



**Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center
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Exposure of a Hezbollah network in Egypt: state of affairs, implications, and reactions in Egypt and in the Arab and Muslim world¹



**Iran hitting a giant on/off switch on Hassan Nasrallah's back
(Al-Nadwa newspaper, Saudi Arabia, April 14, 2009)**

¹ This is a follow-up and supplement to our April 13 Information Bulletin: ["Egypt exposes a Hezbollah network on its soil, claiming it not only smuggled weapons into the Gaza Strip but also planned to carry out terrorist attacks and subversion activities. Hassan Nasrallah admitted a detained Hezbollah operative was involved in smuggling but denied other accusations"](#). See also: ["News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict"](#) (April 7-14, 2009).

Overview

1. In late 2008, Egyptian security services exposed a **Hezbollah network which operated on Egyptian soil**. Immediately following the exposure, the affair was hushed up and received no media coverage. In early April 2009, the Egyptian government decided to make public the exposure, the network members' interrogations, and the implications of Hezbollah's activity on Egyptian soil.

2. That network is perceived and portrayed by the Egyptian government as an **Iranian "plot" to destabilize Egypt and further Iran's strategic objectives, being part of its drive for Middle Eastern hegemony**. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, who is viewed by the Egyptians as an instrument used by the Iranian regime to further its objectives, received special treatment from the Egyptian media, which referred to him, inter alia, as the "monkey sheikh", "Iranian agent", and "militia leader in the Iranian party of Lebanon". Accusations were also made against the **Muslim Brotherhood** in Egypt, which was allegedly involved with and supported the network.²

3. Against this backdrop, Egyptian media (as well as Arab media benefiting from Egyptian leaks) have been recently publishing a great deal of highly detailed information on the Hezbollah network's activities in Egypt. According to that information, the network was involved in smuggling weapons and terrorist operatives into the Gaza Strip (mostly for Hamas, in our assessment). It is also our assessment that those operatives had undergone training in Iran, Syria, and Lebanon, and had been brought back to the Gaza Strip with the assistance of Hezbollah. According to the Egyptian media, the smuggling route passed through **Sudan, Egypt, and the Gaza Strip**, via the Rafah tunnels. It appears that in some point (possibly following Imad Mughniyah's death) the Hezbollah network was instructed to **carry out terrorist attacks on Egyptian soil**, mostly against tourist sites on the Red Sea coast where Israelis often stay.

4. **The Hezbollah network was serving the strategic interests of Iran**, which strives to help build up the Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip, even though Hamas, unlike Hezbollah, does not fully comply with the Iranian dictates. Iran considers the establishment of the radical Islamic entity in the Gaza Strip to be an **important leverage for waging an armed struggle against Israel along its southern border** by providing Palestinian terrorist organizations with

² Al-Masri al-Youm, a newspaper which published the names of the detainees belonging to the network, noted that one of them was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and had recently joined the Hezbollah network (Al-Masri al-Youm, April 28).

rocket capabilities (as Iran did with Hezbollah in Lebanon). The Gaza Strip is also seen as a convenient staging ground from which terrorists can be dispatched to Israel, either directly or through the breached Egyptian-Israeli border. What is more, the Iranians consider the Hamas-controlled Islamist Gaza Strip to be a **regional power which they can use to increase their influence in the Arab and Muslim world**, pose a considerable challenge to Abu Mazen, and export radical Islam to such pro-Western Arab countries as Egypt, using that country's geographical proximity to the Gaza Strip.³

5. The exposure of the **Hezbollah** network, which not only provided Gaza Strip terrorist organizations with logistical assistance but was also planning to perpetrate terrorist attacks on Egyptian soil, was a **warning sign the Egyptians could not ignore**. Its activities meticulously covered by Egypt's media, the network was **considered by the Egyptians** as a blatant Iranian interference in Egyptian internal affairs and as compromising their national security. Sincerely concerned about the potential implications of Iranian subversive activities on its territory, Egypt launched a massive media campaign against Iran, led by President Mubarak, Egypt's Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit, and the Egyptian government-controlled media. Joined by the media of Saudi Arabia and other like-minded countries, the media campaign put Iran and its allies (Syria, Hezbollah, and to a lesser extent Hamas) **on the defensive**.

6. With the parliamentary elections drawing near, **Hezbollah** leader Hassan Nasrallah, who was put in an uncomfortable position by the Egyptians' activity, **admitted** soon after the affair was exposed that the leader of the network (known as Sami Shihab) and some of his operatives, **did, indeed, belong to Hezbollah**. The media strategy adopted by Hassan Nasrallah (and later also by his deputy, Sheikh Na'im Qassem) was to confirm that the Hezbollah network was involved in smuggling weapons and "fighters" (i.e., terrorist operatives) into the Gaza Strip, portraying that activity as being **perfectly legitimate** seeing as, according to Hezbollah, supporting the Palestinians was imperative. At the same time, Hezbollah denied the Egyptian allegations that the network's activity was not limited to logistics but also included terrorist attacks and subversion, claiming that such accusations were groundless and that their sole purpose was to compromise the "reputation" built by the organization in the Arab world, including Egypt, since the second Lebanon war.

7. **The Iranian and Syrian propaganda** rushed to Hezbollah's aid, all the while keeping a low profile in order to mitigate the Egyptian attack. **The Hamas movement**, which was put in an

³ For more details, see our January 12, 2009 Information Bulletin: "[Iranian Support of Hamas](#)".

uncomfortable position, denied having anything to do with the affair, stressing, however, that smuggling weapons into the Gaza Strip was perfectly legitimate.

The Hezbollah network in Egypt — summary based on Egyptian and Arab media reports

8. The Egyptian and Arab media have published a great deal of detailed information about the activity of the Hezbollah network exposed in Egypt. Some of that information is said to have originated in interrogations of those detained in the affair, with several interrogation protocols published in the Egyptian media. The picture that emerges from those reports is that the network included **49 operatives** and that it was headed by a Hezbollah operative codenamed **Sami Shihab** (see below). Its members were Egyptians, Lebanese, Palestinians, Sudanese, Israeli Arabs, and Syrians (Al-Hayat, April 13), **21 of whom were arrested** (Al-Masri al-Youm, April 29). The network started operating in Egypt in 2005 and was probably exposed in late 2008. Most of its operatives were arrested by the Egyptian security services, although it was reported that the search for additional (Lebanese and Palestinian) operatives who sought shelter in the central Sinai Peninsula was still underway.



Photographs of several Hezbollah detainees in Egypt
(Al-Arabiyya, April 12, 2009, as they appeared on Israel's Channel 10 on the same day)

9. On April 13, **Al-Masri al-Youm** published the interrogation protocols of **Muhammad Yussuf Ahmed Mansour**, a Shi'ite Lebanese from the southern suburb of Beirut, who entered Egypt using a fake passport. The detainee admitted that he was a **Hezbollah operative** codenamed

Sami Hani Shihab, which was confirmed by Hassan Nasrallah's speech.⁴ Following are the main points related by the detainee in his interrogation by the Egyptian security services:

a. He was sent to Cairo in 2005 to establish there a Hezbollah network called "**Egypt Branch**". Its goal was said to be "supporting the Palestinian cause". His direct commander in Lebanon was a Hezbollah operative named **Mohammad Qabalan**, who was chosen for the mission because he had visited Egypt in 2007 and 2008 and had considerable knowledge about the southern Sinai Peninsula, where he spent some time using a fake Egyptian passport on the name of **Hassan al-Ghul**.⁵

b. **Egypt Branch** operatives surveyed tourist sites on the Red Sea coast in order to collect information on Israeli tourists staying there (Arab and Egyptian media reported that the network was planning to perpetrate several showcase terrorist attacks at the tourist spots using **car bombs and explosive belts**). One of the network's operatives was a resident of Port Said named **Hassan al-Manakhili**, who was instructed to gather information in the region of Nuweiba and conduct reconnaissance missions in the Ras al-Shaitan area (on April 23, the **Al-Akhbar** newspaper reported that Hassan al-Manakhili and five other detainees from Port Said were instructed by Sami Shihab to purchase a boat and rent a fish store in Port Said in order to collect information on vessels going through the Suez Canal).

c. Mohammad Qabalan was involved in **smuggling operatives and weapons into the Gaza Strip** for terrorist attacks against Israel. For that purpose, the network acquired **C-4**, a very high quality plastic explosive,⁶ and stored it in the house of one of the network's operatives in El-Arish. The explosives were then used to make **explosive belts and explosive suitcases**. The network members also purchased some supplies for preparing explosive devices, such as electric wires and iron pellets. Egyptian sources close to the interrogation told an Al-Sharq al-Awsat reporter in Cairo (April 18) that the explosives were meant to be transported to Israel by Israeli Arabs for perpetrating terrorist attacks.

d. As part of the preparations for smuggling weapons, Mohammad Qabalan went to **Sudan** "in order to attend to logistical matters". The purpose of his visit in Sudan was "**to**

⁴ The same Lebanese was portrayed by Egypt's media as the one in charge of the Hezbollah network in Egypt. In his speech, Hassan Nasrallah admitted that he was indeed a Hezbollah operative involved in smuggling weapons and operatives to the Gaza Strip.

⁵ The Egyptian intelligence services' interrogation showed that Hezbollah used the names of deceased Sunni Lebanese to forge passports for Hezbollah operatives (Al-Arab, April 22, 2009).

meet with African and Sudanese smugglers to smuggle fighters to Gaza". The agreement was that the smugglers would receive 2,000 dollars for each person smuggled into the Gaza Strip and 16,000 dollars for a passenger car. **The network was able to smuggle "fighters" (i.e., terrorist operatives) into the Gaza Strip**, but their number was small, the detainee related.

e. Sami Shihab admitted that, as part of his activity in Hezbollah, he was enlisted to that organization's general recruitment division. He underwent military training but suffered an injury to his spinal cord. After his recovery, he joined **Unit 1800**, which deals with the Palestinian issue through the "ring states" (that is, the countries which surround Israel). The detainee had undergone extensive intelligence training, qualifying him for the assignments he was charged with.

10. Another detainee named **Muhammad Ramadan** admitted to infiltrating Egypt (from the Gaza Strip) through the Rafah tunnels along with another operative. Their purpose was to recruit operatives who could be smuggled into **Israel for perpetrating suicide bombing attacks there**.⁷ Muhammad Ramadan met with **Sami Shihab**, the network's leader, who told him that he was able to help him and provide him with the necessary means to perpetrate terrorist attacks. According to Egyptian media reports, the attacks were not carried out because several Israeli Arabs involved in the affair were apprehended by the Israeli intelligence services.

The involvement of Hezbollah's Al-Manar TV in the affair

11. The Egyptian newspaper **Al-Akhbar** reported that the Hezbollah network operatives in Egypt were assisted by a person working for Hezbollah's Al-Manar TV channel. They took advantage of his knowledge of the Hebrew language and charged him with contacting elements inside Israel through the Internet in order to collect information on Israeli tourists visiting Egypt (Al-Akhbar, April 13).

⁶ This kind of explosives is manufactured by the Iranians, and it is possible that they smuggle it to the Gaza Strip.

⁷ The Egyptian media does not mention the terrorist organization to which Muhammad Ramadan and his associate belonged, as part of a larger trend to focus on Iran and Hezbollah and play down the role of **Hamas**, which the Hezbollah network assisted. The Egyptian media also noted that among the detainees were two **Fatah** operatives who admitted during questioning to infiltrating Egypt from the Gaza Strip. They had been given instructions to go to Sudan as well as to Syria and Lebanon to undergo training for suicide bombing attacks (Al-Masri al-Youm, April 16).

12. Following the exposure of the affair, an Egyptian attorney filed a plea calling for the termination of Al-Manar's broadcasts through the Egyptian-controlled Nilesat satellite. According to the plea, Al-Manar TV was broadcasting false information and violating legal ethics (Al-Gomhuria, April 17). **Al-Manar TV does broadcast through Arabsat (an inter-Arab TV satellite dominated by the Saudis) and Nilesat (an Egyptian TV satellite)**, while many countries in the world, mainly France, have taken practical measures against the channel since 2004.⁸ Hezbollah's reliance on those Arab satellites **allows Al-Manar TV to disseminate its inciting broadcasts to the Middle East, North Africa, and countries in southern Europe**, where it enjoys great popularity.

Reactions in the Arab world

Egypt

The affair as reflected in cartoons



Nasrallah as a Santa Claus throwing grenades (Al-Gomhuria, April 16, 2009)



Iran directing Nasrallah, portrayed as a puppeteer who operates terrorism in Egypt. The Egyptian security services are cutting the puppet strings of terrorism (Al-Ahram, Egypt, April 13, 2009)

13. The Egyptian official and non-official media, as well as Egyptian leaders, including President Hosni Mubarak, took the opportunity of the Hezbollah network's exposure to **vehemently lash**

⁸ The Egyptian media made a point of mentioning that in recent years Egypt has been facing pressure exerted by outside elements (including the US) to terminate the broadcasts of Al-Manar on the Egyptian Nilesat satellite (Al-Ahram al-Masai,

out against Iran, accusing it of being **responsible for the anti-Egyptian “plot”** and of using the Palestinian issue to **further its interests in the Middle East**. At the same time, the Egyptian government is also attempting to make a profit **on the internal scene** by accusing the Muslim Brotherhood of being associated with the Hezbollah network (an accusation which has yet to be proven). This media attack may herald a new phase in the confrontation between Egypt (and other pro-Western Arab countries) and the Iranian-Syrian axis, which directs such terrorist organizations as Hezbollah and Hamas.

14. President **Mubarak** addressed the affair and Iran’s role in it during his speech in Ismailia on the 27th anniversary of the liberation of Sinai (April 23).⁹ “We are aware of the connection between the national security of Egypt and the security and stability of the Middle East, the Gulf, the Red Sea, the Mediterranean, Sudan, the Nile basin countries, and Africa,” said Mubarak. **“We affirm our Arab identity and will not allow the interference of regional elements that are opposed to peace and are pushing the region to the edge of an abyss [i.e., Iran].** Those elements seek to impose their influence and agenda on our Arab world, incite disagreements on the Arab and Palestinian scene, and send their agents [i.e., Hezbollah] to the region **in order to threaten Egypt’s national security, harm its borders, and compromise its stability.”** President Mubarak then reiterated his threatening message to Iran: “I’m telling them: **we are totally aware of your plots. We will expose your plots and react accordingly.** Stop interfering in the Palestinian issue; **beware the wrath of Egypt and its people”** (Middle East News Agency, April 23, 2009).



Egypt’s President Mubarak speaking at the 27th anniversary of the liberation of Sinai: “...We will not allow the interference of regional elements that are opposed to peace and are pushing the region to the edge of an abyss” (Egyptian TV, April 23)

April 16, 2009).

⁹ When the affair just began, it was reported that Hosni Mubarak held a telephone conversation with Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, in which he said that the Egyptian justice system was committed to put those responsible to trial (Haaretz, April 13, 2009).

15. Following are more examples of the still ongoing Egyptian media attack on Iran:

a. A weekly editorial by the editor-in-chief of **Al-Ahram** accused Iran and Hezbollah of taking advantage of the Palestinian problem to promote Iranian interests and disseminate Iranian revolutionary ideas. The article argues that Egypt's non-compromising stance against "the crimes of Hezbollah" was beneficial to the entire Arab world, and that eventually Hamas will also understand that there is an Iranian conspiracy against it. The article accuses Hezbollah of encouraging suicide bombing attacks which resulted in the failure of the second intifada, unlike the success of the first intifada, in which Hezbollah did not interfere.



The Al-Ahram weekly editorial (April 20). On the lower part is a cartoon showing Nasrallah being fired from a cannon (the text on which says "Iran") and releasing mice that are stomped by a foot which represents the Egyptian security forces.

b. In an article dated April 18, **Ahmed Moussa**, the deputy editor-in-chief of **Al-Ahram**, claims that the Hezbollah network was not just planning to perpetrate terrorist attacks but also "conspired" to stage a coup in Egypt. According to Moussa, that "conspiracy" included three countries: **Iran, Syria, and Qatar**. It allegedly also included three organizations: **Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Muslim Brotherhood**. In addition, the article accuses the **Al-Jazeera** channel of manipulating Egyptian public opinion, referring to it as "Al-Qatar channel which belongs to the country of Al-Jazeera". The article goes into detail about Hezbollah's close relations with **Syria**, arguing that the organization had received three quarters of the Syrian army's weapons before its withdrawal from Lebanon. **Iran**, on its part, "picked up the tab" for Syria and, in addition, exported Grad rockets to Hamas. The author of the article also lashes out against Hamas for causing a rift within the Palestinian entity, rebelling against the legitimate government, objecting the continuation of the lull in

the fighting, and, "on the day the lull in the fighting ceased, firing its useless rockets in order to prompt Israel to launch a military operation, without giving any thought to the defenseless people of the Gaza Strip...".

c. The **Al-Gomhuria** newspaper published an article by its editor-in-chief (April 16), claiming that the confrontation between Egypt and "Iran and its proxies" originated in two distinct worldviews about handling the conflict with Israel, leveling accusations against Iran's supporters in Egypt. He says that Egypt espouses the peace treaty model and the democratic solution, while Iran espouses "liberation" through armed resistance. The roots of that conflict are well known from the past; however, a new phenomenon has been exposed in the present affair: "Up until now, we haven't been aware of the existence of an intellectual 'elite' in Cairo which is currently defending Iran's interests and Hezbollah, even though they violated Egypt's territorial sovereignty..." According to the author, Hassan Nasrallah and the Iranian clerics who handle him strive to turn the Arab world into a scene of terrorism using Hezbollah's sleeper cells in the various countries.

d. In an interview to the Arab newspaper **Al-Sharq al-Awsat** (April 14), Egypt's Foreign Minister **Ahmed Aboul Gheit** claimed that Iran was holding several "inter-Arab cards" in order to "trade them" when it decides to begin negotiating with the West. He further adds that Hezbollah's gaining a foothold on the western Mediterranean coast, by Iran's initiative, is a clear message to the West, to Israel, to Egypt, and to all Arabs: "We are here and we will influence your interests". Iran also used Hezbollah to gain a foothold in Egypt "so that it can tell Egypt 'we are here'". The Egyptian Foreign Minister also said that Iran considered itself a revolutionary country striving to increase its influence on the Arab and Muslim world, including the Gulf region and Afghanistan, and possibly also the Islamic republics of Central Asia.

e. In the same interview, the Egyptian Foreign Minister was also asked about the **bombing of the arms convoy in Sudan**. He replied that the arms that were bombed originated in Iran, but did not specify the identity of the convoy's attacker. He said that Egypt had discovered that there were camel caravans which transported people, arms, ammunition, and equipment to Egypt, from where they are intended to be transported to the Gaza Strip through the Sinai Peninsula. He further noted, "It is obvious that the arms [of the attacked convoy] came through the Red Sea from one of the largest sponsors in the area (Iran)" (parentheses in the original). He also added that the Egyptians were aware of the attack on the arms convoy. The Sudanese, who claimed that the attack was

carried out without their knowledge, kept silent (preferring not to make the affair public). Egypt's Foreign Minister called upon any country (possibly hinting at Sudan) to "increase its control [over its territory] to hunt down those organizations and their funding sources".

f. **Abdallah Kamal**, the editor-in-chief of the Egyptian newspaper **Roz al-Yousef**, who was cited in **Al-Quds al-Arabi** (April 20), published an in-depth article covering the history of the relations between Iran and Hezbollah. The article states that Hezbollah, which is an "armed gang", is just a tool used by various countries, mainly Iran, Syria, and Qatar. **Those countries**, the article says, **do not carry out the activities themselves but employ several organizations** and assist them with funds, training, and equipment.

g. **Khaled Imam**, the editor-in-chief of the Egyptian newspaper **Al-Masaa** (April 24), called Hassan Nasrallah "the servant of the Iranian clerics". He claimed that Nasrallah was seeking to harm Egypt, its people, and its interests, and "to set the region on fire for Persian goals". He condemned the Muslim Brotherhood's "alliance" with Iran and Hezbollah, and said "The problem with the Muslim Brotherhood is that they, like the Iranians and Hezbollah, are liars at heart, regarding themselves as would-be guardians of all Muslims".

16. On April 20, the Egyptian Foreign Minister's Assistant on Asian Affairs summoned the head of the Iranian interests office in Cairo, **Ambassador Hossein Rajabi**. The former expressed his protest over statements made by Iranian leaders, such as Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani, who claimed that the exposure of the Hezbollah network was a "silly, retarded scenario". The Foreign Minister's Assistant also noted that the reports which appeared on Iranian media were unacceptable, seeing as they reflected an Iranian decision to meddle in Egypt's internal affairs (Middle East News Agency, April 21). In an article published in Al-Ahram, Muhammad Amin al-Masri claims that Larijani made two mistakes: "Claiming that Egypt deliberately made public the Hezbollah network affair to influence the election results in Lebanon, and defending Hezbollah by saying that it had provided assistance to the Palestinians during the Israeli war against the Gaza Strip" (Al-Ahram, April 25).

Iran

17. The affair receives modest coverage on Iranian media, and it appears that officials in Tehran are attempting to hush up the affair and avoid fanning the flames (as Egypt is doing). The Iranian Foreign Ministry rushed to Hezbollah's aid, attempting to refute the Egyptian accusations:

a. At a press conference with Oman's Foreign Minister, **Iran's Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki** noted that the accusations against Hassan Nasrallah and Hezbollah leaders were groundless. He said that they were meant to influence the coming elections to the Lebanese parliament (ISNA, April 15).

b. **Foreign Minister Spokesman Qashqavi** said that the outcry raised by the Egyptians was not serving Arab and Islamic countries, particularly now, with "Palestine being occupied", and Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt's national interests under the attack of the "Zionist regime" (IRNA, April 14).

18. On the other hand, an editorial in **Jomhuri Eslami**, a newspaper associated with the conservative bloc, was much more blatant and clear regarding the affair. According to the editorial, the accusations against Hezbollah were meant to push back the increasing internal resistance against President Mubarak's government and that the increasing popularity of Hezbollah and Hassan Nasrallah since the second Lebanon war was highly concerning for President Mubarak. The article claims that Mubarak's accusations against a "Lebanese citizen" arrested several months ago¹⁰ were meant to haul Mubarak from the quagmire in which he had sunk during the Gaza war. **According to the article, there are groups in Egypt**, mainly the Muslim Brotherhood, who are aware that the accusations are false. The Article asserts that **President Mubarak, who cooperated with Israel, is the one who should be brought to trial and punished as a war criminal alongside the leaders of the Zionist regime in the International Court**. The article ends by stating that Mubarak is rightfully concerned about the appearance of "Nasrallahs" in Egypt and the expansion of "resistance culture" in Egypt, which will ultimately **end Hosni Mubarak's unwelcome life** (Jomhuri Eslami, April 12).

¹⁰ The Iranians continue to hide what even Hassan Nasrallah admitted—that the commander of the network was a **Hezbollah operative** who was involved in smuggling arms and "fighters".

Syria

19. In an interview to Arab newspaper **Al-Sharq al-Awsat** (April 28), **Syria's President Bashar Assad** was requested to respond to the attacks planned by Hezbollah against Israeli tourists in Sinai. Bashar feigned ignorance and said that "Hezbollah has no interest to do so, because it did deny it and said that it had nothing against Egypt or the Egyptians". Bashar added that there had been media reports about Hezbollah's intentions to attack Israel in 2008 in retaliation for the killing of Imad Mughniyah, but that Syria had "no concrete evidence to that effect".

20. The Syrian propaganda also rushed to defend Hezbollah (even if that defense was rather low-key) by portraying the assistance to the Palestinians as being legitimate and by bringing up the claim that Egypt's accusations against Hezbollah were nothing more than "political delusions". Thus, for example:

a. In an article published in **Al-Watan** (April 14), **Nizar Salloum** lashes out against the "political delusions" unprecedentedly disseminated from Egypt in order to portray Hezbollah and its leader as a threat on Egypt's sovereignty and national security. The article complains that the terms "war criminal" or "highwayman" are not used to describe Olmert or Netanyahu but rather Hassan Nasrallah, who sent Sami Shihab to "logistical missions" which had to do with supporting the "Palestinian resistance" in the Gaza Strip. The article's conclusion states that the Egyptian policy is still the same as it was during Bush's era, missing an "historical opportunity" to mend its ways.

b. **Suleiman Haddad**, the Chairman of the Foreign Ministers' Committee in the Syrian People's Council, stressed Syria's support of Hezbollah. When asked whether Syria also supported the rule of the law, he replied positively. He added, however, that a statement by Hezbollah's leader, "a personality known for its credibility and nationalism", made it clear that meddling in the internal affairs of a country was the last thing it would do (BBC Radio in Arabic, April 13).

Lebanon

21. The timing that the affair hit the media was inconvenient for Hezbollah, seeing as the elections for the Lebanese parliament are due June 7, 2009. The main reason for that inconvenience is that Hezbollah's portrayal as a terrorist organization involved in subversive activities and serving Iranian interests compromises its efforts to present itself as a legitimate Lebanese "party", as well as its desire to receive inter-Arab and international legitimacy.

22. Owing to the above reasons, **Hezbollah** has kept a low profile on the media when addressing the affair, in an attempt to douse the flames fanned by the Egyptian government. **Sheikh Naim Qassem**, Hassan Nasrallah's deputy, has continued to follow the media strategy outlined by Hassan Nasrallah when the affair was first exposed. That media strategy rejects the Egyptian allegations, attempts to trivialize the issue by portraying it as support of the "resistance" (i.e., terrorist organizations), and emphasizes that it is the duty of the Arab world to provide the Palestinians with such assistance.

23. In that context:

a. In an interview granted to AFP, **Sheikh Naim Qassem** stressed that the Egyptian allegations were slanderous, worthless, and unproven. He said that the Egyptians were trying to get back at Hezbollah because of its position during Israel's activity in the Gaza Strip (Operation Cast Lead). Egypt also wants to hurt Hezbollah's reputation in the Arab and Muslim world. He reiterated once again (echoing Hassan Nasrallah's rhetoric) that the Hezbollah operative arrested in Egypt was involved in transporting arms and supplies to the Gaza Strip. "That is not an accusation" but rather every Muslim's duty (AFP, April 15).

b. In an interview to an Egyptian newspaper, **Sheikh Naim Qassem** claimed that it was every Arab and Islamic country's duty to help the Palestinians. He said that Hezbollah had not violated Egypt's sovereignty but rather performed an "elementary act" that it was morally obliged to do "for the sake of Palestine". At the end of the interview, he called upon the Egyptian government, "which made up all that mess", to stop the media and political campaign, and to release the detained "honorable jihad warriors" (Al-Shuruq, Egypt, April 14).

c. **Ali Fayad**, a Hezbollah candidate for the Lebanese parliament in the Marjayoun-Hasbaya district, claimed that Hezbollah was not conducting political or military activities in Egypt, and that it was not meddling in the internal affairs of Arab countries. He added that smuggling weapons was not a violation of sovereignty, and called on Egypt and Hezbollah to settle their differences (FTV channel, Lebanon, April 20).

24. **On the internal Lebanese scene**, the affair further accentuated Hezbollah's image as an organization with a regional agenda, serving Iranian interests outside of Lebanon. Nevertheless, **Hezbollah's opponents** from the March 14th camp were careful with their words and did not take advantage of the incidents for media bickering to promote the election campaign for the Lebanese parliament. **The Lebanese government** also kept a low profile on the media in order to distance itself from the affair and avoid the impression that it was a crisis between the states of Lebanon and Egypt.

Condemnations of Hezbollah's interference in Egypt's internal affairs in a report by the UN Secretary-General, and Hezbollah's response

25. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon addressed the Hezbollah network exposed in Egypt in the ninth semi-annual report he submitted to the UN Security Council about the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1559 (2004).¹¹ The report states, inter alia (Paragraph 50), "Recent clandestine and illegal militant activities by the militia beyond Lebanese territory indicate that its objectives extend beyond Lebanon and, as such, **pose a threat to regional peace and stability**. I call upon Hizbullah to cease any militant activities outside Lebanon and to complete its transformation into a solely Lebanese political party..."¹²

26. The UN Secretary-General also condemned Hezbollah's interference in Egypt's political affairs (Paragraph 42): "I am alarmed that Hezbollah publicly admitted to providing support to Gaza-based militants from Egyptian territory... **I condemn such unwarranted interference in the domestic affairs of a sovereign member state.**"

¹¹ On September 2, 2004, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1559, which called, inter alia, for the demilitarization of all the militias in Lebanon, including Hezbollah and Palestinian militias in the refugee camps, in order to extend Lebanese sovereignty on the entire territory of Lebanon. Those demands have yet to be implemented. See our July 25, 2006 Information Bulletin: "[Disarming Hezbollah and extending the sovereignty and authority of the Lebanese government to south Lebanon, in accordance with Security Council Resolution 1559 \(2004\) and the Taef Accord \(1989\)](#)".

¹² Source: the United Nations website, Ninth semi-annual report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1559, S/2009/218.

27. Hezbollah spokesmen **launched an offensive against UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon** even before the report about Security Council Resolution 1559 was formally published (based on excerpts from the report made public in advance):

a. On May 25, Hezbollah MP **Hassan Fadlallah** said that “Ban [Ki-moon] was putting the UN on high alert for Israel’s safety”, turning a blind eye to the “crimes and massacres” perpetrated against the Lebanese and the Palestinians (Ilaf website, April 25).

b. **Ali Fayad**, a Hezbollah parliament candidate, claimed that Ban Ki-moon’s stance on “Hezbollah’s attempt to help the Palestinian people in Gaza” was meant to “take the matter out of proportion and portray it as a regional crisis”. He said that the Secretary-General’s position was propagating the feeling among the people of the Middle East that the UN institutions are favoring Israel, following a biased policy, and “covering up the Israeli crimes” (Al-Nashra website, April 28).

Hamas

28. **The Hamas movement**, which was put in an uncomfortable position as a result of the exposure of its ties with the Hezbollah network in Egypt, made an effort to distance itself from the affair while keeping a low profile on the media. **Muhammad Nazzal**, a member of the Hamas political bureau, claimed that Hamas had “nothing to do with the affair, and any attempt to associate it is blackmail against it”. He said that Hamas did not cooperate with Hezbollah, but expressed solidarity with Hezbollah “considering the campaign against it” (Al-Quds al-Arabi, April 14). **Fawzi Barhoum**, a Hamas spokesman in the Gaza Strip, claimed that the Egyptians made no accusations against Hamas and that Hamas’s relations with the Egyptians were close. At the same time, however, he noted that transporting weapons to the Gaza Strip should not be construed as a “crime” (Al-Sabil, Jordan, April 13).

29. However, **Moussa Abu Marzouq**, deputy chairman of the Hamas political bureau, made it clear that **Hamas had no intention of stopping the arms smuggling into the Gaza Strip**: “We are a resistance movement, and it is well known that resistance movements do not get their weapons through official contracts of arms deals between countries. We import our weapons in channels we believe will ensure that, **and it is our right to arm our people** to defend our interests and our rights (Palestine-info website, April 23).

Saudi Arabia and Persian Gulf states

30. Saudi media also joined Egypt's media campaign against Iran, even though it was not as extensive or aggressive. For example, an editorial in the Saudi daily **Al-Jazeera** (April 11) noted that the security apparatuses and justice systems in Egypt and Morocco saved their countries from the schemes of "the forces of evil". They also sent a warning signal to other Arab and Muslim countries that they could become the target for Shi'ite religious activity and for terrorist operations which serve the interests of a "certain country" in the Middle East, which undermines and threatens the security of Arab countries (referring to Iran).¹³

31. Cartoonists in Saudi Arabia and Persian Gulf states besmirched Hassan Nasrallah and lashed out against Iran. However, some of them stressed that the disagreement between Egypt and Hezbollah was serving Israel and that the Palestinians were the victims.

¹³ For more reactions on Saudi media, see MEMRI report dated April 27: "Egypt: The Hizbullah Cell in Egypt - A Joint Conspiracy by Iran, Syria, Qatar, Hizbullah, Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood" (by Y. Yehoshua).

Saudi cartoonists lashing out against Hassan Nasrallah and Ahmadinejad



Hassan Nasrallah abandoning his primary tasks—"The occupied Golan", "The Shabaa Farms", and "The Israeli threat to strike at Iran"—and heading for Egypt with grenades and explosives in his hands (Al-Nadwa, Saudi Arabia, April 20).



Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah reading a book which says "Machiavellianism" (Al-Watan, Saudi Arabia, April 20)



Ahmadinejad giving a speech at the UN conference in Geneva (Durban 2), saying "Israel is a racist occupier", while taking over islands belonging to the United Arab Emirates (Al-Watan, Saudi Arabia, April 23)

Cartoonists in the Persian Gulf states: Israel enjoys the Egyptian attack on Hezbollah



A Palestinian trapped between Hezbollah and Egypt while Israel, portrayed as a crocodile, is waiting to devour him (Al-Watan, Qatar, April 15)



A Jew representing Israel reading about the attacks on Hezbollah in the Egyptian press (insinuating that Israel benefits from the conflict) (Al-Raya, Qatar, April 21)



Hezbollah and Egypt throwing darts at the head of a Palestinian. Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is standing nearby, looking pleased. The text reads: "Mutual accusations and the plunder of our kin [i.e., the Palestinians]" (Akhbar al-Khaleej, Bahrain, April 14, 2009)