

Hezbollah Raises \$173 and “Delivers a Painful Blow for the Zionist Entity”

by Hugh Fitzgerald



In Yemen, for the second year, the radio station SAM FM (a Houthi-owned station) conducted a fundraising campaign for the Houthi rebels during Ramadan. MEMRI.org has a lengthy account of that fundraising [here](#).

During the campaign, the station devotes a daily program to fundraising, which according to the pro-Houthi Yemeni press, is very popular and has even scored top ratings. The campaign is also widely advertised by the station, on its two Telegram channels, each of which has over 2,000 members (the station's Facebook page has been shut down). It is also advertised on billboards in the Houthi-held areas, and the station has circulated a telephone and Whatsapp number (770991991) for the campaign.

Donations can be made to a Postal Bank account no. 555555, and can apparently also be handed to activists who collect them on the streets. In addition to cash, gold, and even vehicles have been donated for the benefit of the Houthi fighters as well. According to the Houthi rebels' news agency, last year's campaign and this year's together have yielded a total of over 200 million Yemeni rials (about \$800,000), about 30,300,000 (\$120,000) of which was collected during the first 10 days of this year's campaign, which focused on supporting the Houthi military industry, missile units, drones, air defense forces, naval forces, and coast guard. To demonstrate that the donations have indeed been deposited in the campaign account, the station director, Hamoud Muhammad Sharaf, posted a photo of the deposit receipt on his Facebook page.

On the 19th day of Ramadan SAM FM launched another fundraising campaign, dedicated to Hezbollah. **Station director Sharaf said that devoting part of the fundraising to Hezbollah would be "a surprise and a painful blow for the Zionist entity, enemy of the Arab and Muslim nation... [and would] have an immense impact in terms of strengthening the resistance axis."** He assessed that the response would be extensive, saying: **"We have great faith in the Yemeni people's sense of responsibility towards the issues of the [Islamic] nation... and in its belief in the principle of being loyal towards those who showed it loyalty amid the oppressive aggression and the criminal siege we have been facing for the past four years... The Yemeni people will never disappoint the leader of the Islamic resistance in Lebanon, Hassan Nasrallah.** This is in accordance with the statements of the commander of the [Houthi] revolution, ['Abd Al-Malik Al-Houthi], who declared [on July 7, 2017] that 'we are loyal' and expressed the willingness of the Yemeni people to dispatch troops to [participate in] any future military confrontation [waged by] Hizbullah in Lebanon or in Palestine with the Israeli enemy." Sharaf confirmed the reports about

the economic crisis Hezbollah is suffering due to the U.S. sanctions on it and on its sponsor Iran, saying that the organization is in financial “distress” because it is being punished for supporting the Palestinian cause and the Yemeni people.

According to the anti-Houthi Yemeni website Yemen60.com, the station presenters exhort the audience to support “the leaders of jihad in the world [and] the world’s purest people, Hizbullah,” by asking: “Are you a Yemeni? Are you among the loyal? If you are, be part of attaining the victory. In the spirit of the jihad fighter Hassan Nasrallah and based on the principle that loyalty deserves loyalty, we call upon all the Yemeni people to take a large and active part in the popular donation campaign [for Hezbollah].” The station also took advantage of International Qods Day, which is marked by the supporters of Iran’s Islamic Revolution on the last Friday of Ramadan, to promote the campaign.

It seems that, contrary to the organizer’s expectations, the response to it was sparse. A week after the start of the campaign for Hezbollah, the station posted on its Telegram channel a receipt for 43,300 rials (about \$173) that had been deposited in the postal bank account. The small yield apparently motivated the station to extend the campaign, which was supposed to end on the last day of Ramadan, until June 30, “in response to popular demand.”

173 dollars! How many weapons will that ludicrous sum buy the Hezbollah fighters? One rifle? One pistol? How much fear will that amount of fundraising instill in the “Zionist entity”? The campaign has been extended, to run beyond the 19th day of Ramadan to the end of June, because of “popular demand.” So the fundraising campaign for Hezbollah began on May 24, and now runs until June 30 – a total of five weeks. Let’s suppose \$173 is raised in each of those five weeks, which would bring the total raised among the Houthis for Hezbollah to \$865, not

enough to pay for even one rifle. The IDF is unlikely to lose much sleep over that.

Hezbollah must now be frantic. Such a comical result of the fundraising on its behalf in Yemen makes clear that the terrorist organization is now very much on its own. Its main financial backer, Iran, is itself reeling financially from the re-imposition of American sanctions, and has since the beginning of 2019 drastically cut back on funds for Hezbollah. Its fighters have seen their salaries cut, first by a third, and now in half, with more cuts undoubtedly to come. In Lebanon, Hezbollah has been reduced to having its members manning donation buckets on street corners. In Europe, as Hezbollah's military wing has now been banned everywhere, it is unable to conduct a fundraising campaign to support Hezbollah fighters and pay for weapons. And in Yemen, as we have just seen, where the Houthis are always preaching Shi'a solidarity, the fundraising for Hezbollah on the Houthi radio station, and on billboards, amounted in its first week to a flabbergasting \$173.

Hezbollah's remaining sources of income are drug trafficking and money laundering. Hezbollah has long been involved in the heroin trade in Asia's Golden Triangle, but now it is even more extensively involved in the cocaine trade, receiving drugs from South American suppliers, chiefly in Colombia (the Colombian-Lebanese drug lord, Ayman Jourmaa, has been linked both to Hezbollah and to the Mexican drug gang Los Zetas), and delivering them to American and European distributors. Hezbollah has also been involved in smuggling Lebanese, not necessarily Hezbollah members or even Shia, for money, into the United States. It has been able to smuggle its own operatives into the U.S., by obtaining from the Maduro government false papers showing them to be Venezuelan citizens. Once in the U.S., among their other tasks, these operatives raise money among wealthy Shi'a that is then transferred back to Hezbollah in Lebanon,.

A key figure in the false-papers effort, as well as in Hezbollah's cocaine trafficking and money laundering, is one of Maduro's closest confidants, Venezuelan Industry Minister Tareck El Aissami. He has been investigated for his alleged ties to the country's criminal underworld and to Hezbollah, which years ago expanded its presence beyond the Triple Frontier area of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay to include operations within Venezuela.

Leaked documents from the American government say that El Aissami and his family helped move Hezbollah operatives into Venezuela, worked with a drug lord, and shielded 140 tons of chemicals believed to be used for cocaine production from authorities.

Testimony of informants in files provided to the New York Times by one of Venezuela's most senior intelligence officials claimed that El Aissami and his father recruited Hezbollah members to expand spy and drug trafficking networks in the region. If Maduro is overthrown, El Aissami will have to face trial for aiding drug traffickers and internationally-recognized terrorists. Most likely he will flee the country, and return to Lebanon, with whatever loot he can manage to seize from Venezuelan government coffers.

Hezbollah does not smuggle only hard drugs, heroin and cocaine; it has also been the main producer of hashish in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon, which is exported to Iraq, Syria, and Jordan. As a profitable sideline, it runs one of the largest cigarette smuggling operations in the Western Hemisphere.

If the Maduro government is finally overturned, and is replaced by a constitutional democracy headed by Juan Guaido – who has expressed support for Israel and a desire to shut down Hezbollah's Venezuelan connection – he will promptly end the false-papers program, and also be able to identify for American authorities those Hezbollah members, now in the U.S., who had been provided by Maduro's people with Venezuelan

passports, birth certificates, and other false papers. The roundup of such operatives will shut off one more source of Hezbollah funds, the money raised by the “Venezuelans” from wealthy Shi’a in the U.S. Hezbollah has bet the farm on Maduro (given their longstanding ties, they could hardly abandon him now), coming out – like so many of the Arabs – in full support of his ruthless dictatorship. If he falls, and Guaido shuts down Hezbollah’s drug smuggling, money laundering, and false-papers production in Venezuela, it will be a great loss to the group.

But let’s look on the bright side. In Yemen, the loyal Houthis answered the call to support their Hezbollah brothers, and provided them – in only their first week of fundraising! – with a grand total of \$173. I am sure that Hassan Nasrallah was deeply impressed. I know I was.

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