

Criticism over Israeli 'terror' label for Palestinian groups

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JERUSALEM: Israel's surprise "terrorist" designation of six Palestinian civil society groups has divided its ruling coalition and thrown a spotlight on Marxist group the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

The move announced last Friday by Defense Minister Benny Gantz caused shockwaves, including among European donors who support the targeted groups and from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

Israeli non-government organizations, or NGOs, which partner with the implicated Palestinians also voiced astonishment.

So did some in the media, given the prominence of the groups involved – especially Al-Haq, a rights group founded in 1979 by writer Raja Shehadeh, a New Yorker magazine contributor.

Gantz has also taken fire from within Israel's government, an unwieldy eight-party alliance that includes left-wing politicians.

Health Minister Nitzan Horowitz, leader of the dovish Meretz, warned that as an occupying military power Israel needed to be "very careful in imposing sanctions on Palestinian civil organizations because there are political, diplomatic and, more importantly, human rights consequences."

Transport Minister and Labor leader Merav Michaeli said the way the announcement was made "caused Israel great damage with our greatest and most important friends."

But Gantz's office has not wavered, insisting that a joint security establishment investigation had proved the six groups operated "as an organized network under the leadership of the PFLP," as the Marxist group is known.

The PFLP was founded in 1967 by George Habache – mixing Marxist-Leninism, Arab nationalism and virulent anti-Zionism – ultimately becoming the second most powerful Palestinian armed group after Yasser Arafat's Fatah.

It currently does not have firepower matching the arsenal of rockets held by Gaza's rulers Hamas or Islamic Jihad, but it is active in the international campaign to boycott Israel known as BDS, short for Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions.

The PFLP has been declared a terrorist organization by the United States and the European Union, and Israel says it is responsible for a 2019 bomb attack in the occupied West Bank that killed 17-year-old Israeli Rina Schnerb.

The PFLP leader in Israeli-blockaded Gaza told AFP the designated organizations have "no link" with his group beyond a shared ideology opposing the occupation.

"These NGOs work in complete independence," Jamil Mazher said.

The PFLP has been a prime target of the Israeli organization NGO Monitor, which tracks funding and activities of non profit groups engaged in the

Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with specific focus on European donors. Its president Gerald Steinberg told AFP the designations last week “appears to reflect the impact of NGO Monitor’s ongoing research.”

NGO Monitor wrote to the European anti-fraud office OLAF in November 2020 to share what it said was evidence of EU funds being given to Palestinian NGOs with links to terrorist organizations.

OLAF replied in January that it had “dismissed the case on the grounds that there is no sufficient suspicion to open an investigation,” according to a letter seen by AFP.

Israel is not obligated to disclose the evidence it used to support the terrorism designation, with secrecy allowed under the 2016 counter-terrorism act.

The defense ministry has said the groups had hosted PFLP meetings, employed “convicted terrorists” and operated as a “lifeline” for the PFLP through “fundraising, money laundering and recruitment of activists.”

Tel Aviv University law professor Eliav Lieblich, writing on the Just Security website this week, argued that “it simply cannot be accepted that well-known and widely respected Palestinian human rights groups be designated as ‘terrorist organizations’ by executive fiat and on the basis of classified intelligence.”

An Israeli official told AFP that an envoy would soon head to Washington to share evidence after the US said it would be seeking “more information” about the designations.

Meanwhile, pushback persists against the decision. Representatives from 25 Israeli civil society groups traveled to Ramallah Wednesday to show solidarity with their Palestinian colleagues.

“This attack on Palestinian civil society, on Palestinian organizations, is not new,” Hagai El-Ad, the executive director of Israeli rights group B’Tselem, told AFP at the demonstration.

“What is new,” he added, is that “they’re targeting some of the most respected and oldest civil society organizations in Palestine, like Al-Haq,” and that growing international outrage means Israel may no longer be able to act with “impunity.”



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UN says Israel move designating Palestinian groups as 'terrorist organizations' unjustified Israel envoy to brief US over ban on Palestinian groups

[Arab coalition says 95 Houthis killed in strikes on Juba and Al-Kasarah](#)

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Thu, 2021-10-28 18:36

RIYADH: The Arab coalition said on Thursday that 95 Houthis were killed during air strikes on two districts near the central Yemeni city of Marib. The coalition added that 11 military vehicles had also been destroyed in the

22 strikes carried out on Juba and Al-Kasarah during the last 24 hours. Juba is some 50 km south of Marib, whilst Al-Kasarah is 30 km northwest of the city. The coalition has reported heavy strikes around Marib in recent weeks. Earlier on Thursday, the Arab coalition intercepted and destroyed five Houthi ballistic missiles fired toward the southwestern Saudi city of Jazan.



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Lebanese PM distances self from minister's Houthi Yemen 'self-defense' claim
Arab coalition says more than 105 Houthis killed near Yemen's Marib

Moroccans protest mass vaccination rules; some skirmishes

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Wed, 2021-10-27 20:17

RABAT, Morocco: Demonstrators took to the streets in cities around Morocco on Wednesday, some clashing with police as they denounced the country's decision to require coronavirus vaccination passes to be allowed to work and enter public venues.

The decision came into effect Oct. 21 and stipulates that Moroccans must provide proof of vaccination in order to enter their workplaces. In a statement, the government has said employers have "direct legal responsibility" to enforce the decision.

The pass is also required to access indoor services such as restaurants and banks as well as domestic and international travel.

The North African kingdom of 36 million people has Africa's highest vaccination rate, with more than 50 percent of the population fully inoculated. Earlier this month, the government also started administering booster shots.

But the abrupt and unusually widespread vaccine requirements have also prompted opposition, and led to big crowds at vaccination centers as people rushed to get shots.

In the capital, Rabat, protesters gathered outside the parliament building and chanted slogans against the rule, arguing that it goes against fundamental human rights and civil liberties. Police formed a line to prevent the angry demonstrators from getting inside the legislature.

A few protesters clashed with police as they were pushed away down Mohammed V Avenue that leads to the parliament building.

Among protesters was Nabila Mounib, a member of parliament and the secretary general of the opposition Unified Socialist Party. She joined the protest after being barred from entering the parliament building for showing up without a vaccination pass.

Similar scenes unfolded in other Moroccan cities, with dozens of protesters taking to the streets in the country's most populous city, Casablanca, as well as tourist hotspots of Marrakech and Agadir. They shouted "United against the pass!" as police pushed and swung batons at some of the demonstrators in an attempt to disperse them.



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[Western envoys met with Sudan's PM in his residence](#)

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Wed, 2021-10-27 19:10

CAIRO: Envoys from France, Germany, Norway, the UK, the United States, the European Union and the United Nations met with Sudan's Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok at his residence, the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance

Mission Sudan (UNITAMS) wrote on Twitter on Wednesday.

The mission added that the envoys found Hamdok in good health.



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Japan condemns Sudan military leaders

[US urges Iran to show 'good faith' in talks resumption](#)

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Wed, 2021-10-27 18:38

WASHINGTON: The United States on Wednesday urged Iran to show “good faith” and quickly revive a nuclear deal after the clerical state indicated it would return to negotiations in Vienna next month.

Iran’s nuclear negotiator said after talks with European Union mediators in Brussels that Tehran had agreed to resume talks in Vienna next month. These discussions had been on hiatus since June.

“We are prepared to return to Vienna, and we believe that it remains possible to quickly reach and implement an understanding on return to mutual full compliance” with the 2015 nuclear deal, a State Department spokesperson said. The talks should focus on “closing the small number of issues that remained outstanding at the end of the sixth round of talks in June,” he said.

“As we have also been clear, this window will not remain open forever as Iran continues to take provocative nuclear steps, so we hope that they come to Vienna to negotiate quickly and in good faith.”

President Joe Biden has repeatedly offered to return to the nuclear accord reached in 2015 but his administration has voiced growing frustration at the prolonged delay, which comes as a new hardline government gets settled in Tehran.

Then president Donald Trump withdrew the United States from the deal in 2018 and imposed sweeping sanctions, leading Iran to step up contested nuclear work in protest.



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