

## Feltman: Evidence on Hizbullah's Arms Smuggling, US will not recognize renegade

Contributed by Naharnet, Dailystar  
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Feltman: Evidence on Hizbullah's Arms Smuggling, Feltman: US will not recognize renegade head of state, Ambassador hopeful berri initiative will lead to breakthrough.

### Feltman: Evidence on Hizbullah's Arms Smuggling

The U.S. ambassador to Lebanon said Friday that there is clear evidence the Shiite group Hizbullah is still smuggling weapons across the Syrian border in violation of U.N. resolutions.

"We find the evidence to be strong that arms smuggling is continuing across the Syrian-Lebanese border," Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman told Agence France Presse, without giving any specific details.

"We are concerned by the reports and by the public statements by Hizbullah that Hizbullah has actively rearmed."

He added: "In our view this poses one of the biggest dangers to Lebanon and it is a violation of the spirit and the letter of a number of Security Council resolutions."

Hizbullah, which is backed by Syria and Iran, is considered a "terrorist" group by the United States. It had one minister in the Lebanese government until he and five other pro-Syrian colleagues resigned last November.

Hizbullah, which claimed its resistance against Israel forced the Jewish state's 2000 withdrawal from south Lebanon, kidnapped two Israeli soldiers in July 2006, sparking last year's devastating 34-day war with Israel.

This led subsequently to the reinforcement of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the deployment of the Lebanese army along the tense border zone with Israel for the first time in decades.

The militant group, however, was not disarmed and recently said it still had weapons that could reach Israel.

Feltman said there were several initiatives under discussion with the Lebanese government on how to halt the smuggling of weapons.

Saying that the international community would respond favorably to any Lebanese government request to help in border security, Feltman said "there are several initiatives under discussion with the government about how best to prevent smuggling, most importantly arms smugglings."

He also rejected arguments that controlling Lebanon's border with Syria would amount to interfering in the country's sovereignty.

"Controlling borders is an assertion of sovereignty," he maintained.(AFP-Naharnet)

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<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&3CC46207E3B74536C2257359002AA4AF>

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Feltman: US will not recognize renegade head of state  
Ambassador hopeful berri initiative will lead to breakthrough  
By Agence France Presse (AFP)

Saturday, September 15, 2007

Jocelyne Zablit

Agence France Press

BEIRUT: The US ambassador to Beirut said Friday that his country would not meddle in Lebanon's upcoming presidential poll but made clear that Washington will not recognize anyone it viewed as a renegade head of state. "We

continue to recognize the government that has the vote of confidence in Parliament," Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman said, referring to the government of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora which enjoys wide US backing.

"The new president will trigger the formation of a new government but until that time we will recognize the government that has the vote of confidence of Parliament," he added.

Lebanon's Parliament is responsible for electing the head of state who is traditionally a Maronite Christian. Feltman said that if the pro-Syrian head of state Emile Lahoud ignores Parliament and appoints, as he has suggested, someone to provisionally replace Siniora, the US would not condone such a move.

Washington accuses Damascus of continuing to interfere in the small neighboring country where it was the powerbroker for nearly three decades until April 2005.

"We hope that President Lahoud would end his extended term quietly without resorting to ... measures that do not appear to be constitutional and that appear to be designed to complicate rather than resolve the situation," Feltman said.

Lebanon has been mired in a political stalemate since last November, when pro-Syrian opposition forces, led by the Shiite movement Hizbullah, withdrew their six ministers from Siniora's Cabinet.

The president has refused to recognize the government's continuing legitimacy, and Speaker Nabih Berri has blocked all legislative initiatives put forward by Siniora's administration.

Lahoud was elected president in 1998 and had been due to step down in 2004, but the country's then powerbroker Syria pushed through Parliament a controversial constitutional amendment extending his term for three more years.

This year's presidential election must take place between September 25, when Parliament is due to reconvene, and the November 24 expiry of Lahoud's term.

Feltman said he was hopeful that a compromise deal put forward by Berri would lead to a breakthrough between the ruling coalition and the opposition, thus sparing the country further instability.

"Berri is reaching out across a deep political divide that has plagued the country for nearly a year," he said. "I think the response by March 14 [the ruling coalition] has also been positive." Berri said last month the opposition was ready to drop its demands for a national unity government if all parties agree to choose a new president by consensus when Parliament convenes on September 25.

The ruling majority said on Wednesday that it was not opposed to such a move as long as no conditions were attached.

Feltman said Washington was keen on the elections taking place without foreign interference and without outside backing to a specific candidate.

"A lot of people are pushing us to give names ... but we aren't playing the name game," he said. "We would like to see Lebanon's members of Parliament be able to freely elect Lebanon's next president."

Away from the issue of the looming presidential poll, the US ambassador said there was clear evidence that Hizbullah was still smuggling weapons across the Syrian border, in violation of UN resolutions.

"We find the evidence to be strong that arms-smuggling is continuing across the Syrian-Lebanese border," Feltman said, without giving any specific details. "We are concerned by the reports and by the

public statements by Hizbullah that [the movement] has actively rearmed."

"In our view this poses one of the biggest dangers to Lebanon and it is a violation of the spirit and the letter of a number of Security Council resolutions," Feltman added.

Saying that the international community would respond favorably to any Lebanese government request to help in border security, Feltman said "there are several initiatives under discussion with the government about how best to prevent smuggling, most importantly arms smuggling."

Feltman also rejected arguments that controlling Lebanon's border with Syria would amount to interfering in the country's sovereignty.

"Controlling borders is an assertion of sovereignty," the ambassador maintained.

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