

Hezbollah MPs step up attacks on US over Lebanon 'meddling'

Author:

Sun, 2019-11-24 01:04

BEIRUT: Hezbollah and its allies in the Lebanese government on Saturday widened their attacks on the US over alleged meddling in the country's political future.

In an interview with the Central News Agency (Al-Markazia), Muhammad Fneish, Hezbollah's minister in the caretaker government, referred to "foreign interference in our affairs" and said: "We want to form a sovereign government that is distant from US desires and foreign accounts."

He said that recent statements by former US ambassador to Lebanon Jeffrey Feltman had "complicated matters."

Feltman told a US House of Representatives hearing last Tuesday that most Lebanese people have lost faith in Hezbollah and that there is growing anger against Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil for providing "Christian cover" for the militant party.

The comments sparked outrage in Lebanon with Hezbollah and its allies accusing the former envoy of "interfering in Lebanon's internal affairs." Hezbollah Deputy Secretary-General Sheikh Naim Qassem joined the criticism on Saturday, accusing the US of "meddling in the formation of a new Lebanese government."

"Hezbollah is determined not to fall into strife," he said, adding: "I do not see signs of a civil war in Lebanon."

As widespread street protests in the country entered their 38th day, MP Salim Aoun, a member of the parliamentary bloc loyal to the president and the Free Patriotic Movement, claimed that protesters have created a "political movement."

"No matter what we give them, nothing pleases them," he said, accusing international bodies of backing the demonstrations.

"We know who is intervening and what their goals are," Aoun said.

Amal MP and Hezbollah ally Ali Bazzi asked: "Is it true that there is aim to create a political vacuum and chaos in the country?"

Russian Ambassador to Lebanon Alexander Zasytkin also questioned the motives of the civil movement. Speaking in Beirut, he said that "people's demands have turned against Hezbollah, and this is a very serious matter."

Zasytkin urged "the Lebanese parties to find a compromise solution that satisfies everyone on the formation of a government."

However, former Future Movement MP Mustafa Alloush described Hezbollah's claims of US meddling as "ridiculous."

"To say that the US is behind a movement that brought thousands of people on to the streets to demand tax cuts and jobs is a ridiculous accusation. Will they prosecute people for high treason?" he asked.

"Hezbollah supporters who are paid by Iran, take up arms, and fight and kill people, are not held accountable. How does this make sense?"

Public affairs analyst Walid Fakhreddine also rejected claims of a US

conspiracy, saying: "We have seen these accusations at the beginning of the movement and now they are back. We were accused of treason and of receiving funding for the protests. They do not understand what is happening. People are now in a different place."

Fakhreddine warned that the ruling class is "dragging the country into financial and economic collapse."

"They insist on leading the country into bankruptcy. What is required is an independent transitional government that will hold early elections," he said. "They think people are revolting because they want to be represented in government. This is not true. The civil movement does not want to share power. We are looking for a homeland. They accuse us of demagoguery. We are a people who want real reform, not their corrupt reform."



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Students burn history books as protests continue in Lebanon
Lebanon confusion: Uneasy calm descends on Beirut amid 'fear of what is to come'

107 Democrats challenge Pompeo's recognition of illegal Israeli settlements

Sun, 2019-11-24 00:41

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's announcement recognizing the legitimacy of Israel's illegal settlement movement has prompted one of the largest protests challenging Israeli policies in the US Congress.

107 members of Congress, all Democrats, signed a letter on Friday (Nov. 22) rebuking Pompeo for his declaration recognizing the settlements.

Only one of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's seven-member Democratic leadership team, Majority Whip James Clyburn of South Carolina, signed the letter. That exposes the hypocrisy of Congressional Democrats, including Pelosi, who have criticized President Donald Trump for shifts in longstanding policy on Israel and Palestine, but refrained from challenging those policies directly or offered counter legislation.

Pompeo's declaration was surprising but not unusual, reflecting the views of past Republican administrations which favor Israel over international law. Even Democratic administrations that criticized the settlements continued to ignore Israel's settlement expansion which grew under every Trump predecessor at an alarming rate, including President Barack Obama.

"The establishment of Israeli civilian settlements in the West Bank is not per se inconsistent with international law," Pompeo said, including several important and ignored qualifications. He added the view did not reflect an opinion on the legal status of any individual settlement, nor was Trump declaring that the settlements were not subject to changes through direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine.

But the declaration itself was enough to prompt the 107 Democrats, led by Congressman Andy Levin, to issue a blistering attack on Trump and Pompeo's actions.

The letter also criticizes Trump's recent decisions to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital outside of a negotiated settlement, the occupied Syrian Golan Heights as part of Israel, annexation of the Jordan Valley, and other actions including the halting of financial aid to Palestine and the closure of the Palestinian Mission in Washington D.C. as undermining peace and encouraging more violence.

The letter warned that the Trump administration's actions and Pompeo's declaration on settlements "would destroy prospects for a two-state solution and lead to a more entrenched and possibly deadlier conflict, this decision erodes the security of both Israel and the US."

The letter is signed by Jewish, Christian and Muslim members including several who have been consistently outspoken in challenging Israel's violence against Palestinian civilians such as Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib, Betty McCollum and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

Not included are Congressman Dan Lipinski, whose Illinois 3rd District represents one of the largest concentrations of Palestinian Americans in the country. Lipinski is being challenged by progressive Marie Newman who has embraced the Two-State Solution and criticized Trump's declarations, and Palestinian-American Rush Darwish. Newman came within 2,000 votes of unseating the five-term Lipinski, while this is Darwish's first election run.

The eight-page rebuke does not hold back on the damage Pompeo and Trump have brought to the delicate Israeli-Palestinian peace process, arguing that by ignoring international law in this respect, the Trump administration is also undermining international law for human rights and undermining "America's moral standing."

"This State Department decision blatantly disregards Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which affirms that any occupying power shall not 'deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies,'" the letter continues.

"In ignoring international law, this administration has undermined America's moral standing and sent a dangerous message to those who do not share our values: Human rights and international law, which have governed the international order and protected US troops and civilians since 1949, no longer apply. If the US unilaterally abandons international and human rights law, we can only expect a more chaotic and brutal 21st century for Americans and our allies, including the Israeli people."

The US Congress has 435 members including 233 Democrats, 197 Republicans and 1 independent. Justin Amash, who was a member of the Republican Party representing the 3rd Congressional District, abandoned the GOP, criticizing Trump's policies to become an independent. But Amash, who is also a Palestinian-American, did not sign the letter.



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Israeli settlement goods should be labeled, court told

[US urges social media platforms to block Iran officials](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

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Sat, 2019-11-23 21:37

WASHINGTON: The US State Department on Saturday called on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to suspend the accounts of Iranian government leaders until Tehran re-establishes internet coverage throughout the riot-torn country. The government imposed a near-total Internet blackout more than a week ago amid violent protests.

Special Representative for Iran Hook urges [@Facebook](#), [@instagram](#), and [@Twitter](#) to suspend the accounts of the Iranian regime's leadership, who've shamelessly used social media to spew propaganda while shutting down the internet for ordinary Iranians. [#Internet4Iran](#) [#IranProtests](#) pic.twitter.com/8rM0d0tadC

– Department of State (@StateDept) [November 23, 2019](#)

"It is a deeply hypocritical regime," Brian Hook, special US representative for Iran, said in an interview with Bloomberg posted on the official State Department Twitter account.

"It shuts down the internet while its government continues to use all of these social media accounts.

"So one of the things that we are calling on are social media companies like Facebook and Instagram and Twitter to shut down the accounts of Supreme Leader Khamenei, the Foreign Minister Zarif and President Rouhani until they restore the internet to their own people."

Demonstrations erupted in Iran on Nov. 15, a few hours after the shock announcement of a decision to raise gasoline prices at the pump by up to 200 percent in the sanctions-hit country.

The following day the government drastically restricted Iranians' access to the internet in a step seen as aimed at curbing the spread of videos of the violent protests.

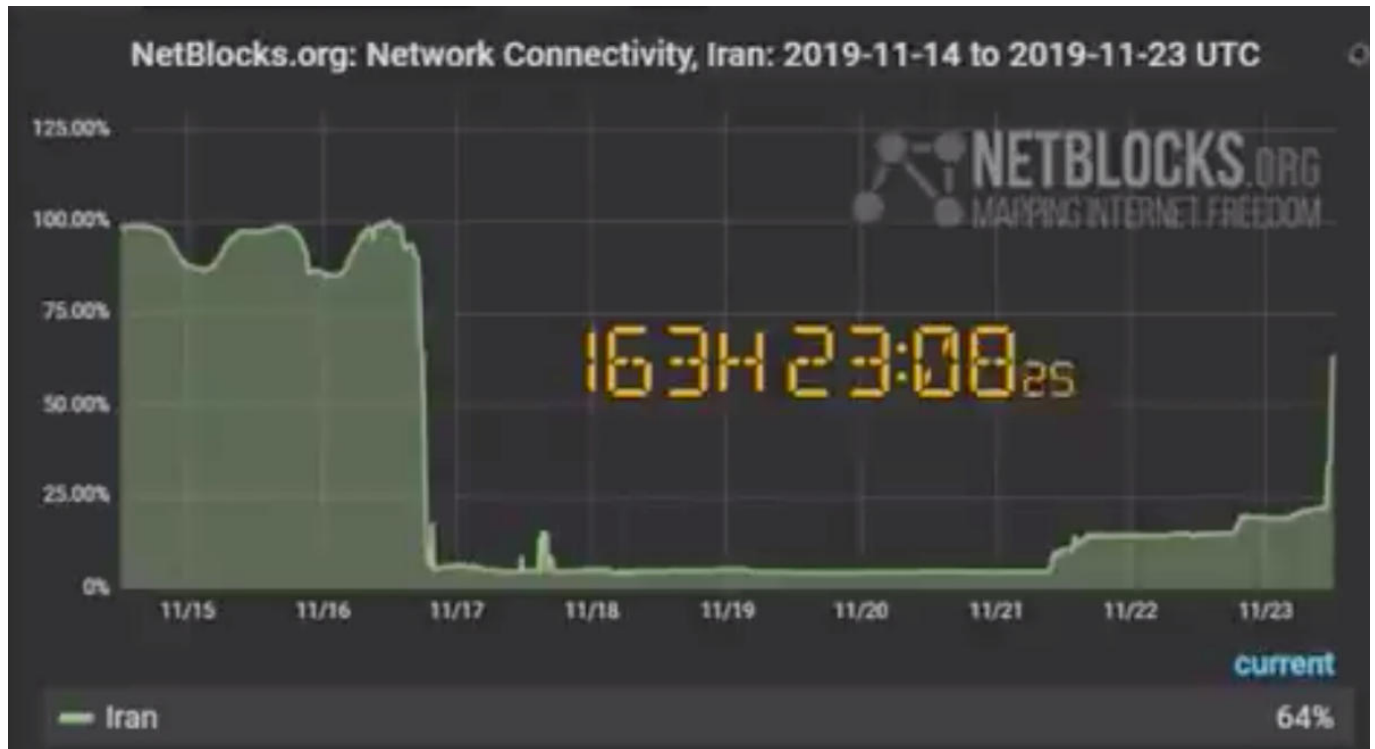
Five people have died in those protests by official government count, though Amnesty International has put the total at more than 100.

"The regime shut down the internet because they're trying to hide all of the death and tragedy that the regime has been inflicting on thousands of protesters around the country," Hook said.

Facebook, Instagram and Twitter did not immediately respond to a request for comment from AFP.

On Friday, the United States imposed sanctions on Iranian communications minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi for what it said was his role in the "vast censorship" of the internet.

In a tweet Friday translated into Farsi, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo invited any Iranian who witnessed government "repression" to send documentation to the US, promising it would sanction any abuses.



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Al-Jubeir calls for 'deterrence not appeasement' to halt Iranian aggression towards Saudi Arabia
US sanctions Iran minister over Internet censorship

[Iraq to close nine TV stations for 'inciting violence'](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-11-23 23:59

BAGHDAD: The Iraqi Communications and Media Commission (CMC) has decided to warn five TV channels, and close nine, for "violating articles of media licensing regulations," and "publishing content inciting violence" during coverage of demonstrations, observers told Arab News on Saturday.

Baghdad and nine southern Shiite-dominated provinces have witnessed repeated anti-government demonstrations since Oct. 1. More than 350 demonstrators have been killed and about 16,000 others injured, after security forces began to use live bullets and tear gas canisters.

Local and foreign media have played a pivotal role in documenting and exposing abuses suffered by demonstrators, despite authorities blocking the internet for two weeks in Baghdad and several southern governorates. Social

media platforms have also been censored for more than a month.

Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi and his allies believe that some media outlets "are working to sustain the momentum of the demonstrations and incite demonstrators against the government." The overthrow of the government and the holding of early national parliamentary elections preceded by the changing electoral law, is at the top of the list of demands from demonstrators.

The CMC is the organization responsible for regulating the media and communications in Iraq. It was established in 2004 and, according to the Iraqi constitution, is an independent body not affiliated with the government. However, the majority of its decisions "indicate the full dependence of the government" observers have said.

According to sources, the CMC forced internet and mobile companies to disconnect services to their customers in protest-hit areas and block social networks.

The latest CMC decision saw the closure of the nine local and Arabic TV stations and warnings given to five others "for violating the regularities of media licensing rules."

Dijla, Sharqiya, Al-Arabiya, Al-Hadath and Alhurra Iraq were among the stations that had to close their offices in Iraq, while Sky News Arabia, Al-Sumaria and Rudaw were among those warned.

The Journalistic Freedoms Observatory, a non-profit organization that monitors abuses against journalists, said in a statement issued on Saturday that it had seen an internal memorandum sent by the CMC to the offices of Abdul Mahdi and the interior minister, recommending the closures and citing the other channels for mishandling coverage of the demonstrations.

"We are used to seeing the CMC lining up every time with the government (against journalists). It is an independent body and its board of trustees is subject to partisan quotas like all government bodies and institutions," Ziyad Al-Ajaili, the head of the observatory, told Arab News.

"The closure and warning decisions issued by the CMC are not the first ... The body has a bad record in dealing with the media."

The CMC told Arab News that it does not punish any media in a "qualitative" manner, and that it followed a globally approved media code of conduct that is included in the terms of the work permit granted to the media.

The CMC also said that it dealt with media outlets that violate the terms of the license "amicably" before resorting to warnings and closures, and that it has not yet "publicly" made any new decisions regarding the 14 channels mentioned.

"No decision has been announced so far. There have been irregularities and there have been warnings, but no action has been taken yet and there is no announcement on the matter to date," a senior CMC official told Arab News. "As colleagues, we first talk amicably with the journalist or the media concerned before we take any legal action."



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Protester shot dead and dozens wounded in Iraq Shooting strife: Amir Jasim captures Iraq's uprising

[Iraqi minister suspected of fraud in Sweden](#)

Sat, 2019-11-23 21:40

HELSINKI: Swedish media reports say Iraq's defense minister, who holds dual Iraqi-Swedish citizenship, is suspected of illegally receiving benefits in Sweden.

Local media, citing a Swedish defense official, reported that Najah Al-Shammari claimed child and housing support for years despite living in Baghdad. Al-Shammari and Swedish officials weren't immediately available for comment.

Swedish news agency TT said Friday that Al-Shammari, who assumed his post in June, is registered to live in a Stockholm suburb.

Swedish newspaper Expressen reported Saturday he moved to Sweden in 2011, received citizenship in 2015 and was reported to authorities, along with his

wife, earlier this month for suspected benefits fraud. He allegedly continued to claim social payments years after returning to Iraq. Al-Shammari served as a Major General in the Iraqi Army and served under former dictator Saddam Hussein. Sweden and its Nordic neighbors are known for providing generous social benefits.



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Shooting strife: Amir Jasim captures Iraq's uprising