



Strong condemnation of Iran for its support of terrorism and calling Hezbollah a terrorist organization at an emergency meeting of the Arab League in Cairo

November 27, 2017

On November 19, 2017, the Arab League's foreign ministers held an emergency meeting in Cairo **at the request of Saudi Arabia. The meeting focused on Iranian intervention in the internal affairs of the Arab states. Saudi Arabia** complained of the **launching of an Iran-manufactured ballistic missile into Saudi territory by the Iranian-supported Houthis. Bahrain** complained of terrorist activities carried out in its territory by Iranian-supported terrorist groups, including a recently-exposed squad planning to blow up Bahraini oil installations.



The emergency meeting of the Arab League foreign ministers in Cairo (Arab League YouTube channel, November 20, 2017).

► **The final announcement of the meeting strongly condemned Iran and its proxy, "terrorist Hezbollah in Lebanon,"** for intervening in the internal affairs of Arab states. The announcement presented two recent examples of Iran's terrorist and subversive activities: the **firing of a ballistic missile at Riyadh, the Saudi Arabian capital; and the exposure of a terrorist squad in Bahrain,** handled by the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), and directed to attack Bahraini oil installations. The main points of the announcement were the following:

- ◆ **A condemnation of Iran's ongoing intervention in the internal matters of Arab states, deepening the [Shi'ite-Sunni] sectarian conflicts in the Arab world.** The announcement called on Iran to stop supporting [terrorist] groups in the Persian Gulf countries, and to stop funding the armed militias and factions in the Arab world, especially in Yemen. The announcement also condemned Iranian incitement against Arab states.
- ◆ **A "very strong condemnation" of the firing of an Iranian-manufactured missile at Riyadh:** The launch, carried out **by the Houthis in Yemen, who are supported by Iran, is a threat to Arab national security.**
- ◆ **A very strong condemnation of Iranian subversion in Bahrain:**
 - **Terrorist activities carried out by Iran in Bahrain:** Among the activities mentioned were the blowing up Bahrain's the oil pipeline by a terrorist group supported by the IRGC (See Appendix A).
 - **Iranian intervention in Bahrain's internal affairs** by supporting "**terrorist groups" with training and smuggled weapons:** Iran's objective is to undermine Bahrain's stability and security.
 - **Establishing "terrorist groups" in Bahrain financed by the IRGC and Hezbollah in Lebanon.**
- ◆ **A call to Iran to stop supporting the Houthi rebels:** The announcement called on Iran to stop supporting [the Houthis], who oppose Yemen's legitimate government. Iran supports them with weapons and has turned Yemen into **a base for launching missiles at neighboring countries and for threatening shipping in the Mandeb Straits.** According to the announcement, Iran's activity has negative implications for the security and stability of Yemen, neighboring countries and the entire region.
- ◆ **Calling Hezbollah a terrorist organization** (Paragraph Nine of the final announcement) (ITIC translation and emphasis): "**Placing responsibility on Hezbollah, the Lebanese terrorists, a participant in the Lebanese government, for sponsoring terrorism and terrorist groups in the Arab states by [supplying them with] advanced weapons and ballistic missiles. Hezbollah [must] stop spreading extremism and sectarianism, stop intervening in the internal matters of the [Arab] states, and stop supporting regional terrorism and terrorists.**"
- ◆ **Forbidding broadcasts of Iranian-funded channels on Arab satellites.**

The outspoken summation of the Arab League's foreign ministers is part of a **Saudi Arabian campaign to put a stop to Iranian intervention in the Arab world**. The blatant language used **clearly reflects the worsening of the confrontation between the Sunni camp, headed by Saudi Arabia, and the Shi'ite camp, headed by Iran and with the participation of Syria and Hezbollah** ("the Axis"). The confrontation is characterized by blows traded in the media and by **fighting on the ground in a number of arenas in the Middle East**, including **Yemen and Bahrain** (which were the focus of the Arab League's announcement). The strong condemnations of Iran and Hezbollah in the announcement have **mainly political and propaganda significance**, but apparently will not lead to practical action taken against Iran or Hezbollah.



Iran and Hezbollah foster terrorism and civil war in the Arab world in a cartoon about the final announcement of the Arab League emergency meeting in Cairo (al-Bayan Media Center, UAE, November 22, 2017).

► **As to the designation of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization**, it was not the first such statement. It was **preceded by other statements at various inter-Arab forums**, including meetings of the Arab states' Council of the Foreign Ministers and Council of Ministers of the Interior in 2016.¹ The statement may be used for propaganda by the enemies of Hezbollah in

¹ **The Arab states' Council of Foreign Ministers** met in Cairo on March 11, 2016, and **issued a statement designating Hezbollah as a terrorist organization**. Lebanon and Iraq voted against the decision; Algeria abstained (al-Arabiya, March 12, 2016). The decision came after a similar one made by the ministers of the interior designating Hezbollah as a terrorist organization at a meeting held on

Lebanon, given the increased internal tension resulting from the affair of the (postponed) resignation of Lebanese Prime Minister Sa'ad Hariri. In any event, Hassan Nasrallah rejected the accusation that Hezbollah was a terrorist organization, trotting out the familiar claim that Israel was threatening the organization (also claimed by Lebanese President Michel Aoun) and that Hezbollah's weapons were fundamental to security and stability in Lebanon (See Appendix B).

March 2, 2016, in Tunisia (al-Jazeera, March 11, 2016). On March 3, 2016, the UAE's Council for Cooperation designated Hezbollah as a terrorist organization (al-Jazeera, March 3, 2017).

Appendix A

Exposure of a Terrorist Squad in Bahrain Handled by the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)

► On November 15, 2017, the ministry of the interior in Bahrain held a press conference about the exposure of a **five-man terrorist squad** operating in the country. One of the operatives was apprehended and the **others fled to Iran**. The operatives had gone to Iran in July 2017 and then returned to Bahrain. Upon their return they rented an apartment and used it as a laboratory for making explosives. **While in Iran they underwent military training given by IRGC instructors, including the manufacture of explosives** (Twitter account of the Kuwaiti ministry of the interior, November 15, 2017).



Right: The director of internal security in Bahrain at a press conference where he reports the exposure of a terrorist squad handled by Iran. Left: Personal information about the four operatives of the terrorist squad who escaped to Iran (Twitter account of the Bahraini ministry of the interior, November 15, 2017).

► The operatives of the terrorist squad were instructed by the IRGC to carry out attacks in Bahrain, including attacks on public figures and blowing up three oil pipelines (Twitter account of the Bahraini ministry of the interior, November 15, 2017).

- ◆ **On February 12 and 14, 2017**, the squad **attacked a Bahraini security force** patrol with an IED. Three vehicles were damaged.
- ◆ **On August 13, 2017**, the squad attacked a **Bahraini security force patrol** with an IED.
- ◆ **On October 27, 2016**, the squad detonated a pipe bomb in an attack on a **bus carrying policemen to Manama**, the capital of Bahrain. One policeman was killed and another was wounded.

Appendix B

Selection of Reactions to the Arab League Announcement

Rejection and condemnation

Iran

- ▶ Iran was severely critical of the final announcement issued by the Arab League. **Iranian President Hassan Rouhani**, in a speech delivered in Tehran declaring the end of ISIS in Syria and Iraq,² condemned the Arab League and criticized its silence regarding ISIS's crimes. He said that when ISIS terrorists decapitated Syrians in Aleppo, and when the citizens of Yemen were bombed from the air, the Arab League did nothing (Fars, November 21, 2017).
- ▶ **Hossein Jaber Ansari, deputy foreign minister for Arab-African affairs**, said the Arab League had made its decision because of **pressure from Saudi Arabia**. The decision, he claimed, conflicted with the policies of many Arab states, which wanted to broaden ties with Iran (Iranian Diplomacy website, November 20, 2017). **Yahya Rahim Safavi, senior military advisor to the Supreme Leader**, said that it was a great shame that some of the Arab states, which had been **enslaved by Saudi Arabia's dollars**, had designated Hezbollah as a terrorist organization (Mehr, November 21, 2017).
- ▶ **The Iranian press also condemned the Arab League's decision**. According to an article in the **radical daily Kayhan** on November 21, 2016, the Arab League had originally been established to counter the "Zionist regime," but since its founding it had done little but issue worthless declarations. **The recent declaration against Iran and Hezbollah, said the article, had been made because of Saudi Arabian pressure**, but all the Arab League was capable of doing was issuing an anti-Iran declarations.

Hezbollah

- ▶ **Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah gave a speech in which he related to the announcement issued by the Arab League** (al-Manar, November 20, 2017). He said:
 - ◆ **Hezbollah, Nasrallah claimed, did not send weapons to the Arab states, with the exception of the Gaza Strip**. He mocked the Arab League for saying Hezbollah supported terrorist organizations in Arab states with advanced weapons and ballistic missiles. He said, "That is a stupid thing to say, a superficial thing, it has no value..."

² Although it was the Islamic State that ended, not ISIS, which continues operating extensively as a terrorist organization.

Hezbollah, he claimed, had not sent any weapons at all to Yemen, or Bahrain, or Kuwait, or Iraq ("Not ballistic missiles, not advanced weapons, not a single gun to the Arabs..."³ However, Nasrallah did admit that **Hezbollah had sent weapons, including Kornet anti-tank missiles, to the Gaza Strip.**⁴ As to Syria, Nasrallah said that Hezbollah operatives in Syria were fighting with their own weapons.

◆ **Israel, not Hezbollah, is the threat to Lebanon:**

- According to Nasrallah, several foreign ministers, especially those from Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, told Lebanon that its security and stability were being threatened by Hezbollah's weapons. In response Nasrallah claimed that "**the greatest threat to Lebanon's security and stability is, was, and has always been the Israeli occupation.**" That is because the "**weapons of the resistance [i.e., Hezbollah's weapons] are the fundamental factor in [Lebanon's] security and stability,** driving the Israeli occupation out of Lebanon."
- Nasrallah added, in reference to the Arab states, "Who defends Lebanon from Israel? You? Your countries? Your armies? Your planes?...You can help Lebanon by not meddling in its affairs...And don't send us your infidel organizations [i.e., the Salafi jihadist organizations], al-Qaeda and the others, which grew up in the bosom of Wahhabism [an ultraconservative branch of Islam that calls for a return to its roots. It is the main form of Islam practiced in Saudi Arabia], and don't encourage Israel to strike a blow at Lebanon..."

◆ **Hezbollah was in no way involved in launching a ballistic missile at Riyadh:**

According to Nasrallah, the Saudi Arabian foreign minister said the missile was manufactured in Iran, that Iranians brought it into the region of Yemen controlled by the Houthis, and that **Hezbollah operatives fired the missile at Riyadh.** In response Nasrallah said, "I categorically deny the accusation. **No one [from] Hezbollah in Lebanon has any connection to the missile,** not to missiles launched in the past and not to missiles launched in the future" (Ahed, November 20, 2017).

³ Hezbollah's support for Iran's proxies in Iraq, Bahrain and Yemen is mainly accomplished through the deployment of military experts and training. Weapons for the various organizations including the Houthis in Yemen, **are sent by Iran.**

⁴ **Salah al-Bardawil, a member of Hamas' overall political bureau,** was asked in an interview with the London-based newspaper al-Sharq al-Awsat about Nasrallah's admission that Hezbollah had sent Kornet missiles to the Gaza Strip. Asked if Hamas had received the missiles, Salah al-Bardawil said that he did not deny there was cooperation between Hezbollah, Hamas, the "resistance" organizations and Iran (but he did not directly answer the question).



Hassan Nasrallah responds to the decision of the Arab League to designate Hezbollah as a terrorist organization (al-Manar, November 20, 2017).

Palestinian terrorist organizations

Hamas

► The Hamas movement issued an announcement stating that **it objected to the representation of Hezbollah in Lebanon and the [Palestinian] "resistance organization" as terrorist organizations**. The terrorism of Israel ("the Zionist enemy") against the Palestinian people is what should be objected to. Hamas called on the Arab-Muslim nation to unite to deal with the "Zionist enemy" and help the Palestinian people restore their rights (Hamas website, November 20, 2017).

► Other responses from senior Hamas figures were the following:

- ◆ **Musa Abu Marzouq, a member of Hamas' overall political bureau**, wrote that **Hezbollah is not a terrorist organization** and that "if the designation is passed **we [can all expect] the same fate**" (Twitter account of Musa Abu Marzouq, November 19, 2017). He said such a decision could lead to an alliance with Israel and putting the "forces of the resistance," among them Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) "in the crosshairs" (Twitter account of Musa Abu Marzouq, November 20, 2017).
- ◆ **Mahmoud al-Zahar, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, wrote that Hezbollah is a "resistance movement" which liberated south Lebanon territories = from Israel. Hezbollah liberated them through the use of resistance and calling it "terrorist activity" will only help support the "Zionist program" (al-Manar, November 22, 2017).

The Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)

► **The PIJ expressed** surprise that the Arab League's announcement did not include a condemnation of Israel's actions against the Palestinians, but rather condemned those who "oppose the Zionist occupation and support and support the rights of the nation of Palestine." The PIJ **condemned the description of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization**, saying that such a decision served only Israel (Paltoday, November 20, 2017).

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)

► The PFLP said in a statement that the Arab League's description of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization was "**aggression against the entire Arab nation**, and reflects Saudi Arabia's hegemony in the League." The PFLP called on "the forces of liberation around the globe" **to unite around the "axis of resistance" [i.e., the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis]**. Those forces should confront American policy and to oppose the recent Arab League decisions against Hezbollah ("the Lebanese resistance") and Iran (PFLP website, November 20, 2017).

Support for the announcement

Saudi Arabia

► On November 20, 2017, **'Adel al-Jubeir, the Saudi Arabian foreign minister**, was interviewed by the Egyptian Extra News channel after the emergency meeting of the Arab League held in Cairo. He argued that **Iran was a threat to the national security of the Arab states** because of its intervention in their internal affairs and its support for terrorist groups. He called on the international community to take steps against Iran to put an end to its policies. He said that **[the Saudi Arabians] were examining additional measures against Hezbollah to exert pressure on the organization**. He added that **Hezbollah launders money in Lebanon and deals drugs, and that it is an Arab militia taking orders from Iran** (Extra News YouTube channel, November 20, 2017).

Jordan

► **Ayman Safadi, the Jordanian foreign minister**, speaking before the Arab League meeting in Cairo, said Arab security was a common cause and any threat to one country was a joint threat. He argued **the security of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain were integral to the security of Jordan**, and therefore Jordan condemned and rejected any attack on them (al-Hadath News, November 19, 2017).

Bahrain

► **Khalid bin Ahmed al-Khalifa, the Bahraini foreign minister**, praised "the decision condemning Iran and its regional proxies, led by 'terrorist Hezbollah in Lebanon.' " The decision, he said, was determined support of the security and stability of both Saudi Arabia and Bahrain (Twitter account of Bahrain's foreign ministry, November 19, 2017). He added that "we would like to remind the president of Lebanon that today's allies [i.e., Hezbollah] are those who were formerly enemies, who plotted against him, who killed Rafiq al-Hariri, who turned themselves into a de facto army and put Lebanon in a dangerous situation" (Twitter account of Bahrain's foreign ministry, November 19, 2017).

The UAE



Hezbollah secretary general Hassan Nasrallah salutes the flag of his Iranian patron (al-Bayan Media Center, November 24, 2017).

► **Anwar Qarqash, the UAE foreign minister**, praised the Arab League decision condemning Iran's regional policy. He said Iran's objective was to undermine regional stability. He added that the decision "criticized the terrorist character of Hezbollah, Iran's proxy, which plays an important role in regional destabilization" (Twitter account of the UAE's foreign ministry, November 20, 2017). He called on Lebanon to preserve the principle of not interfering in the affairs of its neighbors or in regional affairs (Twitter account of the UAE's foreign ministry, November 21, 2017).