

# **The Hezbollah – Houthi connection**

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The Arab Coalition revealed on December 26, 2021, evidence proving the involvement of Hezbollah militia in Yemen and in using the Sanaa airport to target Saudi Arabia. The Coalition showed pictures of Hezbollah members training the Houthi militia to launch explosive-laden drones.<sup>1</sup>

Coalition spokesman Brigadier General Turki al-Malki said in a press conference: “The terrorist organization Hezbollah has spread destruction in the region and the world, and it bears the responsibility for targeting civilians in Saudi Arabia and Yemen.”<sup>2</sup>

The Arab coalition released during the press conference a video recording of Abu Ali Al-Hakim the ‘second-in-command’ of the Houthi movement, as well as its intelligence chief, showing him receiving orders from a member of the Lebanese terrorist Hezbollah party. The video shows the terrorist emphasizing to Al Hakim the importance of capturing the Hodeidah province so that its ports can be used for the shipping of weapons and transportation of terrorists to join the Houthis.

The recording showed a leading member of Hezbollah saying that the party had stopped its battles (in Syria) in order to stand by the Houthis in Yemen.<sup>3</sup>

Yemen President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi has repeatedly accused the Iranian regime of deploying Iranian and Hezbollah military experts in Yemen to support Houthi rebels.<sup>4</sup>

## **Abdullah Yahya Al-Hakim**

Abdullah Yahya al-Hakim (also known as Abu Ali al-Hakim), is often described as the ‘second-in-command’ of the Houthi movement, as well as

its intelligence chief. Hakim serves also as the link between the Houthis and Hezbollah and the Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC).<sup>5</sup>

The U.N. notes his involvement in the takeover of Sanaa and other areas of Yemen. In June 2014, Hakim reportedly held a meeting in order to plot a coup against Yemeni President Abdrabuh Mansour Hadi. Al Hakim met with military and security commanders, and tribal chieftains; leading partisan figures loyal to former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, which aimed to coordinate military efforts to take over Sanaa, Yemen's capital.<sup>6</sup>

In a 29 August 2014 public statement, the President of the United Nations Security Council stated that the Council condemned the actions of forces commanded by Abdullah Yahya al Hakim who overran Amran, Yemen, including the Yemeni Army Brigade headquarters on 8 July 2014. Al Hakim led the July 2014 violent takeover of the Amran Governorate and was the military commander responsible for making decisions regarding conflicts in the Amran Governorate and Hamdan, Yemen.

As of early September 2014, Abdullah Yahya al Hakim remained in Sanaa to oversee combat operations in case fighting began. His role was to organize military operations so as to be able to topple the Yemeni government, and he was also responsible for securing and controlling all routes in and out of Sanaa.<sup>7</sup>

On January 11, 2021, the US has designated three of the Houthis' top leaders as global terrorists: Abdul Malik al-Houthi, Abd al-Khaliq Badr al-Din al-Houthi, and Abdullah Yahya al-Hakim. All three leaders are also sanctioned by the United Nations Security Council. Al Hakim is also the fifth most wanted figure on the list announced by the Saudi-led Arab coalition given his crimes and violations of all rules of war.

Al Hakim is responsible for controlling "all routes" in and out of the Houthi-run capital of Sanaa, thereby having a major impact on imports and aid which millions of Yemenis rely on.

### **The support of Hezbollah to the Houthis in Yemen**

Since 2015, during the war years, Yemen's legitimate government and Saudi-led coalition have repeatedly accused Iran and Hezbollah of aiding the Houthi rebels.

Inquiries on the subject have been forwarded to the UN Security Council, the Arab League and the United States and other Western countries to act to end Iran and Hezbollah's involvement in the war in Yemen. Here are some evidences for the Hezbollah involvement in the war and some examples of inquiries to international organizations.

The first report of a Hezbollah presence on the ground in Yemen surfaced on April 12, 2015, the same day as Iran's state media reported a high-level meeting between Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and Iran's First Deputy Foreign Minister Morteza Sarmadi over the crisis in Yemen. Iran's Ambassador to Lebanon Mohammad Fat'hali also attended the meeting, according to Iran's Press TV and Hezbollah's Al-Manar TV station.<sup>8</sup>

The Asharq al-Awsat, claimed that the body of a "former Hezbollah militiaman" was discovered among the dead in Yemen's Shabwa province. Hezbollah issued a statement denying the "baseless" report that one of their men had been killed in Yemen - but notably stopped short of denying that it was operating in the country.<sup>9</sup>

Lebanon's al-Mustaqbal newspaper claimed that "several" Hezbollah fighters had died fighting in Yemen alongside the Houthis. The Beirut-based paper cited sources as saying that Hezbollah fighters may have provided support to the Houthis.<sup>10</sup>

According to the Al-Mustaqbal newspaper, Hezbollah and Iran's Revolutionary Guards were present in Yemen to train the Houthis even before the intervention of the Saudi coalition in the civil war in Yemen. The military experts and fighters of Hezbollah arrived to Yemen's Saada before the rebels captured large swathes in the country.<sup>11</sup>

A short time after the military intervention of Saudi Arabia in Yemen, Hezbollah leader, Hassan Nasrallah, said on April 7, 2015, the Syrian News Channel (Al-Ikhbariyah) that the Houthi command has not made a decision regarding potential attacks on Saudi Arabia, which has been leading international coalition efforts against the rebels in Yemen, although there is a real possibility of such move. According to Hassan Nasrallah, Saudi Arabia and the coalition are suffering a "catastrophic failure" in their efforts to defeat Houthis through airstrikes as the attacks have turned Yemeni residents against the authorities.<sup>12</sup>

Iran and Hezbollah have condemned the coalition's airstrike campaign against the Houthis, while former US Secretary of State John Kerry said that Iran had been “obviously” providing military assistance to the rebels.<sup>13</sup>

The Yemen legitimate government claimed in April 2015 that Hezbollah is engaged in fighting alongside Houthi rebels in Yemen and several Hezbollah fighters were killed in airstrikes led by Saudi Arabia against Yemen's Houthi rebels.<sup>14</sup>

Ahmed Awadh bin Mubarak, Yemen’s ambassador to the US and a former Yemeni president’s chief of staff, told Arab News that there is increasing evidence of Hezbollah military involvement in Yemen. “Hezbollah is executing Iran’s agendas in the region. Hezbollah has always been the training, military, media and political incubator of the Houthis,” he said.<sup>15</sup>

Hezbollah does indeed have a presence in Yemen and it has been supporting the Houthi insurgents in their war against the Saudi-led coalition.

The assistance from Hezbollah has come in the form of training, media operations, as well as battlefield direction and help to launch ballistic missiles and drones and anti-ship missiles. There is no indication of the size of the Hezbollah contingent in Yemen.<sup>16</sup>

In 2016, a video clip circulated on social media showing a Hezbollah military expert lecturing Houthi fighters.

Hezbollah 's techniques for making improved land mines disguised as rocks that the group used against Israeli forces in South Lebanon, have claimed the lives of hundreds of soldiers and civilians in Yemen.

Yemeni officers believe that Hezbollah experts are stationed inside command rooms and military camps in Sanaa, Hodeidah and Saada, in the rebels’ heartland.<sup>17</sup>

Arab League foreign ministers held an emergency meeting in November 2017 at the request of Saudi Arabia to discuss ways to confront Iran and Hezbollah over their role in the region. Saudi Arabia has accused Hezbollah of helping Houthi rebels in Yemen and playing a role in the ballistic missile attack in November 2017.

In a televised address, the leader of Lebanon’s Hezbollah Hassan Nasrallah said on November 20, 2017, his group had not sent any weapons to Yemen

and denied that it was behind the firing of a ballistic missile at Riyadh from Yemeni territory held by Tehran-allied Houthi forces. “I categorically deny it,” Nasrallah said. “No man from Lebanese Hezbollah had any part in the firing of this missile or any missiles fired previously.”<sup>18</sup>

Nasrallah also heaped criticism on Arab states that accused Hezbollah of terrorism at an emergency Arab League meeting in November 2017. He called the charge “trivial and ridiculous”, asking why Arab states were silent about what he described as the destructive war a Saudi-led coalition has waged in Yemen. “I confirm to them, no ballistic missiles, no advanced weapons, and no guns ... we did not send weapons to Yemen,” or Bahrain, or Kuwait, or Iraq, he said.<sup>19</sup>

Hezbollah had however sent arms to Palestinian territories, including anti-tank missiles, Nasrallah said. “I take pride in that. And in Syria there are the weapons we are fighting with,” he said.<sup>20</sup>

In his speech in June 2018, Nasrallah addressed the Houthis and said: “I am ashamed that I am not with you. I wish I could be one of your fighters and fight under the guidance of your brave and dear leaders.”<sup>21</sup>

Yemen’s foreign minister has called on July 2018 on Lebanon’s government to “rein in” Hezbollah and its aggressive tactics in support of the Iranian-backed Houthi militia. “The Republic of Yemen reserves the right to present the matter to the Arab League, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Security Council,” Khalid Hussein Al-Yamani said in a letter to Lebanese Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil.<sup>22</sup>

Al-Yamani said that Hezbollah’s support for the Houthis was evident in a televised address by its Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah, who called on the Houthis to fight the Yemeni government forces, and expressed “his party’s ambition to fight in Yemen against the internationally recognized legitimate authority.”<sup>23</sup>

The Saudi ambassador to the US has released in August 2018, videos which he claimed prove that Hezbollah is linked to the Yemeni rebel Houthi group. The footage, uploaded on twitter, showed a previous operation carried out by the Special Forces of the Arab coalition, which Prince Khalid Bin Salman said revealed evidence on Hezbollah's role in Yemen.<sup>24</sup>

The video showed a man, who Bin Salman described as the leading member in Hezbollah, outlining his military expertise, with a picture of the

Supreme Leader of the Iran, Ali Khamenei, as the wallpaper on his computer.<sup>25</sup>

Another post shows the same man giving instructions about the need to use civilian vehicles in order to transport fighters, such as the case in the town of Dammaj in the Yemeni province of Saada, when they were transferred in water tanks.<sup>26</sup>

In 2018, the Yemeni government lodged a complaint with the UN Security Council against Hezbollah's meddling in Yemen. Yemen's Ambassador to the UN asked the Security Council to launch an investigation into Hezbollah's support for the rebel Houthi movement in Yemen and charged that it was trying to sabotage the forthcoming negotiations in Geneva. He accused Iran of engineering these developments.

### **The meeting of Houthi delegation with Hassan Nasrallah**

The leader of Hezbollah met with a delegation from Yemen's Houthi rebels on August 19, 2018. According to the group, Hassan Nasrallah met with a delegation headed by the Houthi spokesperson Mohamad Abdel Salam, and discussed the latest developments in Yemen's civil war.<sup>27</sup>

The visit by the Houthi delegation triggered Yemeni Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Yamani complaining to his Lebanese counterpart Gebran Bassil of Hezbollah's support for the Houthi rebels.

Al-Yamani charged that Hezbollah had “deviated from the brotherly course and damaged the solid and long-established relations between Lebanon and Yemen” through its training and support of the Houthi militias.

Some Lebanese politicians have also lent their voices to the criticisms of Hezbollah, according to the Lebanese Masdar Diplomacy (Diplomatic Source) news site. They said that the visit was a violation of the rules of diplomatic protocol in Lebanon, which recognizes only the legitimate Yemeni government represented by its ambassador to Lebanon. The politicians demanded to know how the Houthi delegation had been permitted to enter Lebanon and who had arranged the visit.

## **The death of Hezbollah members in Yemen**

### **Two Hezbollah experts killed in Sanaa**

In November 2020, Arab coalition warplanes killed two Hezbollah military experts in Yemen during airstrikes on a training camp outside Houthi-held Sanaa. Along with the two Lebanese experts, at least a dozen Houthi fighters who were undergoing military training in Sanaa's Arhab district were killed in the same raid.<sup>28</sup>

### **Eight fighters of Hezbollah killed in north Yemen**

The Arab Coalition said on June 25, 2018, that eight members of Hezbollah were killed in north Yemen. "The coalition killed 41 terrorist elements in Maran and destroyed their vehicles and equipment," said coalition spokesman Col Turki Al Malki in a statement. "Among the dead were eight members of Lebanese Hezbollah, including a commander."<sup>29</sup>

The deaths near the town of Maran in Saada province, close to the Saudi Arabian border came as the coalition pushed forward its offensive to recapture the Houthi controlled Red Sea port city of Hodeidah further south.<sup>30</sup>

Coalition spokesman Col Al Malki said that although he has not previously disclosed such Hezbollah casualties it was "not the first time".<sup>31</sup>

The Hezbollah chief denied reports that eight of his party members were killed fighting alongside the Houthis in the Saada province in June 2018.<sup>32</sup>

"We've recently said that for certain reasons and interests, we do not say whether we have a presence in Yemen ... but whether we're there or not, I categorically deny that there are Hezbollah martyrs in Yemen – not in the last few days nor in recent years," he said.<sup>33</sup>

### **Hezbollah commander killed in air strike by coalition in Yemen's Saada**

In September 2018, Yemeni media has quoted security sources as saying that Tareq Haidara, known by the name Abu Haider, a commander in Lebanon's Hezbollah militia, was killed along with other Houthi commanders by an air strike by the Arab coalition in Yemen's Saada. Haidara was killed, along with a Houthi commander called Ali al-Jahdari. The Yemeni Khabar news agency quoted a security source as saying that

the Haidara, a Lebanese national, is one of the commanders training the Houthi militias.<sup>34</sup>

### **Concluding Remarks**

The conflict in Yemen is a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The Iran-aligned Houthi movement, which has been battling a Saudi-led coalition for seven years, has recently stepped up cross-border attacks on Saudi cities, mostly targeting southern Saudi Arabia.

The Iran- Hezbollah backed Houthi militia targeted civilian areas and energy facilities in the Kingdom with explosive-laden drones and ballistic missiles. The Saudi Coalition said that the Houthis had fired 430 ballistic missiles and 851 explosive laden drones at Saudi Arabia since the Yemen war began in 2015, leading to the deaths of 59 Saudi civilians.<sup>35</sup>

Hezbollah's long-standing involvement in the war in Yemen contributes to both the organization and its Houthi allies in Yemen. Hezbollah's assistance to the Houthis in training, operating missiles, rockets and drones and in information warfare, improves the Houthi's capabilities to withstand the war against the Saudi coalition.

Iran and Hezbollah gaining operational experience in the battlefields of Yemen and technological lessons, that will be implemented by Iran and its proxies.

In any future armed conflict in the Middle East the drones and missiles will be a significant component of the Iranian arms arsenal as an essential part of Iran and its proxies asymmetric warfare.

The legitimate government of Yemen and the Saudi-led coalition have for years sought the help of the international community to bring an end to the involvement of Iran and Hezbollah in the war in Yemen but very little has been done about it. The nuclear talks currently taking place between the powers and Iran could be an opportunity to put pressure on Iran also in the area of its involvement and Hezbollah involvement in the war in Yemen.

### **Notes:**

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<sup>1</sup> Arab Coalition: Lebanon's Hezbollah trains Yemen's Houthis to target Saudi Arabia, Al Arabiya, December 26, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



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<sup>3</sup> Abu Ali Al-Hakim ... The Pawn of the Terrorist Hezbollah, Asharq Al Awsat, December 27, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Coalition airstrikes kill Hezbollah military experts in Yemen, Arab news, November 11, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Abu Ali Al-Hakim ... The Pawn of the Terrorist Hezbollah, Asharq Al Awsat, December 27, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Security Council,  
<https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/2140/materials/summaries/individual/abdullah-yahya-al-hakim>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ari Sofer, Hezbollah 'Backing Houthi Rebels in Yemen,' Israel national news, April 12, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Hezbollah Fighting Alongside Houthis in Yemen, Sputnik, April 11, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Houthis Capable of Attacking Saudi Arabia, Hezbollah Leader Says, Sputnik, April 7, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Hezbollah Fighting Alongside Houthis in Yemen, Sputnik, April 11, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Coalition airstrikes kill Hezbollah military experts in Yemen, Arab news, November 11, 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Yemen files complaint against Hezbollah to UN, The National, July 11, 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Coalition airstrikes kill Hezbollah military experts in Yemen, Arab news, November 11, 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Ellen Francis and Laila Bassam, Lebanon's Hezbollah denies sending weapons to Yemen, Reuters, November 20, 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Ellen Francis and Laila Bassam, Lebanon's Hezbollah denies sending weapons to Yemen, Reuters, November 20, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Yemen files complaint against Hezbollah to UN, The National, July 11, 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Rein in Hezbollah, Yemeni foreign minister tells Lebanon, Arab News, July 12, 2018.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>24</sup> Saudi ambassador to US releases videos showing 'link' between Hezbollah, Houthis, The New Arab, August 18, 2018.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Hezbollah leader meets Yemen Houthi delegation, The New Arab, August 19, 2018.

<sup>28</sup> Coalition airstrikes kill Hezbollah military experts in Yemen, Arab news, November 11, 2020.

<sup>29</sup> Eight Hezbollah fighters killed in Yemen, The National, June 25, 2018.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Yemen files complaint against Hezbollah to UN, The National, July 11, 2018.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Hezbollah commander killed in air strike by coalition in Yemen's Saada, Al Arabiya, September 2, 2018.

<sup>35</sup> Arab Coalition: Lebanon's Hezbollah trains Yemen's Houthis to target Saudi Arabia, Al Arabiya, December 26, 2021.