

US claims Iran is spending \$1 billion a year backing Hezbollah, other allies

The United States is claiming that Iran spends nearly \$1 billion a year providing support to Hezbollah, Hamas, and other allied militant groups in the Middle East.

U.S. Ambassador Nathan Sales, a coordinator for counterterrorism at the State Department, told reporters in Washington late on November 13 that Iran spends about \$700 million a year on Hezbollah, the Lebanese militia that has fought wars with Israel and has provided critical support to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in his seven-year civil war against Sunni rebels.

In addition, Sales said Tehran gives Hamas, the militant Palestinian group that controls the Gaza Strip, and other "Palestinian terrorist groups" another \$100 million a year.

He did not specify where the rest of the funding goes, but he claimed the total spending by Iran supporting militant activities primarily in the Middle East is close to \$1 billion a year.

"Iran is the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism. It has held that dubious distinction for many years now, and it shows no signs of relinquishing the title," Sales said.

"Sadly, it is the Iranian people who are forced to pay this price. The resources that Iran uses to fund its global terrorist ambitions are resources that come directly out of the pockets of everyday, average Iranians."

U.S. President Donald Trump has said the sanctions he reimposed on Iran this year were aimed in part at forcing Tehran to curb its support for militant activities in the Middle East, making such financial outlays more difficult and burdensome.

A principal goal of the U.S. sanctions imposed last week was to cut Iran's revenues from exporting oil, which have provided a large share of funding for the government and Iran's military, including its Quds Force, which conducts foreign

military operations involving Hamas and Hezbollah.

Iranian officials have said the sanctions will do nothing to deter the country's support for allies in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, and elsewhere.

But in street protests that broke out in Iran earlier this year, some demonstrators expressed concern about the money the government is spending in Syria and elsewhere outside Iran.

Sales made his comments as the United States announced a new round of sanctions against the son of Hezbollah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, as well as other senior commanders of Hezbollah and Hamas.

The department announced it was offering up to \$5 million for information leading to Hamas leader Salih al-Aruri and Lebanese Hezbollah leaders Khalil Yusuf Mahmud Harb and Haitham Ali Tabatabai.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Diplomatic Security Michael Evanoff said Harb is Hezbollah's military liaison with Hamas while Tabatabai commands Hezbollah forces fighting alongside the Syrian Army in Syria.

Sales claimed that Hezbollah's extensive military operations and growing political clout in Lebanon pose a danger for the Lebanese people. He made that claim on the same day that Lebanon's prime minister accused Hezbollah of blocking the formation of a government in Beirut.

"Inside Lebanon, Hezbollah's destructive actions have endangered the Lebanese people," Sales said. "Thanks to Iran's backing, Hezbollah has built a fearsome arsenal. The group has stockpiled more than 100,000 rockets and missiles inside Lebanon, and we see this as a massive and destabilizing buildup."

"As we all know, Hezbollah hides its missile factories in population centers, effectively using innocent civilians as human shields," Sales said.

The ambassador claimed that Iran's ties with Hamas have grown recently and also pose a danger in the region.

"We are also deeply concerned about Tehran's growing ties to Hamas," he said. "After a brief split early in the Syria conflict, Hamas and Iran have rebuilt their relationship. Iran is once again providing Hamas with much-needed funding."

Source: <https://americanmilitarynews.com/2018/11/us-claims-iran-is-spending-1-billion-a-year-backing-hezbollah-other-allies/>

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