

Australia lists Hezbollah as 'terrorist organization'

Wed, 2021-11-24 03:38

SYDNEY: Australia on Wednesday listed all of Hezbollah as a "terrorist organization," extending an existing ban on armed units to the entire organization, which wields considerable power over Lebanon.

Home Affairs Minister Karen Andrews said that the Iran-backed Shiite group "continues to threaten terrorist attacks and provide support to terrorist organizations" and poses a "real" and "credible" threat to Australia. Hezbollah has been designated as a terrorist group by parts of the West, although some countries have been reluctant to sanction the group's political wing, fearing it could destabilize Lebanon and hamper contacts with authorities.

Hezbollah defies easy definition – acting as part political party, part militant organization and part provider of basic services to Lebanon's Shiite community.

It is the only side that has to date refused to disarm since the country's devastating civil war ended in 1990.

Membership of the organization or providing funding for it will now be proscribed in Australia, which has a large Lebanese community.

No reason was given for the timing of the move, which comes as Lebanon reels from spiralling political and economic crises.

Nearly 80 percent of the population is estimated to be living below the poverty line.

Elections are expected in March 2022 and there is growing public anger about nepotism and corruption among Lebanon's ruling class.

Andrews also announced that Australia would be listing far-right group The Base.

"They are a violent, racist neo-Nazi group known by security agencies to be planning and preparing terrorist attacks," Andrews said.



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Lebanon needs to show that Hezbollah can change behavior, Bahrain minister says
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[UN urges 'patience, calm' as Iraq waits on ratification of election results](#)

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Wed, 2021-11-24 03:17

NEW YORK: Iraqis across the political spectrum should show restraint, shun violence and wait patiently for the final ratification of results from last month's "hard-earned" elections, a senior UN official told the Security Council on Tuesday.

Jeanine Plasschaert, special representative of the UN secretary-general and head of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq, said there is much for Iraqis “to be proud of” in the Oct. 10 election – the fifth national poll held under Iraq’s 2005 constitution – which the UN has praised as generally peaceful and well-managed.

Her comments come as Iraq waits on final confirmation of the election result by the Federal Supreme Court.

Referring to the poll, Plasschaert said: “All in all, it was a substantial achievement, which Iraq’s authorities and parties would do well to publicly acknowledge.”

She reminded the Security Council that the October elections came in the wake of an unprecedented wave of protests throughout Iraq in 2019, including “demonstrations that were marked by violence, excessive use of force, abductions and targeted killings.”

The protests resulted in hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries, Plasschaert added.

Iraqis went to the polls to elect MPs amid protesters’ calls for a halt to endemic corruption and an improvement in living conditions.

Following the elections, supporters of the Fatah Alliance – the coalition representing Iran-backed militias that lost two-thirds of its seats – claimed the poll was rigged and refused to accept the results, despite hundreds of international observers testifying to the integrity of the voting process.

Describing the current Iraqi outlook as “precarious,” Plasschaert highlighted clashes that erupted in the weeks following the vote, and sit-ins that escalated into violence and resulted in several deaths.

The UN official called the assassination attempt against Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi a direct attack on the Iraqi state, “a heinous act, and one that can only be condemned in the strongest of terms.”

Speaking to the Security Council remotely from Baghdad, Plasschaert added: “Let me be clear, under no circumstances must terrorism, violence or any other unlawful acts be allowed to derail Iraq’s democratic process.”

While acknowledging that emotions run high in any democratic election, she called for dialogue, calm and restraint to ease tensions, and warned that any unlawful attempt to prolong or discredit the electoral results process, through violence, intimidation or pressure, “can only backfire.”

“The fact is that citizens in democracies often must recognize that, even if the results are not what she or he hoped for, the process as such might have been sound. In fact, one of the clearest signs of a strengthening democracy is the ability for parties and electors to recognize outcomes – no matter their individual preferences when it comes to results.

While reiterating the absence of any evidence of systemic fraud, the UNAMI

chief called for any electoral concerns to be dealt with through legal channels.

“While losing seats can be difficult to digest, it is important – for any party in any democracy – to examine the reasons and to learn for future elections,” she said.

With the continued risk of political deadlock in Baghdad, Plasschaert underscored the importance of an inclusive government formation process.

“Iraq desperately needs a government that is able to – swiftly and effectively – tackle the long list of unfinished domestic business. This is the primary responsibility of all political stakeholders,” she said.

US Permanent Representative to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield also said Iraqis should be proud of this election, which took place “in a world with far too much democratic backsliding.”

Thomas-Greenfield also credited the Security Council for the successful results of Iraqi elections.

“This council spoke in unison, authorizing UNAMI to provide electoral technical assistance and election monitors. This council came together and provided the resources the government of Iraq needed to meet the legitimate demands of its people. This council helped strengthen democratic institutions,” she said.

The US envoy called for this “spirit of cooperation” to continue across all the files on the Security Council agenda.



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Iraqi PM unhurt after failed assassination attempt at his residence
Iraqi Shiite leader Sadr cautions vote 'losers'

[Syrian air defenses intercept Israeli attack above Homs -state media](#)

Wed, 2021-11-24 03:13

CAIRO: Two civilians were killed and one wounded in an Israeli attack over Syria's central region, state media said on Wednesday.

"An Israeli air aggression targeted parts of the central region, and the air defenses are responding," state media reported.

Four soldiers were injured and there was material damage, state media reported, citing a military source.

There was no immediate comment from Israeli officials.



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Israeli defense minister heads to Morocco for 'historic' visit
Apple suing Israeli hacker-for-hire company NSO Group

Israeli defense minister heads to Morocco for 'historic' visit

Author:

Wed, 2021-11-24 03:03

RABAT: Israel's Defense Minister Benny Gantz arrived in Morocco Tuesday on a "historic" visit aimed at bolstering ties between the countries, at a time when Rabat is embroiled in a standoff over Western Sahara.

The two-day trip comes less than a year after Morocco normalized ties with Israel in a deal brokered by former US president Donald Trump's administration.

In return, Washington recognized the North African kingdom's sovereignty over the disputed territory of Western Sahara.

Gantz – the first Israeli defense minister to make an official visit to Morocco – has said he will sign defense "cooperation agreements" with Moroccan counterparts and "continue to strengthen ties."

The former Israeli army chief added it was crucial that the "historic" trip proved "successful."

His chartered El Al flight landed in Rabat late Tuesday, ahead of a day-and-a-half of meetings, including with the Moroccan defense and foreign ministers, and a visit to a synagogue.

The trip aims to "set the foundation for all future security cooperation between Israel and Morocco," a source familiar with the visit told AFP.

"Until now there has been some level of cooperation; this truly formalizes it," the source added.

The visit comes as tensions have recently flared between Morocco and Algeria over Western Sahara, a former Spanish colony that Rabat considers part of its sovereign territory.

Algeria, which backs Western Sahara's Polisario Front independence movement, cut diplomatic ties with Morocco in August, citing "hostile actions" – a charge denied by Rabat.

Earlier this month, Algiers accused Rabat of killing three Algerian civilians on a desert highway, raising fears of an escalation.

And Polisario head Brahim Ghali said last week the movement had decided to step up military operations.

Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, an Israeli expert on Morocco, said the timing of Gantz's visit and the signing of an MOU was not a coincidence.

"It's possible that in the context of the Moroccan-Algerian tensions, the Moroccans were the ones who were keen on this," he said.

"It would seem to me that the Moroccans are the ones who are keen on showing everybody – their own public, their Algerian rivals, the West – that they are

deepening their relationship with Israel,” said the Tel Aviv University professor.

Morocco and Israel previously set up low-level ties in 1993 but Rabat broke them off at the start of the second Palestinian intifada, or uprising, in 2000.

Rabat normalized ties with the Jewish state last December, shortly after similar announcements by the UAE and Bahrain.

Last month, Israel’s Ratio Petroleum announced an agreement with Rabat on “exploration operations” off the city of Dakhla in Western Sahara.

Israel’s defense ministry oversees all security exports, with the Jewish state offering state-of-art products ranging from attack drones to the Iron Dome missile defense system.

One Israeli product, the NSO’s Pegasus spyware, has already made its way to Morocco, according to Amnesty International and Paris-based organization Forbidden Stories.

Rabat allegedly used it against French President Emmanuel Macron – a claim denied by Morocco which said it never bought the software and has filed lawsuits against French media and Amnesty International.

A spokeswoman for Gantz would not comment on NSO.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to mobilize civil society, Islamists and the far-left in Morocco, with a call for a November 29 demonstration against “creeping normalization with Israel” and in support of the Palestinians.

There were also calls for a pro-Palestinian demonstration in front of parliament on Wednesday.

According to Maddy-Weitzman, while Rabat has not abandoned the Palestinian cause, “there are too many other interests in play, too many other benefits to be gained by recalibrating.”

“Most of the countries in the region just don’t want to be held hostage any more on the issue, they want to pursue their interests as they define them, and at this point in time obviously Israel has a lot to offer,” he said.



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[Iran taking 'arbitrary measures' against IAEA inspectors, says Saudi representative](#)

Wed, 2021-11-24 01:04

LONDON: Iran is taking "arbitrary measures" against International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors, Saudi Arabia's governor at the UN watchdog said Tuesday.

He also called on Tuesday for Tehran to fully comply with safeguard agreements under the 2015 JCPOA nuclear deal and stop escalation of its nuclear program, adding: "Iran's nuclear commitments should not be mixed with negotiations."

He also said Iran's nuclear policy revolved around "blackmailing the world

through its nuclear program.”

The watchdog’s chief, Rafael Grossi, is in Tehran for talks with the regime and said Tuesday he wanted to deepen cooperation with Iran.

“The agency is seeking to continue and deepen the dialogue with the government of Iran... We agreed to continue our joint work on transparency and this will continue,” Grossi, who arrived in the Iranian capital on Monday, told a televised news conference.

The IAEA last week issued reports detailing its conflicts with Iran, from rough treatment of its inspectors to re-installing cameras it deems “essential” for the revival of Tehran’s nuclear deal.

Tehran and Washington will resume indirect negotiations on Nov. 29 in Vienna, which have been on hold since June, to find ways to reinstate the nuclear deal that former US President Donald Trump exited three years ago and reimposed harsh sanctions on Iran.



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IAEA’s Grossi says in Iran that he wants to deepen cooperationIran says

IAEA's Grossi to visit Tehran 'probably soon'