

Political

update:– UN Secretary-General criticises Hezbollah for destabilising Lebanon and the region – 30 April

Key points:

- UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says that Hezbollah has created an “atmosphere of intimidation” in Lebanon ahead of parliamentary elections on 7 June
- Ban Ki-moon accuses Hezbollah of using its military arsenal to damage Lebanese sovereignty and the sovereignty of other Middle East countries
- Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak says that a Hezbollah cell has been caught whilst attempting to damage Egyptian national security
- Lebanese security officials accused of murdering former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri released; Hezbollah celebrates in the streets

Latest developments

- UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon accused Hezbollah on Monday (27 April) of destabilising Lebanese and regional politics. Describing the arsenal of the pro-Syrian and Iranian backed militant group as a “direct challenge” to Lebanon’s sovereignty and an “obstacle” to the democratic process, Ban said:

“The threat that armed groups and militias pose to the sovereignty and stability of the Lebanese state cannot be overstated... It creates an atmosphere of intimidation in the context of the upcoming parliamentary elections. It also undermines the stability of the region, and is incompatible with the objectives of [UN Security Council] Resolution 1559.” (27/04/09)

- Ban made the comments when discussing his ninth report on the implementation of UN Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1701, which brought about a ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006 and calls for Lebanese militant groups to disarm. He also expressed concern that Hezbollah may be acquiring new, advanced military hardware from across the Syrian border.
- Ban Ki-moon and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak have criticised Hezbollah for allegedly operating terrorist cells in Egypt. Ban condemned Hezbollah on Monday (27 April) for “unjustified interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign country.” Referring to both Hezbollah and Iran on Wednesday (29 April), the Egyptian President warned regional adversaries not to attempt to destabilise his country. He also criticised them for their opposition to peace:

“After these powers and their hirelings have encroached on Egypt’s security and sovereignty, I say clearly that I don’t allow this and will not tolerate those who try to tamper with Egypt’s security and stability... The Arab region is passing through a

delicate and hard stage... and facing the threats of known regional powers that embrace terrorism and extremism and clearly brag of animosity to peace.” (29/04/09)

- Egypt announced earlier this month that it had uncovered a plot by 49 men with links to Hezbollah to destabilise the country by carrying out attacks on Egyptian institutions and Israeli tourists in the Sinai. Egypt’s High State Security Prosecution office is now dealing with the case. Hezbollah’s leader Hassan Nasrallah confirmed on 10 April that one of those being held was a Hezbollah member. German news agency DPA also reported on Monday (27 April) that Egypt had arrested three more suspects in the plot.
- Egypt’s allegations come at a time when it is feared that Hezbollah could increase its political representation in the Lebanese general election on 7 June. A Hezbollah victory would bolster the pro-Syrian faction within the parliament, further protecting the militant group from calls for it to disarm.
- Hezbollah received a political boost on Wednesday (29 April) when a UN-backed tribunal ordered the release of four high-ranking Lebanese security officials held in connection with the 2005 killing of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. The acquitted men were instrumental in implementing Syrian policy in Lebanon prior to Syria’s withdrawal in 2005.
- Supporters of the freed men, mainly from Hezbollah, fired guns into the air and set off fireworks to celebrate. The decision is, however, a setback for Lebanon’s pro-Western political bloc headed by Hariri’s son Saad, which blames Syria for the killing.

Background

- Hezbollah became part of the current Lebanese government following the Arab-brokered Doha accord of 21 May 2008, which ended a standoff between the Lebanese state and the Iranian and Syrian backed militant group. The deal gave Hezbollah 11 of Lebanon’s 30 cabinet posts, a veto over all cabinet decisions and permission to maintain its weapons arsenal for use against all but internal targets.
- The UK government announced on 4 March that it would explore establishing contacts with Hezbollah parliamentarians. Bill Rammell, Minister of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, made the comments in evidence he gave to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee. The Foreign Office further clarified its position on 5 March, stating that the UK’s objective with Hezbollah:

“remains to encourage them to move away from violence and play a constructive, democratic and peaceful role in Lebanese politics, in line with a range of UN Security Council Resolutions. Hezbollah’s political wing is part of a National Unity Government in Lebanon. The UK is doing all it can to support that government.” (05/03/09)

- The UK proscribed Hezbollah’s entire military wing in July 2008, stating that it is committed to armed resistance against Israel and supports terrorism in Iraq and the Palestinian territories. Prior to this the UK only proscribed part of Hezbollah’s military wing – the External Security Organisation.
- Home Secretary Jacqui Smith refused to grant a British visa to Hezbollah spokesman Ibrahim al-Moussawi on 13 March. The Home Office said that it could not comment on individual cases, but it is understood that Home Secretary Jacqui Smith rejected the application on the grounds that his

presence would not be “conducive to the public good.” Al-Moussawi had been due to speak at a conference on political Islam at London University’s School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) on 23 March.

- Israel has continually voiced its concern to the UN over Hezbollah’s weapons arsenal. Despite the adoption of UNSCR 1701, the Israeli government estimated in July 2008 that Hezbollah had amassed approximately 40,000 rockets.
- Hezbollah was founded in the early 1980s and has been headed by Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah since 1992. Its executive board, the Shura Council, controls the military, social and political wings, which all share the same goals as set out in Hezbollah’s founding manifesto of 1985:

“No one can imagine the importance of our military potential as our military apparatus is not separate from our overall social fabric. Each of us is a fighting soldier. And when it becomes necessary to carry out the Holy War, each of us takes up his assignment in the fight in accordance with the injunctions of the Law.”

- The manifesto has an entire section entitled “the Necessity for the Destruction of Israel.”