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# The Syrian Accountability Act and the Triumph of Hegemony

On October 15, the U.S. House of Representatives, with an overwhelming bipartisan majority, passed the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003, which imposes strict sanctions against the Syrian government. (A similar bill was introduced earlier this year in the Senate and is pending.)

Both Republican and Democratic leaders in the House International Relations Committee agreed to not allow for any witnesses opposing the bill to testify at the committee hearings for the bill, which a major shift away from previous U.S. policy that stressed engagement with the nationalist government in Damascus.

Given the already somewhat limited trade between the United States and Syria, as well as Syria's growing commercial ties with western European countries, the impact of the sanctions will minimal. What is noteworthy about the vote, however, is that a careful reading of the bill reveals a rather frightening consensus in support of the Bush Administration's unilateralist worldview.

Only four of the 435-member House of Representatives cast a dissenting vote.

Ironically, both politically and economically, Syria has liberalized significantly over the past decade or so. The level of repression is far less than it was during its peak in the 1970s and is significantly less than a number of other Middle Eastern countries, including close U.S. allies like Saudi Arabia. Similarly, the size and power of Syria's military has been reduced dramatically from its apex in the 1980s as a result of the dissolution of its Soviet patron. Syrian links to international terrorism have also declined markedly.

This begs the question as to why this resolution was passed now?

The answer may lie in today's unipolar world system where the United States, rather than supporting comprehensive and law-based means of promoting regional peace and security, insists upon the right to impose unilateral demands targeted at specific countries based largely upon ideological criteria. As the one-sidedness of the vote on this resolution indicates, both the Republicans and the Democrats, including the most liberal wing of the party, now accept this vision of U.S. foreign policy.

There are still many reasonable criticisms that can be directed at the authoritarian regime of Bashar Assad and its policies. However, the resolution imposing the sanctions is so filled with hyperbole and double-standards it undermines its own credibility. In fact, its real purpose may be to simply demonize a government whose main offense appears to be its refusal to support the Bush Administration's foreign policy agenda in the Middle East.

The primary grievances expressed in the legislation against Syria are in regard to the regime's alleged support for international terrorism, its ongoing military presence in Lebanon, its hostility toward Israel, the alleged military threat from its weapons of mass destruction, its alleged support for the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein and those Iraqis resisting the U.S. occupation, and its status as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

Below are some excerpts from the recently-passed legislation, sorted by category, followed by an analysis:

**Support for International Terrorism**

Among the Findings listed in the resolution include:

(4) The Government of Syria is currently prohibited by United States law from receiving United States assistance because it has repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism, as determined by the Secretary of State for purposes

of section 6(j)(1) of the Export Administration Act of 1979 (50 U.S.C. App. 2405(j)(1)) and other relevant provisions of law.

(5) Although the Department of State lists Syria as a state sponsor of terrorism and reports that Syria provides “safe haven and support to several terrorist groups,” fewer United States sanctions apply with respect to Syria than with respect to any other country that is listed as a state sponsor of terrorism.

According to the State Department’s most recent annual Report on Global Terrorism, “the Syrian Government has not been implicated directly in an act of terrorism since 1986.” With the exception of Cuba (which is kept on the list for purely political reasons), all the other countries designated as state sponsors of terrorism (North Korea, Iran, Sudan, and Libya) are either currently or were in the very recent past involved in direct support and sponsorship of terrorist activities.

It is noteworthy that, during the Syrian-Israeli peace talks in the 1990s, the Clinton Administration offered to remove Syria from its list of states sponsoring terrorism if it agreed to terms offered by Israel. During that period, State Department officials admitted that keeping Syria on this list was not a result of direct Syrian support for international terrorism, but as a means of political leverage against the regime.

According to the same State Department report,

The Syrian Government has repeatedly assured the United States that it will take every possible measure to protect US citizens and facilities from terrorists in Syria. During the past five years, there have been no acts of terrorism against US citizens in Syria. The Government of Syria has cooperated significantly with the United States and other foreign governments against al-Qaida, the Taliban, and other terrorist organizations and individuals. It also has discouraged any signs of public support for al-Qaida, including in the media and at mosques.

In 2002, Syria became a party to the 1988 Protocol for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts of Violence at Airports Serving International Civil Aviation, making it party to five of the 12 international conventions and protocols relating to terrorism.

Furthermore, Syria has passed on hundreds of files crucial data regarding Al Qaeda and other radical Islamic groups in the Middle East and Europe to U.S. officials, including information on the activities of radical cells and intelligence about possible future terrorist operations. Seymour Hersh reported in the July 28, 2003 New Yorker that the CIA had told him that “the quality and quantity of information for Syria exceeded the agency’s expectations” but that Syria “got little in return for it.”

Congress has now decided to risk a suspension of such important cooperation in the struggle against international terrorism by imposing sanctions against the Syrian government. This is the same Congress that has continued to support close military and economic ties to the government of Saudi Arabia despite its lack of such cooperation.

Another Finding in the bill noted:

6) Terrorist groups, including Hizballah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, maintain offices, training camps, and other facilities on Syrian territory, and operate in areas of Lebanon occupied by the Syrian armed forces and receive supplies from Iran through Syria.

Syria’s role in promoting international terrorism is not as extensive as this finding makes it appear.

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) is a Marxist-Leninist group which peaked in their popular support and in their terrorist activities in the 1970s and has been in decline ever since. The PFLP is now a legal opposition political party within areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority. Their limited military activities in recent years (which have been targeted primarily but not exclusively against Israeli police and military) have been launched from within the West Bank and Gaza Strip in areas controlled by Israeli occupation forces and the Palestine Authority. No military operations appear to have come from Syria.

The terrorist activities by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC) have also declined markedly since their apex in the 1970s. There have been some minor incidents attributed to the PFLP-GC in

recent years, such as two attacks on illegal Israeli settlements, one in the occupied Golan Heights in 2001 and the other in the Gaza Strip in 2003. There have also been some incidents along the Lebanese border that some reports link to the PFLP-GC, though these have not been confirmed. There is no evidence that Syria had any connection with the clashes, which originated in southern Lebanon in areas that are outside of direct Syrian military control.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad, the only two groups mentioned in the resolution that do engage in major ongoing terrorist activities, are based in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in areas controlled by Israeli occupation forces and the Palestine Authority. It appears that all of their terrorist attacks have originated within the areas under PA and Israeli control and none from areas of Syrian control. Hamas and Islamic Jihad have political offices in Damascus, as they do in the capitals of a number of Arab countries, and have done some political organizing in some Palestinian refugee camps, including those in Syria. Most of Hamas' outside support has come from individuals and organizations based in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Gulf. Islamic Jihad has received most of its outside support from Iran. The Damascus regime has brutally suppressed Syrian Islamists that espouse similar ideological views as these two extremist Palestinian groups.

The alleged Islamic Jihad "training base" located in a Palestinian refugee camp near Damascus that was bombed by Israel in early October appears to have actually been an abandoned PFLP-GC facility. The Bush administration defended the attack by claiming that there were active military facilities on site, though they could only show evidence of some anti-aircraft batteries, which are usually considered to be defensive weapons rather than instruments of terrorism. Given that Islamic Jihad's mode of operations is strapping explosive devices to the bodies of suicide bombers who walk into public areas with high concentrations of civilians, it is unclear why they would need a training base in a foreign country anyway.

State Department reports of some limited Syrian logistical support for these groups may indeed be accurate. However, there is little to back the resolution's claim that Syria, at least at any time in the past decade and a half or so, "has repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism." Syria is at most a very minor player in this regard.

The only group mentioned in the resolution that has received significant Syrian support for its operations is the extremist Lebanese Shiite group Hizballah, though Syria's principal Shiite ally in Lebanon has traditionally been the rival Amal faction. Most of Hizballah's support has come from Iran and even that has declined markedly since the early 1980s.

During the 1982-84 U.S. military intervention in Lebanon, terrorist cells that later coalesced into Hizballah engaged in a series of kidnappings and assassinations of Americans as well as bombings against the U.S. embassy and Marine barracks, among other terrorist operations. However, Hizballah has since become a legally-recognized Lebanese political party and serves in the Lebanese parliament. During the past decade, its armed components have largely restricted their use of violence to Israeli occupation forces in southern Lebanon and in disputed border regions, not against civilians. Since attacks against foreign occupation forces is considered legitimate under international law, it is unclear as to why Congress still considers Hizballah to be a "terrorist" group.

**Military Presence in Lebanon**

Among the Findings of the resolution is the following:

Article 7: United Nations Security Council Resolution 520 (September 17, 1982) calls for "strict respect of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon under the sole and exclusive authority of the Government of Lebanon through the Lebanese Army throughout Lebanon."

A reading of the full text of this resolution reveals that this was actually in reference to Israel, which had launched a major invasion of Lebanon three months earlier and at that point held nearly half of the country, including the capital of Beirut, under its military occupation. Indeed, Israel was the only outside power mentioned by name in the resolution. Though the Israelis pulled out of Beirut shortly thereafter and withdrew from most of central Lebanon by the following year, Israel kept its occupation forces in southern Lebanon until May 2000 in violation of this Security Council resolution and nine others calling for their unconditional withdrawal.

At the time UN Security Council resolution 520 was passed, there were also Syrian troops in the country. (Palestinian forces had been withdrawn shortly beforehand.) These Syrian forces entered Lebanon six years earlier as the primary

component of an international peacekeeping force authorized by the Arab League to try to end Lebanon's civil war. The United States quietly supported the Syrian intervention as a means of blocking the likely victory by the leftist Lebanese National Movement and its Palestinian allies.

Having already abused their mandate by that time, one can certainly make the case that this resolution applied to Syria as well and, given that Syrian troops remain in Lebanon to this day, that Syria is still in violation of this resolution. While not formally an occupying army, the Syrian military presence makes it possible for Damascus to exercise an enormous amount of influence on the Lebanese government, particularly in foreign affairs, in a manner similar to that of the Soviet Union in relation to the Warsaw Pact nations of Eastern Europe during the Cold War.

It is interesting to note, however, that none of the supporters of the Syrian Accountability Act, the vast majority of whom were in office during at least some of the nearly eighteen years that Israel was in violation of this resolution, ever called on Israel to abide by UN Security Council resolution 520, much less call for sanctions against Israel in order to enforce it. Indeed, virtually all of the backers of this resolution then in office were supporters of unconditional military and economic aid to the Israeli government during this period when Israel was in violation of this very same resolution for which they have now voted to impose sanctions on Syria for violating.

It is also worth noting that there are currently over 90 UN Security Council resolutions being violated by countries other than Syria, the vast majority of which are by governments for which this same Congress has allocated billions of dollars worth of unconditional military and economic aid.

In short, virtually the entire Democratic Party in the House of Representatives has joined its Republican colleagues in supporting the Bush Administration's contention that UN Security Council resolutions should only be acknowledged or enforced in regard to governments the United States does not like, but UN Security Council resolutions should not be enforced or even acknowledged in regard to America's allies.

The operational part of the bill reads:

(3) the Government of Syria should immediately declare its commitment to completely withdraw its armed forces, including military, paramilitary, and security forces, from Lebanon, and set a firm timetable for such withdrawal;

While this is a very reasonable demand in itself, given the support by the vast majority of this resolution's supporters of the Israeli occupation of Lebanon, it would be naïve to think that most sponsors of the bill actually care about Lebanese sovereignty. If they did care about Lebanese sovereignty they would have demanded that Israel abide by UN Security Council resolution 520 and nine other resolutions demanding Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon prior to Israel's long-overdue pullout in May 2000. They did not, however. This seems to indicate that Congress is using the ongoing presence of Syrian forces in Lebanon as an excuse to isolate one of the few countries in the Middle East that dares challenge Washington's policy prerogatives in the region.

In a final irony, the star witness in the House International Committee hearings in support of this bill, particularly in regard to the Syrian role in Lebanon, was Michel Aoun, the Lebanese general who seized the post of prime minister of a military government in 1988 and unsuccessfully tried to block the Taif Accords which brought an end to that country's bloody 15-year civil war. He was ousted by Lebanese troops with the help of Syrian forces in the fall of 1990, just prior to the launch of the 1991 Gulf War. What none of the committee members bothered to point out during his testimony was that the United States quietly supported the Syrian assault against his regime since Aoun's chief foreign backer during his time in power was none other than Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.

**Relations with Israel**

Among the Findings of the resolution, is the following:

(13) Even in the face of this United Nations certification that acknowledged Israel's full compliance with Resolution 425, Syria permits attacks by Hizballah and other militant organizations on Israeli outposts at Shebaa Farms, under the false guise that it remains Lebanese land, and is also permitting attacks on civilian targets in Israel.

The Shebaa Farms is on a disputed border region between Lebanon and Syria that Syria (perhaps opportunistically) now acknowledges is part of Lebanon. In any case, it is not part of Israel: the area was seized by Israeli armed forces during its 1967 invasion of Syria's Golan plateau and they have held the territory under military occupation ever since. Armed resistance against foreign occupation forces is considered legal under international law. In any case, there have been no attacks against Israeli forces since January 2003.

Furthermore, while the United Nations has acknowledged Israeli withdrawal of ground troops from Lebanon, the Secretary General's most recent report on the situation in June 2003 denounced Israeli violations of Lebanese air space as "provocative" and "at variance with Israel's otherwise full compliance with Security Council resolution 425."

There have been virtually no border clashes on the Lebanese-Israeli border involving Hizballah since the 2000 Israeli withdrawal, though this past July shells from Hizballah anti-aircraft fire against Israeli planes illegally encroaching onto Lebanese airspace fell into Israeli territory, injuring three Israeli civilians. Furthermore, there are no Syrian forces near Lebanon's border with Israel, thereby making it unclear as to how Syria could "permit" or not permit such attacks other than by entering the territory and attempting to forcibly disarm them, likely provoking a series of armed clashes they would wish to avoid.

Another Finding observes:

(15) The Israeli-Lebanese border and much of southern Lebanon is under the control of Hizballah, which continues to attack Israeli positions, allows Iranian Revolutionary Guards and other militant groups to operate freely in the area, and maintains thousands of rockets along Israel's northern border, destabilizing the entire region.

This clause is misleading on several counts:

With a few very minor incidents, Hizballah attacks against Israeli positions since the withdrawal of Israeli occupation troops from southern Lebanon have been restricted to Israeli occupation forces in the Shebaa Farms region on the Lebanese-Syrian border. Iranian Revolutionary Guards had a visible presence in the area during the early 1980s, but sightings subsequently have been quite rare.

Furthermore, Israel has far more powerful, accurate, and lethal military hardware on its side of the border. Israeli attacks in Lebanon over the years have resulted in thousands of civilian deaths, while Hizballah attacks have killed less than two dozen civilians on the Israeli side, none for at least five years. The only apparent increases in armaments on the Lebanese side appear to be the placement of additional anti-aircraft batteries, which are defensive in nature. No part of northern Israel has been subjected to military occupation by Lebanese, though Israel illegally occupied parts of southern Lebanon and beyond for 22 years between 1978 and 2000.

Congress, however, apparently believes that it is this Lebanese militia inside Lebanon, not an Israeli army that has invaded, occupied and repeatedly bombed its neighbors, that is responsible for "destabilizing the entire region."

The operational clause of the bill states:

(6) the Governments of Lebanon and Syria should enter into serious unconditional bilateral negotiations with the Government of Israel in order to realize a full and permanent peace;

First of all, it is unclear why Congress insists that Lebanon and Syria must enter into bilateral negotiations as opposed to multilateral negotiations as called for by the United Nations in Security Council resolution 338, particularly given the interrelatedness of the concerns of these three nations.

The Syrian and Lebanese governments have offered full diplomatic relations with Israel and strict security guarantees in return for a total Israeli withdrawal from occupied Syrian territory in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, which successive U.S. administration have insisted should be the basis for Arab-Israeli peace. However, the U.S.-backed Israeli government of Ariel Sharon has categorically rejected an Israeli withdrawal from occupied Syrian territory, even in return for full diplomatic relations and strict security guarantees.

Syria has expressed its willingness to resume peace talks with Israel where the discussions left off in 2000. Israel's right-wing government has refused, however, saying the talks must start from scratch. By insisting that Syria must enter new talks "unconditionally" rather than resume them from the two parties' previous negotiating positions, where both sides made major concessions, took several years to reach and came very close to success, Congress is effectively rejecting the position of the more moderate former Israeli government of Ehud Barak and instead embracing the rejectionist position of current right-wing leader Sharon.

As a result, it is unclear how entering into such negotiations with an occupying power that categorically refuses to withdraw from conquered land would "realize a full and permanent peace" unless the intent of Congress is to force complete Syrian capitulation in accepting Israel's annexation of Syria's Golan region. This would be an unreasonable demand, however, since the UN Charter expressly forbids any nation from expanding its territory by force and UN Security Council resolution 497 declares the Israel's 1981 annexation of the Golan is illegal and must be rescinded.

**Military Threat**

Among the Findings, the resolution includes:

(18) The Government of Syria continues to develop and deploy short- and medium-range ballistic missiles.

(19) According to the December 2001 unclassified Central Intelligence Agency report entitled `Foreign Missile Developments and the Ballistic Missile Threat through 2015′, `Syria maintains a ballistic missile and rocket force of hundreds of FROG rockets, Scuds, and SS-21 SRBMs [and] Syria has developed [chemical weapons] warheads for its Scuds'.

What Congress fails to mention is that Israel has a vastly superior missile capability relative to Syria, fielding short-range Jericho I and medium-range Jericho II missiles, both of which use solid propellant and are nuclear-capable. Israel's missiles are significantly more advanced technologically, are more accurate, have a wider range and can carry a larger payload than the Syrian missiles.

Meanwhile, Syria's northern neighbor Turkey has at least 120 MGM-140 tactical missiles as well as cruise missiles. Egypt has intermediate-range Badr 2000 missiles, not to mention an array of short range missiles, including the Harpoon, the Ottomat, the CSS-N-2, and the Project T.

It should not be surprising to Congress that in such a strategic environment Syria would also opt to develop short and medium-range ballistic missiles.

Another Finding observes:

(25) Syria is not a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention or the Biological Weapons Convention, which entered into force on April 29, 1997, and on March 26, 1975, respectively.

This is true, yet Israel and Egypt, which are the world's two largest recipients of U.S. military aid, are not parties to these conventions either. Congress apparently believes that while it is legitimate for Israel and Egypt to refuse to ratify these important arms control conventions, Syria's refusal to ratify these same two conventions is grounds for strict economic sanctions.

Similarly, another Finding in the bill notes:

(20) The Government of Syria is pursuing the development and production of biological and chemical weapons and has a nuclear research and development program that is cause for concern.

While it is widely acknowledged that Syria, like several other countries in the region, has a chemical weapons program, there is no evidence that Syria currently has any biological weapons. Furthermore, it is unclear why Syria's civilian nuclear program is of such "concern" for Congress: Syria is a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and has "accepted the full scope safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency to detect diversions of nuclear materials from peaceful activities to the production of nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices." Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that they have any kind of nuclear weapons program.

Yet another finding observes:

(22) On May 6, 2002, the Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, John Bolton, stated: “The United States also knows that Syria has long had a chemical warfare program. It has a stockpile of the nerve agent sarin and is engaged in research and development of the more toxic and persistent nerve agent VX. Syria, which has signed but not ratified the [Biological Weapons Convention], is pursuing the development of biological weapons and is able to produce at least small amounts of biological warfare agents.”

The Defense Department has pointed out that while Syria has a biotechnical infrastructure capable of supporting limited agent development, it has not begun a major effort to produce biological agents or to put them into weapons and Syria would need significant foreign assistance to manufacture large amounts of biological weapons.

Finally, it should be noted that Bolton has very little credibility among the intelligence community, which was reportedly “fed up” with his assertions regarding Syria. (During this same testimony, Bolton claimed that Cuba also had a biological weapons program, which was roundly dismissed as pure fantasy.) That Congress would cite Bolton rather than more credible reports from other U.S. government agencies regarding Syria’s chemical and biological capabilities is indicative of the continued willingness by both Republicans and Democrats, exhibited most prominently in the buildup to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, to believe whatever the Bush administration wants to tell them.

The operational clause of the resolution states:

(5) the Government of Syria should halt the development and deployment of medium- and long-range surface-to-surface missiles and cease the development and production of biological and chemical weapons;

Syria’s development of its advanced missile programs and WMDs came only after other countries in the region first developed theirs, programs which still exist today and from which the Syrians still feel threatened:

The first country in the Middle East to obtain and use chemical weapons was Egypt (which used phosgene and mustard gas in the mid-1960s during its intervention in Yemen.) There is no indication Egypt has ever destroyed any of its chemical agents or weapons and it is believed that the U.S.-backed Mubarak regime is continuing its chemical weapons research and development program. Similarly, it is widely believed that Egypt began a program that produced weaponized biological agents as far back as the early 1960s. As of 1996, U.S. officials publicly acknowledged that Egypt had developed biological warfare agents and there is no evidence that they have since been eliminated. Egypt is considered a major U.S. ally and Congress annually grants over two billion dollars worth of military and economic assistance to the Mubarak government.

Israel is widely believed to have produced and stockpiled an extensive range of chemical weapons and is engaged in ongoing research and development of additional chemical weaponry. Israel is also believed to maintain a sophisticated biological weapons program, which is widely thought to include anthrax and more advanced weaponized agents and other toxins. Israel also has a sizable nuclear weapons arsenal with sophisticated delivery systems.

Unlike the case of Iraq, there are no UN Security Council resolutions demanding that Syria cease its development of WMDs or missile programs. The only UN Security Council resolution addressing WMD proliferation in this part of the Middle East is UN Security Council resolution 487, which calls on Israel to place its nuclear facilities under the trusteeship of the International Atomic Energy Agency. Israel is still in violation of this resolution, though this does not seem to bother Congress.

Syria has called for a weapons of mass destruction free zone for the entire Middle East, similar to what already exists in Latin America and the South Pacific. By imposing strict sanctions on Syria for failing to disarm unilaterally, however, Congress has roundly rejected this concept or any other kind of regional arms control regime. Instead, Congress has gone on record supporting the idea that the United States has the authority to say which country can have what kind of weapons systems, thereby enforcing a kind of WMD apartheid, which will more likely encourage, rather than discourage, the proliferation of such dangerous weapons.

**Support for Iraq**

The Findings of the resolution includes the following:

(30) On March 28, 2003, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld warned: `[W]e have information that shipments of military supplies have been crossing the border from Syria into Iraq, including night-vision goggles . . . These deliveries pose a direct threat to the lives of coalition forces. We consider such trafficking as hostile acts, and will hold the Syrian government accountable for such shipments'.

(34) On April 13, 2003, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld charged that `busloads' of Syrian fighters entered Iraq with `hundreds of thousands of dollars' and leaflets offering rewards for dead American soldiers.

There has been absolutely no independent confirmation of either of these charges.

These clauses and other parts of the resolution imply that the Syrian government has been a major backer of the former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. In reality, despite being ruled by the Ba'ath Party, Syria has historically been a major rival of Iraq's Ba'ath regime. Syria broke diplomatic relations with Baghdad in the 1970s and never renewed them. Damascus was the base of a number of exiled anti-Saddam Iraqi leaders and organizations. Syria was the only Arab country to back Iran during the Iran-Iraq War. It was one of the only non-monarchical Arab states to have backed the United States against Iraq during the first Gulf War, dispatching troops to support Operation Desert Shield. Iraq and Syria backed rival factions in Lebanon's civil war. As a member of the United Nations Security Council, Syria voted this past November in favor of the U.S.-backed resolution 1441 that demanded full cooperation by the Baghdad government with United Nations inspectors, with the threat of severe consequences if it failed to do so. Most recently, Syria voted in favor of the U.S.-backed resolution 1511 on post-war Iraq.

In reality, the problem Congress seems to have with Syria is not that Damascus really has supported Saddam Hussein's regime and its remnants, but that it, like most nations in the world, simply opposed the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

In addition, it seems rather extraordinary that Congress would make statements by Donald Rumsfeld part of their findings on this resolution, given the Defense Secretary's history of misinformation on issues related to Iraq:

For example, on March 30, 2003, Rumsfeld confidently stated, in reference to Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction, that "We know where they are. They are in the area around Tikrit and Baghdad and east, west, north and south somewhat." On March 23, 2003, he said that American intelligence reports indicate that Iraqi forces "have chemical and biological weapons, and that they have dispersed them, and that they are weaponized, and that, in one case at least, the command and control arrangements have been established."

Both of these claims have since been shown to be utterly false.

Similarly, on November 14, 2002, Rumsfeld claimed "Two sons-in-law of Saddam Hussein defected, went into Jordan, and the word came out and they told where these inspectors could go look, they went and looked, and they found weapons of mass destruction."

This is also untrue. When the two men defected to Jordan in 1995 they told UNSCOM inspectors, among other things, that "All weapons: biological, chemical, missile, nuclear, were destroyed." The information they provided UNSCOM was obviously useful, but it did not lead inspectors to find any weapons since they no longer existed.

**Membership in the UN Security Council**

From the Findings of the resolution:

(31) According to Article 23(1) of the United Nations Charter, members of the United Nations are elected as nonpermanent members of the United Nations Security Council with `due regard being specially paid, in the first instance to the contribution of members of the United Nations to the maintenance of international peace and security and to other purposes of the Organization'.

(32) Despite Article 23(1) of the United Nations Charter, Syria was elected on October 8, 2001, to a 2-year term as a nonpermanent member of the United Nations Security Council beginning January 1, 2002, and served as President of the Security Council during June 2002 and August 2003.

In the operational clause of the resolution, it declares that:

(8) as a violator of several key United Nations Security Council resolutions and as a nation that pursues policies which undermine international peace and security, Syria should not have been permitted to join the United Nations Security Council or serve as the Security Council's President, and should be removed from the Security Council.

It is interesting that Congress raised no objection when the Suharto regime of Indonesia served as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 1995-96. At that time, Indonesia was engaged in an illegal military occupation of the island nation of East Timor in direct violation of a series of UN Security Council resolutions demanding its immediate withdrawal and recognition of the right of the people of East Timor to self-determination. In the course of Indonesia's 26-year occupation, more than 200,000 people, one-third of the country's population, died as a result of massacres, forced relocation and related atrocities.

Similarly, there was no objection raised in Congress to Morocco serving as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 1992-93. At that time and to this day, Morocco has been engaged in an illegal occupation of the nation of Western Sahara, placing the kingdom in direct violation of a series of UN Security Council resolutions demanding its immediate withdrawal and recognition of the right of the people of Western Sahara to self-determination. Morocco has even refused to move forward with a UN-sponsored resolution on the fate of the territory despite a series of UN Security Council resolutions calling for their cooperation.

In other words, Congress believes that if a regime is allied to the United States, it is okay to serve as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, even if that government is "a violator of several key United Nations Security Council resolutions" and "pursues policies which undermine international peace and security." However, in the case of Syria, even though its violations of UN Security Council resolutions and its threats to international peace and security are significantly less substantial than that of Morocco or Indonesia, Congress believes they must be removed from that body.

Finally, it should be noted that this resolution is from the same Congress that in October 2002 authorized President George W. Bush to invade and occupy a sovereign country despite it being a clear violation of the United Nations Charter and a threat to international peace and security. Needless to say, there are no suggestions from Congress that the United States should be denied its seat on the UN Security Council.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this critical overview is not to defend Assad's regime in Damascus. Given the nature of the Syrian government and its policies, a case could be made that strict sanctions such as those enacted in this legislation might be appropriate under certain conditions.

What is so disturbing about this bill and its near-unanimous support, however, is that the language of the resolution is emblematic of the new bipartisan consensus in Washington in favor of a hegemonic world order led by the Bush Administration. In the near-unanimous passage of this bill, Republicans and Democrats alike are on record in their conviction that the United States has the right to punish particular nations for certain policies while providing military, economic and diplomatic support for allied nations that engage in very policies. Both Republicans and Democrats alike are on record trusting unsubstantiated claims by neo-conservative ideologues who have lied repeatedly about so-called "rogue states" in order to justify increased U.S. militarism and foreign wars. Both Republicans and Democrats alike are on record rejecting multilateral arms control treaties in favor of forcing unilateral disarmament by some governments while sending billions of dollars worth of sophisticated weaponry to neighboring states. Both Republicans and Democrats alike are manipulating popular concern regarding international terrorism to justify policies which actually weaken the United States' ability to counter this very real threat.

The Syrian Accountability Act is not a reflection of popular concern for the Lebanese people, for non-proliferation, for preventing terrorism, or for defending the United Nations. It is a reflection of an imperial world view. Those politicians who support such a role for the United States through such legislation, whether they are Republicans or Democrats, must be held accountable.