



Ballistic Terrorism

By Nikola Zukalova

The latest escalation of violence in Yemen, coupled with reports of Hezbollah's growing arsenal of ballistic missiles, points to the dawning age of hybrid terrorism – ballistic terrorism. In contrast to the waves of grotesque suicide attacks that characterised previous phases of terrorism, this form removes the perpetrators from their targets by previously unimaginable distances. This has complicated counter-terrorist efforts and countries throughout the region are now grappling to contain this new terrorist threat.

Indeed, rocket and missile attacks have been deployed by multiple non-state actors in the Middle East – particularly Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas and other Palestinian groups in the Gaza Strip and the Houthis in Yemen – to fight their stronger state adversaries. These groups share the same denominator – support from Iran, which is well-known for its advanced ballistic missile programme.

There has been a steady increase in the numbers, range and use of missiles by non-state actors, because the technologies required for their engineering are simple, cheap and easily accessible. In addition, the technologies needed to intercept missiles are sophisticated and expensive. States need to build complex and expensive defence systems to protect their territories from ballistic missiles. One interception costs around \$50 000 (depending on the system), not including the hundreds of millions of dollars spent on research and development and/or to purchase the entire defence system. Consequently, these attacks are an ideal tool for a non-state actor to turn the tables when it is not able to compete with its adversary in terms of conventional military capabilities. They are also important instruments of mass terror as even highly expensive missile defence systems cannot assure a 100% guarantee of success; they can only reduce the casualties and damage.

Ballistic missiles follow a ballistic trajectory. Due to their high speed and the short period of time available they are extremely hard to intercept. It is also very difficult to provide accurate guidance, since they are powered only during a brief phase of flight and then they descend on the target, guided only by gravity. To date, the aforementioned groups have used only short-range ballistic missiles with a striking distance up to 1000 km. Even though such missile at-

tacks are usually imprecise, they are very effective in terms of the psychological effect on the targeted population and exerting pressure on the prescribed government. The missiles are being fired not only at military facilities but also at civilians – resulting in deaths, injuries, psychological trauma and the populations fleeing the targeted areas – all without endangering the operators, terrorists striking from a distance. The groups often launch their missiles from urban areas, using a population as human shields. Defence forces are reluctant to respond forcefully to avoid civilian casualties and not serve terrorist propaganda.

Hezbollah, for instance, has been improving its missile warfare since the 1990's. It has proven to be very successful particularly in the 2006 Israel–Hezbollah War, which served as a model of effective asymmetric warfare for other regional groups. The missile attacks were more effective than suicide bombing and even Hamas has shifted its methods of attacking Israel to missile campaigns, imitating Hezbollah. Back in 2006 Hezbollah did not retain any ballistic missiles, instead it fired thousands of Katyusha rockets from Lebanon into northern Israel, while Hamas targeted the South of the country with Grad rockets. Over the years, Hezbollah has refilled its arsenal, mainly with the help of Iran, and can now reach every city in Israel. It possesses tens of thousands of rockets and missiles including short-range ballistic missiles such as Fateh-110 (with range up to 250 km), Scud missiles (with a range of 700 km) among others – and could now launch over 1500 rockets and missiles a day at Israel, which is twelve times more than in 2006.

Hezbollah supports the Houthi forces in Yemen by providing them with training. Hezbollah has reportedly launched ballistic missiles against Saudi Arabia, which helped them to improve and test the missiles and their guidance systems. Some of the short-range ballistic missiles possessed by Hezbollah, or the Houthis, are potentially capable of carrying nuclear or chemical payloads, but until now only conventional warheads have been used.

Over the past three years, ballistic missiles have regularly been launched at Saudi cities and military targets from Houthi-held areas in Yemen. Since 2015, the Kingdom has been hit with around a hundred ballistic missiles fired from Yemen. In most cases, the US-made Patriot missile defence system intercepts the missiles before they could hit their targets, however that is not always the case. Currently, the Houthis possess the Qaher-1 (300 km range), the Qaher-2M (400 km range), the Burkans – an Iranian derivative of the Soviet-made Scud missile modified for longer range – and the most recently unveiled Badr-1. The Burkan-1 (with range up to 800km) was introduced in 2016 and launched at King Fahd Air Base in Taif and at Saudi Arabia's largest port, Jeddah, around 800 km from the Houthi base in Yemen, Sa'adah. Last year (2017) they unveiled the Burkan-2H, a ballistic missile based on Iranian surface-to-surface Qiam missile. It is the longest-distance missile in the Houthi arsenal, with a range of 1000 km, and its specifications assure that it is capable of carrying a nuclear payload (just as the

Iranian Qiam). Burkan-2H has since been used in multiple unsuccessful attacks on the capital Riyadh. Badr-1 was recently used to target Saudi Aramco's key oil facility in Najran province and some military targets, causing serious damage.

Although, war zones like Yemen are major areas for weapons' innovations and engineering, it is evident that the ballistic missiles and technologies had to be provided from abroad, given the fact that Yemen has no real history of a domestic missile industry. Thus, while the shipment of ballistic missiles or their components to Yemen would be problematic, it would not be impossible, as the Yemeni port Al Hudaydah is known to be used for smuggling weapons into the country. Regional tensions have been growing amid Saudi accusations that Iran is supplying weapons to the Houthi rebels. Iran is notoriously known for its desire to establish its hegemony in the Middle East. The Islamic Republic is deploying local proxies to escalate violence in the region, to sabotage the reconciliation efforts in conflict zones and to indirectly attack their adversaries – notably, Israel and Saudi Arabia. The ballistic missile campaign by its proxies is just one of the tools to reach their goal.

We, at the Euro-Gulf Information Centre, strongly condemn such malicious attacks on civilian populations. Ballistic terrorism, like all forms of terrorism, should be eliminated and it is absolutely crucial that the international community continue to work on initiatives promoting international cooperation against terrorism. We encourage dialogue between the opposing parties to reach a consensus for a political solution and to distance themselves from violence and the deliberate targeting of civilians.