



Iranian Website Published a Speech Delivered by Hezbollah Secretary General at a Closed Forum Expressing Total Devotion to Iran's Supreme Leader. Similar Statements were Issued Previously by Hezbollah Officials

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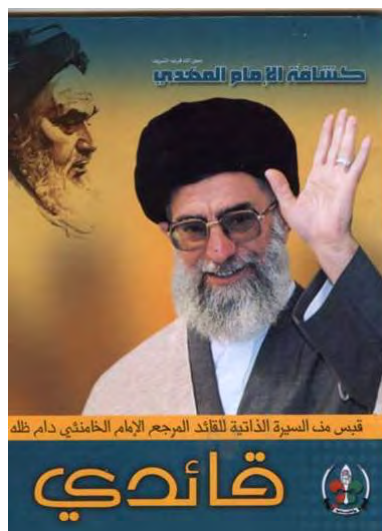
Executive Summary

On March 12, the conservative Iranian website Farda News published a **full transcript of a speech delivered by Hezbollah Secretary General, Hassan Nasrallah, at a conference of Iranian nationals residing in Lebanon**. In the speech, **Nasrallah declared that his organization is wholly committed to the Iranian Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, and that the commitment to Khamenei trumps the organization's commitment to the Lebanese constitution**. This speech, which was not initially publicized in Lebanese or Arab media outlets, encountered **scathing critiques from Hezbollah's opponents in Lebanon** which forced the organization to **issue, a day later, an official denial of the content of the speech**. **Following this, the Iranian website removed the report and issued a retraction.**

► We assess **that this is an authentic speech, which was probably intended for a small closed forum of Iranians residing in Lebanon and not for publication**. The Iranian website Farda News, which published Nasrallah's speech, is semi-official, and to the best of our knowledge, is not used as a channel to spread false news. **The content of the speech is in line with positions expressed previously** by senior Iranian and Hezbollah officials **regarding Hezbollah's devotion to Iran and its Supreme Leader, Khamenei**. **Sayed Yahya Rahim Safavi, the former Commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), who serves as Khamenei's Adviser of Military Affairs (twice) defined the connection between Nasrallah and Khamenei thusly: "Sayed Hassan Nasrallah sees himself as a soldier of the Iranian Supreme Leader..." (see more in the appendix).**

► **Nasrallah's speech demonstrates, once again, the strength of the bond between Iran and Hezbollah. This bond has only deepened in recent years in light of Hezbollah's expanding mission during the Syrian civil war. Iran, for its part, sees Hezbollah as its favored strategic arm that serves its struggle against Israel, policies in Syria, meddling across the Middle East and its drive for regional hegemony.** Hezbollah's extensive and effective involvement in the fighting in Syria and the assistance the organization has provided

to the pro-Iranian Shi'ite militias **in Iraq and in Yemen**, have clearly demonstrated to the Iranians Hezbollah's importance as the preeminent tool at Iran's disposal to advance its regional interests.



Iran's Supreme Leader as the Source of Emulation for Hezbollah: the cover of a booklet issued by Hezbollah's scouts movement under the title "My Commander," which was captured by the IDF during the 2006 Lebanon War. Khamenei is described as Hezbollah's Source of Emulation in the booklet.

► Hezbollah's denial of Nasrallah's speech, in response to the scathing criticism that arose in Lebanon, **demonstrates Hezbollah's preference to try to conceal their complete subordination to Iran's leadership, and to avoid publicly and explicitly admitting that the organization's loyalty to Iran overrides its loyalty to the Lebanese state, its institutions and its constitution.** Such an admission would cause a backlash, one that Hezbollah is particularly interested in avoiding at this sensitive timing, **ahead of the parliamentary elections set to be held in Lebanon in May 2018;** and due to the growing criticism of Hezbollah and its ties to Iran inside Lebanon, and in the Arab world, an approach championed by Saudi Arabia.



On the right: Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei and Hezbollah Secretary General, Nasrallah (Tasnim: November 12, 2014). On the left: The Supreme Leader Khamenei, Hezbollah Secretary General, Nasrallah, and the Commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, Qasem Soleimani (the website of the Supreme Leader, August 11, 2016)

Publication of Nasrallah's Speech on a Conservative Iranian Website

- ▶ On March 12, **the conservative Iranian website Farda News** published the full transcript of a speech delivered by Hezbollah Secretary General, Hassan Nasrallah, at a conference of Iranians residing in Lebanon. In the speech, which according to the website was delivered on **March 10, 2018**, Hezbollah's secretary general declared that **his organization is wholly committed to the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei, and that the commitment to Khamenei supersedes Hezbollah's commitment to the (Lebanese) constitution.** Nasrallah stated that **Hezbollah is obligated to execute not only Khamenei's instructions, but also his "suggestions and ideas."** According to Nasrallah, when Hezbollah's Shura Council deliberates on a matter, it avoids any action **if there is a possibility that Khamenei would be displeased by the decision.**
- ▶ To demonstrate the depth of his loyalty to Khamenei, Nasrallah recounted how **after the former Egyptian President, Mohammad Morsi, was toppled in a coup in 2013, he reacted to it with joy**, as he was displeased with Morsi's policies. **When the Iranian Leader Khamenei was informed about it, he was displeased with Nasrallah's reaction, arguing that there is no reason to celebrate the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood**, despite the wrong-headed policies they have adopted. Upon learning this, **Nasrallah regretted his reaction, and when he met with Khamenei several months later, he apologized to the Supreme Leader and asked for his forgiveness.**

- ▶ Nasrallah also stated that **Hezbollah became a global force due to its loyalty to the Supreme Leader of Iran**, and that Hezbollah's commitment to the Guardianship of the Jurist doctrine is even stronger than that of many Iranians. He maintained that despite the internal disagreements in Iran, all the political currents in the Islamic Republic have supported Hezbollah over the years. He added that **Iran discusses and consults with Hezbollah on regional matters and provides the organization with money, weapons and other supplies, but it does not dictate to Hezbollah how to act.**
- ▶ Nasrallah remarked that **Hezbollah is not afraid to publicly thank Iran for its support to the organization and proclaim the deep connection it has with the Islamic Republic.** The organization is proud to be at the service of the Supreme Leader and the Islamic Republic and is happy to sacrifice itself for them. Nasrallah added that if it were not for Iran, the Shi'ite communities in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq would have been wiped out by ISIS. Nasrallah called the (Christian) Lebanese President, Michel Aoun, a Hezbollah ally, "a descendent of the Leader of the Faithful", an appellation of Ali bin Abu Taleb, the first Shi'ite Imam, to express that the Christian Michel Aoun can be regarded as a real ally of the Shi'ite sect.

The Responses to the Publication: Backlash in Lebanon, Hezbollah's Denial and the Retraction of the Report

- ▶ Uncharacteristically, Nasrallah's speech was not published in Lebanese or Arab media outlets. In Iran too, the speech was featured only on a small number of websites. **A day after the publication (March 13, 2018), Hezbollah issued an official denial of the report published by Farda News.** In the statement, which was published on the al-Mayadin network, it was claimed that **there is no basis to the alleged statements attributed to Nasrallah in his meeting with the Iranian community in Lebanon.**
- ▶ This denial was issued in response to **backlash in Lebanon following the publication of the content of the speech.** Noufal Daou, a member of the March 14 Coalition that opposes Hezbollah, and an independent candidate from the Keserwan and Jbeil region in the parliamentary elections, **called on Nasrallah to apologize to the Lebanese people and retract his statements that harm the Lebanese state.** He wondered how Lebanese leaders, and those who believe in the Lebanese constitution, can stay silent in light of Nasrallah's

statement that the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist supersedes the Lebanese constitution (al-Nashra, March 13, 2018).

Shortly afterwards, **Farda News removed the report from its website**, and published a retraction stating that **the source of the speech was “unreliable”** and that **the publication of the report was a mistake of one of the website’s reporters**. The website apologized to its readers for the publication.

Assessment of the Veracity of the Speech

► Although it can not be completely ruled out that this is a fabrication, **in our assessment this speech is authentic for the following reasons:**

- ◆ The wording of the speech, which was published in full, matches Nasrallah’s style and beliefs. These positions were previously expressed by Nasrallah and senior Hezbollah and Iranian officials regarding the commitment of the organization to Iran and its leader (see appendix).
- ◆ The speech was published exclusively on the Iranian website Farda News, which is a semi-official website, and as far as we know (and unlike, for example, a number of websites affiliated with the Iranian opposition) does not serve as a channel for publishing false or fabricated reports.
- ◆ One can also assume that if Hezbollah opponents intended to fabricate a speech by Nasrallah to use it as a cudgel against the organization, especially in light of the upcoming parliamentary elections in Lebanon, they would have preferred to publish it in Lebanese or Arab media outlets and not on an Iranian website.

Appendix¹

Statements by Senior Iranian and Hezbollah Officials on Hezbollah's Subordination to the Leader Khamenei

Statement by Khamenei's Military Adviser

► On **June 2, 2012**, **Sayed Yahya Rahim Safavi**, former Revolutionary Guards commander and Ali Khamenei's current Military Affairs Adviser, was interviewed by the Iranian channel Press TV. One of the topics under discussion was Hezbollah's involvement in a possible Iraninian-Israeli confrontation. Safavi stated that Hezbollah had thousands of rockets, and if Israel wanted to attack Iran, **it was extremely likely that Hezbollah would** use those rockets to **attack Israel**. He added that **he regarded Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah as "a soldier of the Leader" Khamenei**. He added that Iran also had the ability to attack Israel with its long-range rockets: "There is no place within the Zionist entity that is out of range of our rockets" (Press TV, June 2, 2012). **Safavi made a similar statement in 2008**, asserting that **"...Sayed Hassan Nasrallah regards himself as a soldier of the Iranian Leader** and the men of Hezbollah take their example from the brave men and women of Iran" (Fars, November 16, 2008).



Sayed Yahya Rahim Safavi during a speech in which he labeled Nasrallah as "a soldier" of Khamenei. In the background are photos of Khomeini and Khamenei (Fars, November 16, 2008)

¹ The examples provided in this appendix are based on previous publications of the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center. See for example the report from June 17, 2012, "Hezbollah as the strategic long arm of the Iranian regime," accessible at: <http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/20351/>

Statement by Naim Qassem, Deputy Secretary General of Hezbollah

► On **several occasions, Sheikh Naim Qassem**, Hezbollah's Deputy Secretary General, addressed Hezbollah's subordination to the Supreme Leader of Iran Khamenei:

◆ During a lengthy interview to the Lebanese newspaper **Nahar al-Shabab** (July 30, 2009), Sheikh Naim Qassem was asked about the relationship between the Iranian leadership and Hezbollah. He answered that Hezbollah was a "religious-political party" with a Shi'ite identity and that **it had to acquire religious and political legitimacy from Iran's leadership, which had the authority to grant it**. He said that as a political party, Hezbollah regarded the **Imam Khomeini** as the ruling Islamic jurist, who grants the party its legitimacy. After him, it is **Imam Khamenei**, who **"determines our guidelines, releasing us from blame and giving us legitimacy."**

◆ Sheikh Qassem provided an example for the significance of the kind of religious directive from Khamenei that Hezbollah must adhere to: **if, for example, Khamenei has determined that fighting Israel is a religious duty, then "anyone killed in fighting Israel will be, to the best of our understanding, a martyr."** However, should Leader Khamenei decide that the war was forbidden, "then the dead man will go to hell, because he was not permitted to fight in the war." Sheikh Qassem emphasized that **Hezbollah could not begin an operation against Israel without religious authorization from the Guardian Islamic Jurist in Iran.**² However, he said, the Islamic Jurist **is not supposed to go into detail** about how his ruling will be carried out (timing, necessary weapons, etc.), and such things are left to the discretion of Hezbollah.

² Vali-e Faqih, the Guardian Islamic Jurist, the title of Ayatollah Khomeini in the past and of his current predecessor, Ali Khamenei.



Sheikh Naim Qassem, Deputy Secretary General of Hezbollah, during a speech at a ceremony organized by the Iranian embassy in Beirut on the anniversary of the passing of Khomeini (al-Manar, June 3, 2009)

- ◆ Two years prior, **Sheikh Qassem made similar remarks**. Interviewed on April 16, 2007 by **Al-Kawthar**, the Iranian Arabic TV channel, he said that **Hezbollah did not determine its policies by itself**. He said that **Hezbollah accepted the authority of the Iranian leadership and received religious guidance from it regarding every facet of its struggle against Israel** (for example when to fire rockets and carry out suicide bombing attacks, which require religious sanction from the Iranian leadership). In describing the source of Hezbollah's authority, he often used the term **vali-e faqih**, the Guardian Islamic Jurist, when **referring to Khomeini and his heir, Khamenei**.

Qassem's remarks show that **Hezbollah's political and military instructions come from Iran** although Hezbollah is not only a terrorist organization but a Lebanese political party as well, part of the Lebanese government, and an influential actor in Lebanese politics. Sheikh Qassem repeatedly made it clear that in matters of principle, including **when to go to war, fire rockets and carry out suicide bombings, all required authorization from the Iranian leadership**. He asserted that the Iranian leadership did not go into details regarding how to carry out such actions, but there is no doubt that Tehran has both the capability and the tools to **control the nature and intensity of the actions of Hezbollah**, the organization that serves as Iran's long arm along Israel's northern border.

- A further example for a statement regarding **Hezbollah's total dependence on Iran** can be found in a speech Hassan Nasrallah delivered on June 24, 2016. In the speech, Nasrallah stated that **all of Hezbollah's budget comes directly from Iran** and not through Lebanese banks ("Hezbollah's budget, salaries, money, food, drink, weapons, all of this comes from Iran... as long as there is money in Iran, we have money.") **Nasrallah thanked the Supreme**

Leader of Iran Khamenei for his support for Hezbollah throughout all the years of the organization's existence and until today.³



Hezbollah secretary general, Hassan Nasrallah, delivers a speech, June 24, 2016 (Al-Ahed, June 24, 2016)

³ See in this context the publication of the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center report from July 10, 2016: "Nasrallah's Speech: Hezbollah's Budget Is Entirely Funded by Iran, Including Weapons and Operatives' Salaries Analysis of Significance and Implications." Accessible at: <http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/21033/>