allies in the Broader Middle East, Part II.

"Until recently, and unlike its Arab neighbors, Lebanon had a democratically-elected government that should have had a mandate to govern. But, like all of its regional neighbors except for Israel, Lebanon has suffered from a powerful and unaccountable element of its society acting above and beyond the law. What was different in the Lebanese case was that this unaccountable few didn't occupy or use the institutions of the state in order to coerce, repress and dominate their political opponents.

Instead, they just threatened them, and then, killed them. No one should forget that before the current crisis, before the insurrection of May 2008, before the presidential succession crisis and the lockout of parliament, Hezbollah and its Iranian and Syrian allies engaged in a campaign of assassinations against Lebanese parliamentarians and journalists that began in 2005 with the murder of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri.

Long before the recent back-room coup, Hezbollah set itself above the law and outside the reach of the government. Hezbollah has for years systematically weakened Lebanon's government and continually undermined Lebanon's sovereignty. It has made Lebanon a regional time bomb by deploying more than 40,000 Syrian and Iranian artillery rockets and advanced surface-to-surface missiles, all aimed at Israel, and all in order to shield Iran's illicit nuclear weapons program.

Tragically, the people of Lebanon are now hostages. Like the captive nations of Eastern Europe during the Cold War, their hearts are free but their government has colluded with a foreign power to put them in chains.

The United States must continue to advocate for Lebanon's sovereignty and for the restoration of a legitimate government. We must continue to support and sustain the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, and keep faith with all the Lebanese who want justice for their murdered countrymen and their former prime minister. America must continue to insist on the implementation of all relevant UN Security Council resolutions and we must speak out clearly against the flood of illegal and destabilizing Syrian and Iranian arms going into Lebanon.

And finally, we need to be clear with the government of Lebanon that it bears the burden of demonstrating that it truly serves the people of Lebanon, that it will keep the peace inside Lebanon and on Lebanon's borders, and that it is not, and will not be either a flunky for the ayatollahs in Tehran or for the dictator in Damascus. Until there is clear evidence that Beirut has made these choices, I believe we have no alternative but to suspend our all of our assistance programs. We have many urgent priorities in the Middle East. Helping Iran, Syria and Hezbollah maintain a façade of Lebanese independence is not one of them."

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