



Reactions to Britain's decision to ban Hezbollah

March 4, 2019

Main reactions

On March 1, 2019, the British Parliament approved the decision to recognize **Hezbollah in its entirety as a terrorist organization**. According to the decision, any person charged with belonging to or supporting Hezbollah in British territory is liable to imprisonment for up to 10 years. This is a significant decision **as up to now only Hezbollah's military wing (since 2001) and foreign security unit (since 2008) have been designated in Britain as a terrorist organization**. This means that from now on, Hezbollah's political wing, including Hezbollah members serving as ministers in the recently formed Lebanese government, **will be designated as terrorists**.

► Among its reasons for passing the law in Parliament, the British government noted that Hezbollah continues to stockpile weapons in contravention of a UN Security Council Resolution (i.e., Resolution 1701). According to British Home Secretary Sajid Javid, the reason for this step is Hezbollah's attempts to destabilize the already fragile situation in the Middle East. According to the Home Secretary and other ministers, **it is now difficult to distinguish between the organization's military wing and its political wing, (a distinction) which no longer exists in practice**. Therefore, it was decided to declare Hezbollah in its entirety as a terrorist organization (British government website, Home Secretary Sajid Javid's Twitter account, February 25, 2019).



**Tweet posted by British Home Secretary Sajid Javid
(Home Secretary Sajid Javid's Twitter account, February 25, 2019)**

- ▶ **Hezbollah responded formally to the decision on March 1, 2019**, after the British Parliament approved it. Hezbollah vehemently rejected the accusations of terrorism “which the British government had fabricated” and stressed that the organization was a “resistance movement” against the Israeli occupation. The announcement attacks Britain, perceiving it as a “proxy in the ranks of the American patron.” The announcement stresses that Hezbollah would continue to “defend Lebanon, its liberty and its independence.” **Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Bahram Qassem** also issued a statement denouncing Britain, stressing that Hezbollah plays a key role in all aspects of life in Lebanon and that it enjoys extensive support from the people. He added that the decision harmed Lebanon’s stability and disregarded international law (Tasnim News Agency, March 2, 2019).
- ▶ Media reports also included unofficial reactions by Hezbollah members as well as quotes of statements made by so-called Hezbollah sources who chose to remain anonymous. Most of those who reacted noted that **Britain’s decision would not have any practical effect on the ground**. Some of them **commended France’s position** after French President Macron announced in response to the British move that France had ties with Hezbollah’s political wing and that it refused to include a Lebanese party with a representation in the government on the list of terrorist organizations.

The separation between Hezbollah's military wing and its political wing

► Hezbollah's terrorist activity has been going on for 37 years, a long period during which considerable evidence has accumulated about the terrorist nature of Hezbollah, which is the main proxy of Iran's policy of "exporting" terrorism and subversion. This evidence, which includes extensive and reliable intelligence, is in the hands of the security services of the US, European countries and Israel, which have been targets of Iranian and Hezbollah terrorist attacks for a long time. In addition, the law enforcement agencies of the various countries have accumulated considerable information, based on interrogations of terrorists who were detained, proving that Hezbollah is a terrorist organization handled by Iran.

► The separation between Hezbollah's military wing and its political wing **is baseless** since Hezbollah's military-terrorist wing and its political wing are intertwined. Hezbollah's military power strengthens its political power in Lebanon, while its political and social activities are utilized in order to strengthen the military wing and to obtain internal Lebanese legitimacy for its existence. Moreover, Hezbollah's institutions and its leaders, headed by Hassan Nasrallah, set the policy for employing the organization's military-terrorist force, which **deliberately makes use of violence against civilians in a variety of means and methods** (rocket fire, use of suicide bombers, etc.).

► **Senior Hezbollah figures made it clear in the past that in their view, it was impossible to distinguish between the military wing and the political wing:**

◆ When Hassan Nasrallah was asked: **"Who makes the decision about operations: the operatives on the ground or the political leadership?"** he replied, **"The leadership of Hezbollah.** The issue no longer pertains solely to operatives on the ground. **The leadership of the organization is the leadership of the resistance** [i.e., the military-terrorist infrastructure] **and it is the one that considers all the data, the interests of the resistance and its policy of operation.** The brothers on the ground [i.e., the operatives] are the ones who carry out the policy" (Al-Majalla, March 24, 2002).

◆ **Muhammad Fneish**, senior Hezbollah operative and a Hezbollah MP in the Lebanese Parliament: "They are trying to tempt Hezbollah in order to curb it. The goal is not to harm the political role [of Hezbollah] but rather its military wing. **However, I can say**

that the military wing and the political wing of Hezbollah cannot be separated”

(Al-Manar, January 18, 2002).

◆ Nevertheless, most European countries still make the distinction between Hezbollah’s military wing and its political wing, contrary to the American position (see **Appendix B**). Britain, on the other hand, maintained a united front with the US position when it declared Hezbollah in its entirety as a terrorist organization and imposed sanctions on it and on anyone who helps it.

Reactions to the British resolution

Hezbollah

- ▶ Hezbollah published an official response to the British decision only on March 1, 2019, after the British Parliament approved the decision. According to the organization's response, Hezbollah is a movement of "resistance" against the Israeli occupation and no country in the world is allowed to accuse the movement of terrorism. According to Hezbollah's statement, the decision was intended to please the US administration, of which Britain is a proxy. Furthermore, Hezbollah stated, in its decision, the British government offended the Lebanese people, which elected Hezbollah to represent it in the parliament and in the government. The announcement is concluded by the assertion that nothing will prevent Hezbollah from continuing to defend Lebanon, its freedom and its independence (Al-Ahed, March 1, 2019).
- ▶ According to a statement by **Hezbollah Deputy Secretary-General Naim Qassem, Britain is not allowed to decide who is a terrorist organization** because it is a sympathizer and supporter of Israel. According to him, the decision represents proof for Hezbollah that it wields major influence in the world (Lebanese News Agency, March 1, 2019).
- ▶ Before the decision was accepted, unofficial responses were published on behalf of Hezbollah MPs and a senior Hezbollah figure:
 - ◆ **Hezbollah** Loyalty to Resistance bloc **MP Ali Fayad** said that in view of Hezbollah's adherence to its principles, nothing can derail it from its line. Fayad expressed satisfaction with the position of Lebanese Foreign Minister Jubran Bassil and noted that he was expecting pressure (on Lebanon) to increase in the international arena (Al-Nashra website, February 26, 2019).
 - ◆ **Hezbollah** Loyalty to Resistance bloc **MP Walid Sakariya** said that Britain's decision to classify both parts of Hezbollah, the military and the political, as a terrorist organization was totally unacceptable. However, he said, it is not puzzling because Britain is completely subjugated to the policy of the United States. He further noted that they were not puzzled at these positions of Britain and the United States in view of the American policy. Their policy is completely hostile to the "resistance" and to any party which stands up for its right to Palestine and totally supportive to Israel, to the extent of recognizing Jerusalem as its capital. Sakariya also commended the French

position and said that it was representing a more reasonable policy pursuing its interests in the region (Al-Nashra website, February 26, 2019).

◆ **Jamil Jabak, Hezbollah member who was recently elected to serve as health minister in the Lebanese government** gave an interview to the Voice of Lebanon Radio. In his interview, he pointed out that his job in the Health Ministry is about services and has no connection to Hezbollah's internal political or military activity. He ruled out the possibility that the British decision would impact Lebanon's Health Ministry (LBC Channel website, February 26, 2019).

► Some of Hezbollah's reactions were published on behalf of what the media described as "close associates who wished to remain unknown." According to those sources, the British "invented" a distinction which does not exist between two wings in Hezbollah, thereby putting themselves at a difficult position. **According to those sources, the British position will have negative reverberations on British diplomacy in the Middle East**, as by taking this step, they turned themselves into an enemy of a great part of the Lebanese people. Thus, they lost maneuverability allowing them to carry out steps not only in Lebanon but in the entire region (Addiyar Carlos Chales website, February 26, 2019).

► Other sources in Hezbollah noted that they had expected the British position for several months, but expressed their puzzlement at the timing, close to the establishment of the new government in Lebanon. Those sources pointed out that **the new decision would have no practical influence, particularly in light of the fact that it was not accompanied by a sanction package**. Hezbollah sources who are encouraged by the French position **estimated that Europe would not follow Britain** and noted that Hezbollah would initiate contact with European countries to sort out their position towards the British decision. At the same time, those sources did not rule out the possibility that the US administration would exert pressure to change Europe's position towards Hezbollah (Lebanon 24 website, February 26, 2019).

► The Al-Joumhouria daily quoted Hezbollah sources who said that the action of the British government **would not affect Hezbollah**. According to them, this step seems like an act of solidarity with the US position, which, as is known, did not affect either the very existence of Hezbollah or its position. **The sources also ruled out the possibility that the British position would have any kind of influence on the political reality in Lebanon and the activity of the Lebanese government**. They welcomed the positions expressed by Prime

Minister Hariri and Foreign Minister Jubran Bassil (Al-Joumhouria website, February 27, 2019).

Twitter accounts affiliated with Hezbollah

► A sample examination of Twitter accounts affiliated with Hezbollah revealed that the British decision was hardly mentioned. Most of the accounts did not refer to it at all. Following are examples from the Abu al-Fadl Shuman Twitter account from February 25, 2019:

- ◆ Britain considers Hezbollah terrorist comprising its two wings, the military and the political!
- ◆ Your decisions are worthless and have no influence.
- ◆ It's the decision of the ground [operatives], you fools.
- ◆ It's the decision of the reality and the balance of power, you idiots.
- ◆ As Sayyid [Nasrallah] said a while ago: "You can wet your sanctions and drink their water."
- ◆ Israeli planes are flying at a low altitude over Nabatieh... and Britain classifies Hezbollah as a terrorist organization. Prostitution pure and simple! Unfortunately, the positions of some of the Lebanese are no different from those of Britain; that is, we were not puzzled by the information. The result: They both advocate Israel's security and whoever speaks about Lebanon's sovereignty is speaking nonsense and should shut up.
- ◆ So long as the United States, Israel, the Gulf and Britain consider Hezbollah as a terrorist party, I think terrorism is a very good thing.

The distinction made by Western and Arab countries between Hezbollah's military wing and its political wing

Western countries

► Hezbollah has been declared a terrorist organization by the United States and a number of Western countries. However, most European countries make a distinction between the organization's military wing, which they have declared a terrorist organization, and its political wing. In 2005, several European countries also began to ban the broadcasts of Hezbollah's Al-Manar Channel, on the grounds that it broadcasts anti-Semitic incitement. But aside from this, they did not take the obvious step of outlawing Hezbollah in its entirety.

► Overview:

- ◆ **Israel:** Israel declared Hezbollah as a terrorist organization, with no distinction between its military and its political wing (list of declarations issued by the Israeli Ministry of Defense).
- ◆ **The United States:** The US declared Hezbollah as a terrorist organization responsible for the deaths of more than 300 US citizens, including around 200 US Marines, killed in a Hezbollah attack in Lebanon in 1983 (US Department of State website). In August 2012, the United States imposed economic sanctions on Hezbollah and froze its assets because of its support for President Assad's regime in Syria (US Department of State website). In light of President Trump's new policy on Iran, the US Congress approved two bills expanding the scope of the sanctions imposed on Hezbollah and its supporters in a previous bill (from 2015). Both bills were approved by US President Donald Trump (October 25, 2018)¹.
- ◆ **The European Union:** On July 22, 2013, following the terrorist attack in Burgas, Bulgaria, the EU countries agreed to recognize Hezbollah's military wing as a terrorist organization and added it to the list of terrorist organizations. The step was initiated by Britain, France and the Netherlands (Ynet, July 22, 2013). As a result, sanctions were imposed on Hezbollah, such as the freezing of assets in the 28 EU countries. However,

¹ For further information see the ITIC's Information Bulletin from November 4, 2018: "The United States recently designated Hezbollah as one of the five leading transnational criminal groups and approved bills intensifying the sanctions imposed on Hezbollah and on those supporting it."

for the time being, the European Union has refrained from declaring the entire organization as a terrorist organization.

- ◆ **Canada:** Hezbollah in its entirety was outlawed on October 12, 2002, without making any distinction between the military and political entities (Canadian Government website).

- ◆ **France:** Only the military wing was outlawed. In response to Britain's decision to include the organization's political activity as well, French President Emmanuel Macron noted that they would not declare the organization's political wing as a terrorist organization because France refuses to include Lebanese who are represented in the government on the terrorist lists.

- ◆ **Germany:** On January 24, 2005, after the deportation of a Hezbollah operative from the country, the court in Düsseldorf ruled that the organization was leading the struggle against Israel "with brutal disregard for human life." Germany does not have its own list of terrorist organizations and it adopts the list of terrorist organizations of the European Union (which does not distinguish between the military wing and the political wing), although Hezbollah's Al-Manar TV broadcasts have been banned in Germany.

- ◆ **The Netherlands:** Hezbollah in its entirety has been declared a terrorist organization in the Netherlands.

Arab countries

► **In inter-Arab forums, Hezbollah has been declared as a terrorist organization by most Arab countries, without making a distinction between Hezbollah's military wing and its political wing.** On November 19, 2017, the Arab League held an emergency meeting of foreign ministers in Cairo, at the request of Saudi Arabia. The main issue discussed at the meeting was the intervention by Iran and its proxies in the internal affairs of the Arab countries. The closing announcement of the conference strongly condemned Iran and the "Lebanese terrorist organization Hezbollah" acting on its behalf. The announcement included Paragraph 9, which states: **"Placing responsibility on Hezbollah, the Lebanese terrorist [organization], a participant in the Lebanese government, for supporting terrorism and terrorist groups in the Arab states by supplying them with advanced weapons and ballistic missiles. It should be stressed that Hezbollah must stop spreading**

extremism and sectarianism, stop intervening in the internal matters of the [Arab] states, and stop supporting regional terrorism and terrorists.”



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



Iran and Hezbollah are cultivating terrorism and the civil war in the Arab world: cartoon in the wake of the Arab League’s decision at its emergency meeting in Cairo (Al-Bayan, UAE, November 22, 2017).

► This was not the first declaration of its kind since it was **preceded by additional declarations in inter-Arab forums**, including meetings of the Arab states’ Council of the Foreign Ministers and Council of Ministers of the Interior in 2016. At its meeting in Cairo (March 11, 2016), the **Arab states’ Council of Foreign Ministers decided to designate Hezbollah as a terrorist organization**. Lebanon and Iraq voted against the decision; Algeria abstained (Al-Arabiya, March 12, 2016). The decision came after **the decision by the interior ministers of several Arab states designating Hezbollah as a terrorist organization** at a

meeting held on March 2, 2016, in Tunisia (Al-Jazeera, March 11, 2016). At a meeting on March 3, 2016, **the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** also designated Hezbollah as a terrorist organization (Al-Jazeera, March 3, 2017).