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Gephardt drops nomination of Arab to antiterror panel

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WASHINGTON — An Arab-American accused of condoning attacks against Israel is no longer a candidate for membership in an anti-terrorism panel.

House minority leader Richard Gephardt rescinded his nomination Friday of Salam Marayati, who heads the California-based Moslem Public Affairs Council. The appointment was to have been to the National Commission on Terrorism, which is under the auspices of Congress and evaluates the US's antiterrorism policy.

Citing Marayati's and the council's past statements, which it said justified Palestinian terrorism against Israel, the Zionist Organization of America led a two-week campaign urging Gephardt to rescind his choice.

Gephardt informed Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert that he was withdrawing his nominee because of delays Marayati would likely incur in attaining federal security clearance to sit on the committee.

Gephardt made no reference to

the substance of ZOA's charges, saying only that he learned of "questions about this appointment."

When Gephardt's staff asked Marayati his views of the State Department's classification of Hamas and Hizbullah as terrorist organizations, Marayati replied that he would not fight the designation, but did not state clearly that the groups are terrorist outlaws, according to ZOA president Morton Klein.

Reached by telephone on Friday, Marayati called the ZOA's allegation "an outright lie." He said that he and MPAC are on record as having condemned Hamas and Hizbullah bombing attacks against Israelis.

"When we say we want to look into the root causes [of terrorism], they say that's justifying violence. It's not. We do that here in America — look into why things happen, like the LA riots.

"When it comes to terrorism, we condemn Hamas and Hizbullah. When it comes to building hospitals, we don't condemn them. It's not a blanket" condemnation, he said.
