

Report: Hizbullah Anti-Terrorism Act to be Approved in Fall

Contributed by Naharnet
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The Hizbullah Anti-Terrorism Act is still under discussion by the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs and is likely to be adopted in the fall, congressional sources told As Safir daily Saturday.

U.S. Congressman Howard Berman has introduced the HATA that sets rigorous requirements for the provision of foreign assistance to Lebanon during periods when Hizbullah is part of the majority governing coalition.

The cosponsors of HATA include three Congressmen of Lebanese origin -Darrell Issa, Charles Boustany, and Nick Rahall.

Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Ileana Ros-Lehtinen is seeking to introduce stronger wordings in the Act but without making major amendments to it, the congressional sources told As Safir.

However, the legislation is likely to be approved after the summer vacation of Congress that lasts from August 8 till September 5, they said.

The report came amid growing concern in the U.S. over Hizbullah's influence in Latin America and its implications on U.S. Homeland security.

The Committee on Homeland Security's Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence held a hearing on the issue on Thursday.

Roger Noriega from the American Enterprise Institute said in his remarks that Hizbullah acts as a proxy for Iran, specifically, of the Qods Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. "These determined and deadly enemies of the United States have made substantial progress in the last six years to expand their influence and operations in Latin America."

"Hizbullah operatives have provided weapons and explosives training to drug trafficking organizations that operate along the U.S. border with Mexico and have sought to radicalize Muslim populations in several Mexican cities," he said.

Noriega expected to see the Shiite party presence in Latin America become more active and deadly in the coming years.

Researcher at The International Assessment and Strategy Center Douglas Farah said that in addition to its growing presence in Latin America, Hizbullah has a smuggling network in West Africa to move contraband diamonds and other commodities.

It is now involved in the trafficking of cocaine from Latin America to Europe, he said.

Melani Cammett, who is Associate Professor of Political Science and Director of Middle East Studies Program at Brown University, said during the hearing that the Special Tribunal for Lebanon "continues to destabilize Lebanese politics, with Hizbullah declaring its firm opposition to the proceedings and attempting to undermine the investigation's credibility, particularly after prosecutors announced the indictments of four Hizbullah members."

She said, however, that there is no evidence that the Shiite party aims to launch global operations, as carried out by Sunni extremist groups such as al-Qaida.

"To the contrary, the organization has explicitly and repeatedly condemned the indiscriminate, large-scale acts of violence perpetrated by Sunni extremists," Cammett added.