

How Hezbollah has permeated the Lebanese state

Thu, 2021-07-08 20:36

LONDON: Hezbollah has used its financial backers in Iran and its significant military arsenal to “permeate the Lebanese state,” according to a paper launched this week.

The paper – authored by Lina Khatib, director of London-based think tank Chatham House’s Middle East and North Africa program, and launched at an online event on Thursday attended by Arab News – details how Hezbollah morphed from a resistance group against Israeli occupation to a hybrid power holding the Lebanese state in an ideological stranglehold.

“Hezbollah has spread its influence throughout the Lebanese state, from the presidency of the republic to representative political institutions and the civil service, as well as Lebanon’s military and security institutions,” the paper said.

“This influence is due to a number of factors: Hezbollah’s benefiting from a reliable external patron – Iran – unlike other parties in Lebanon; Hezbollah’s capacity in terms of organization, funding, physical resources and numbers of followers, which dwarfs that of other Lebanese parties.”

Other means used by Hezbollah, the paper said, include the “weakness of the Lebanese state” and the existence of “a political system based on elite pacts.”

Khatib told event attendees that she urges analysts, particularly in the West, to take a “nuanced” approach to understanding the relationship between Lebanon and Hezbollah.

“While Hezbollah is a contributing factor to the weakness of the Lebanese state, it’s also a product of the political system in Lebanon,” she said.

“As long as the current political system in Lebanon continues to exist, it won’t be possible to reverse Hezbollah’s sway over the Lebanese state.”

Khatib said the characterization of Hezbollah as a “state within a state” – popular in academic and policymaking circles – is inaccurate.

This characterization “implies that Hezbollah is operating in a way that’s completely detached from the Lebanese state at large. Instead, what I argue is that Hezbollah permeates the state in Lebanon,” she added.

“And when we say ‘the state,’ I’m not just talking about the state institutions, I’m also talking about the state as the space for the contestation of power in Lebanon.

“This, I think, is vividly illustrated by how Hezbollah, unlike other groups

in Lebanon ... has surveillance capacities. That means it's monitoring not just what happens inside state institutions, but it's monitoring its allies and its opponents in all kinds of arenas: Cultural, social, education, economic. This is something that gives it a huge tactical advantage."

Khatib said other parties also take advantage of the Lebanese state for their own benefit, but "it's Hezbollah, unlike the others, that has coercive power over both its opponents and its allies – this also gives it the edge."

Mona Yacoubian, a senior advisor at the US Institute for Peace, said Hezbollah moved from "the crucible of resistance to Israeli occupation" at the end of the 20th century, to becoming the "praetorian guard of Lebanon's corrupt, cronyism system."

Hezbollah is different from other parties in the country "by virtue of its arms, and that these arms sit outside the gambit of state control," she added.

Despite being a late arrival to the Lebanese political scene, Yacoubian said, the Shiite group has "adopted and emulated some of the most corrupt practices of Lebanon's political class, and in a sense has become completely enmeshed with Lebanon's political system."

She added: "It has increasingly exploited state institutions – Parliament, ministries, the civil service – and used its influence to garner power, to spread patronage and to gain revenues."

However, Yacoubian said this behavior has come back to bite the Iranian proxy. "What we saw in the October 2019 protests (in Lebanon) and beyond is that Hezbollah is no longer viewed as above corruption," she added.

"We see that it has been tarnished by this behavior. Even within its own base, there's growing disaffection."

Lebanon is experiencing its worst financial crisis in more than 150 years, and on Wednesday Prime Minister Hassan Diab warned that the country is "days away from a social explosion."

Yacoubian said because of this approaching explosion, her key question moving forward is: "What would be the impact of a total state collapse on Hezbollah? Because I think that's a real possibility."



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Lebanon's Hezbollah hails Raisi's election win in Iran
Pentagon official warns of Hezbollah threat to Lebanon's stability amid financial crisis

[Ethiopian intransigence over dam project led Egypt, Sudan to approach UN: President El-Sisi](#)

Thu, 2021-07-08 20:09

CAIRO: Ethiopia's intransigence over the controversial Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) project had left Sudan and Egypt with no option but to approach the UN Security Council on the issue, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi said.

And Addis Ababa's attempts to impose a fait accompli on the two countries had

led to the faltering of negotiations being held under the auspices of the African Union, he added.

El-Sisi had made his comments to Felix Tshisekedi, president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), who had called him on Thursday.

The huge Nile dam scheme, set to be Africa's largest hydroelectric project when completed, has resulted in a near decade-long diplomatic stand-off between Ethiopia and downstream nations Egypt and Sudan.

Ethiopia has maintained that the project was essential to the nation's development, but Cairo and Khartoum fear it could restrict their citizens' vital access to water supplies.

El-Sisi said the aim of involving the UN Security Council was to help the three countries move toward a binding agreement to operate the dam within a clear and specific timeframe.

The Egyptian leader noted his appreciation of the DRC's – current chair of the African Union – concerns over the issue and efforts made by Tshisekedi to sponsor talks between the three countries to try and reach a deal that protected the trio's interests and preserved their water rights. Tshisekedi hailed Egyptian moves to resolve the impasse through negotiation.

Meanwhile, during a meeting with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry pointed out the need for the world community to help work toward resolving the GERD dispute.

He noted the danger of taking unilateral actions that could impact on the stability and security of the region and Egypt's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Ahmed Hafez, said the minister had urged the international community to push Ethiopia through the UN to seriously engage in settlement talks.

Shoukry told the Associated Press that he would be calling on the UN Security Council to require Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia to negotiate a binding agreement within six months on the contentious issue of water availability from the dam.

He said that almost 10 years of discussions over the hydroelectric scheme on the Blue Nile had failed to secure assurances that water would continue to flow downstream in sufficient volumes to Sudan and Egypt, where 100 million people are dependent on the river as their only source of water.

Tunisia, the Arab representative on the council, has circulated a draft resolution requesting Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia to resume negotiations at the invitation of the African Union chairman and the UN secretary-general to finalize a legally binding agreement by January on the dam's operation and flow of water into it.

It said any deal must ensure, "Ethiopia's ability to generate hydropower ... while preventing the inflicting of significant harm on the water security of downstream states."



Battle for the Nile

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Battle for the Nile: Why Ethiopia's GERD reservoir filling may be just the start of Egypt's worries
Ethiopia building up forces on western border over 'national threat'

[Putin lifts ban on charter flights to Egypt six years after crash](#)

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Reuters

ID:

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Thu, 2021-07-08 14:49

MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin scrapped Russia's ban on charter flights to Egypt on Thursday, six years after suspending them for national security seasons in the aftermath of a plane crash.

The flights were stopped after a Metrojet plane taking Russian holiday makers back from Sharm El-Sheikh to St. Petersburg broke up over the Sinai Peninsula in October 2015, killing 224 people.

Russia concluded the plane was destroyed by a bomb. A group affiliated with Daesh militants claimed responsibility.

Putin's decree lifting the ban will be a boon for Egypt's year-round resorts in Sharm Al-Sheikh and Hurghada which attracted large numbers of Russians in the past.

Russia and Egypt agreed to resume all flights in a call in April between Putin and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, Egypt's presidency said at the time.



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Russian plane with 28 on board crashed into sea
Russia says foiled Daesh attacks in Moscow, south

[US expects seventh round of Iran nuclear talks; no details when](#)

Wed, 2021-07-07 22:24

WASHINGTON: The United States said on Wednesday it expected a seventh round of indirect US-Iran talks on resuming compliance with the 2015 Iran nuclear deal to take place "at the appropriate moment," but did not say when that might be.

"Of course, nothing is certain in the world of diplomacy, but I think we have every expectation that there will be a seventh round of talks at the appropriate moment, at the right time, and our team looks forward to being

engaged in that next round of talks when it does begin,” US State Department spokesman Ned Price told a regular news briefing.



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Iran accuses Israel of June attack on civilian nuclear site

[Maronite patriarch tells Hariri: 'Form govt or Lebanon will die'](#)

Author:

Wed, 2021-07-07 21:38

BEIRUT: Lebanon's Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros Al-Rahi on Wednesday urged Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri to urgently form a government in collaboration with President Michel Aoun "according to the spirit of the constitution."

Al-Rahi's statement followed his return from the Vatican, where he took part in a prayer and gathering for Lebanon hosted by Pope Francis.

After meeting Aoun, Al-Rahi blamed Lebanon's worsening crisis on "the absence of a government, which is ruining the economy, increasing unemployment and closing enterprises."

Without executive authority, the country will die, he warned.

Last week at the Vatican, Al-Rahi said that "everybody is responsible for the current situation in Lebanon, including the president."

On Wednesday, at the Presidential Palace, he reiterated that "everybody has violated the constitution."

Two days ago, Hariri visited Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, whose initiative to form a government of 24 ministers was obstructed by Aoun's insistence on a blocking third, or a third of all Cabinet seats, effectively giving his team veto power over government decisions.

This coincided with reports on Wednesday that Hariri intends to abandon his efforts to form the government, a mission assigned to him nine months ago by Aoun and parliament.

At that time, Hariri had agreed to form a government of 18 ministers of technocrats to implement economic, financial and administrative reforms, according to the French initiative.

On Wednesday, Arab News was told that efforts were being made to find a replacement for Hariri in order to avoid a government vacuum.

However, the figures being considered, including former prime ministers, refused to take on the role because of past failures to reach an agreement.

MP Bilal Abdullah, a member of the Democratic Gathering bloc, told Arab News: "Renewing the talk about the intention of Hariri to end his mission is lethal for the Lebanese and the economy. It adds to the humiliation of the citizens who are trying to secure their medicines, transportation and food. What we need are serious steps to form the government without obstacles or high demands, as the president and the PM-designate are doing now."

He said that Al-Rahi's appeal to form the government will put pressure on Hariri to resign.

"The patriarch is the one who worked most on reconciliation between the two sides but failed. He is not a party and should work on eliminating obstacles, and not call on one side to rush in forming the government," Abdullah said.

"If Hariri resigns, there will be repercussions, especially if he chooses to join the opposition."

Abdullah said that any replacement for Hariri was destined to fail, adding: "We should focus on reconciliation."

Al-Rahi called on the Lebanese to show resilience and be patient, saying that “after dark there will be daylight.”

However, Wednesday’s dawn presented another bleak picture of Lebanon.

Sheikh Hassan Merheb, imam of a mosque in Tariq El-Jdideh, posted a photo of a man praying with his oxygen device next to him.

Merheb wrote: “The man has no electricity at home, so he came to the mosque at dawn to use the power generated by the mosque’s generator. Damn all those who got us to this situation.”

Shortages of fuel and medicine as subsidies are gradually lifted from many commodities and goods are adding to the problems facing Lebanon’s hard-hit population.

Dr. Sharaf Abou Sharaf, head of the Lebanese Order of Physicians, said: “Lebanese children have started to suffer from the unavailability of vaccines. This poses a serious threat to new generations.”

Protesters in Tripoli stormed a drugs warehouse and said that they found “hundreds of medicines that are unavailable in the pharmacies.



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World is not to blame for crisis in Lebanon, the nation's politicians are
says French envoy Lebanon's PM Diab warns country is a few days away from
social explosion