

Hezbollah

This paper provides background material on Hezbollah as a terror organization, and a detailed discussion of the issue of designating Hezbollah as a terror organization in its entirety across Europe.

Background

Established in 1982 by Iran's Khomeini regime, Hezbollah developed into a **unique phenomenon with political, military, terrorist and criminal dimensions**. While Hezbollah became the most dominant **political party and force in the Lebanese government**, it also developed an **independent army** with organized military formations; tens of thousands of combatants; an arsenal of 130,000 rockets and missiles unrivalled by most militaries; and an **international terror and criminal network** spanning from Latin America to Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

As such, Hezbollah has multiple agendas:

- a. **An Iranian agenda** – Hezbollah is an integral part of the Iranian-led "resistance axis" which confronts Israel, the U.S., and moderate Arab countries. Iran and Hezbollah categorically deny Israel's right to exist, while [Hezbollah's ideology](#) is characterized by antisemitic undertones. Hezbollah has served the Iranian agenda in Lebanon, the Middle East and beyond, conducting terror attacks in Lebanon; deploying thousands of combatants in Syria's civil war; attacking U.S. forces in Iraq mostly through proxy Shiite militias; advising and training the Houthis in Yemen; and actively supporting subversion by Shiite opposition groups in Bahrain. Hezbollah has also collaborated with Iran beyond the Middle East, conducting terror attacks in Europe, Asia and Latin America, and even deploying its operatives to fight in the Bosnian War in the early 1990's.
- b. **A Lebanese agenda** – Hezbollah has built and strives to maintain its dominant power in the Lebanese political system, which is closely tied to its **sectarian agenda** of advancing the interests of the Shiite community, including through a highly-developed social welfare network.

On the most important strategic issues, **Hezbollah's Iranian agenda clearly overshadows its Lebanese orientation**. This is largely due to Hezbollah's heavy reliance on Iran's financial and military support. Moreover, Hezbollah's leadership subscribes to the Shiite religious doctrine (Wilayat al-Faqih) which holds that the authority of the leading Islamic jurist - today Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei - extends to all matters, including non-religious.

Hezbollah is Iran's most potent armed proxy. For this reason, Iran has used Hezbollah extensively in violent acts across the Middle East and globally. To cite just a few examples, there is overwhelming evidence of Hezbollah's involvement in the 1983 bombings of the US Embassy as well as the US Marine and French military barracks in Beirut (killing more than 300); the bombings of the Israeli embassy and Jewish community center in Argentina in 1992 and 1994 respectively (more than 100 killed); the 1994 bombing of AC flight 901 from Colon City to Panama City (21 killed); the 1996 bombing of the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia (killing 19 American servicemen and injuring 372); the 2005 assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri (a U.N. Tribunal recently convicted

one Hezbollah operative, but there is clear evidence implicating others); the 2012 terror attack against Israeli tourists in Bulgaria (6 killed; the suicide bomber was a French Hezbollah activist; a Bulgarian court recently convicted two Hezbollah operatives); and many more perpetrated and thwarted attacks. The indiscriminate firing of thousands of rockets into Israel in the 2006 Second Lebanon War, mostly targeting civilian population centers and killing 44 Israeli civilians, including 19 Israeli Arabs, should also be considered an act of terror.

To support its activities, Hezbollah operates an extensive **global network of drug trafficking and money counterfeiting** [estimated at hundreds of millions of dollars](#) a year from Europe to Latin America, particularly in the Tri-Border region of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay as well as Venezuela. Some experts have termed this the Hezbollah terror-crime nexus.

Hezbollah in Europe

Hezbollah has a long **history of terror and terror-related activities against European targets and in Europe**. In the 1980's it was involved in a series of terror attacks against European targets in Lebanon (killing 58 French soldiers in 1983 and a few more in 1984-1986) and in Europe, including in France, Spain, and Germany. In recent years, Hezbollah established an [extensive infrastructure for terror activities on European soil](#); [operated criminal-financial networks across Europe](#) including drug trafficking, money laundering and [cybercrime](#) (see also [here](#)); and occasionally carried out or tried to carry out terror attacks, such as the Burgas attack and foiled plans in Greece, Cyprus and elsewhere. For example, in 2015 Cyprus arrested Hussam Bassam Adbdullah, a Hezbollah operative of dual Lebanese-Canadian citizenship, who had stockpiled 8.2 tons of ammonium nitrate meant for explosives, and who admitted to plotting terror attacks against Israeli/Jewish targets. In 2016, in a major international operation (Operation Cedar), 16 Hezbollah operatives were arrested in France, Italy, Belgium and Germany for taking part in a global network of drug trafficking and money laundering to help fund the organization's arms procurement, especially for its fighting in Syria.

According to [Europol's 2020 report](#), Hezbollah "is suspected of trafficking diamonds and drugs and of money laundering via the trade in second-hand cars. Capital is sent to Lebanon through the banking system but also through physical transport of cash via commercial aviation." **Europol, the EU's police agency, labeled Hezbollah as an organized criminal organization**, and in 2014 joined the U.S. in establishing the [Law Enforcement Coordination Group](#), dedicated to countering Hezbollah's criminal activities.

Notable Hezbollah terror attacks

6 CASUALTIES	BURGAS BUS BOMBING 2012
44 CASUALTIES	ISRAELI CIVILIANS DURING 2006 WAR
19 CASUALTIES	KHOBAR TOWERS BOMBING 1996
21 CASUALTIES	AC FLIGHT 901 ATTACK IN PANAMA 1994
85 CASUALTIES	AMIA JEWISH CULTURAL CENTER BOMBING IN ARGENTINA 1994
29 CASUALTIES	ISRAELI EMBASSY ATTACK IN BUENOS AIRES 1992
695 CASUALTIES	36 SUICIDE ATTACKS 1982-1986 including 1983 Beirut foreign barracks bombing killing 307 people, incl. 241 U.S. Marines and 58 French military personnel

While the total number of Hezbollah operatives in Europe remains unclear, German intelligence established that **Hezbollah active operatives in Germany alone have increased to more than 1,000 in 2018**, with a further network of over 40,000 supporters. The group has used local social institutions such as community centers, mosques, and charity organizations to raise funds. Hezbollah’s supporters are publicly visible during the “Al Quds” day protests calling for the destruction of Israel, held annually in major European capitals, from Berlin to Paris.

The enormous **blast in the Port of Beirut on August 4th, 2020**, was caused by improper storage of 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate and resulted

in at least 200 deaths, 6500 injuries and 300,000 displaced persons. The catastrophe highlighted the **organization's use of this chemical substance as an explosive in its terror infrastructure and attacks**. While there is as yet no clear publicly-available evidence directly tying Hezbollah to this stockpile, Hezbollah is known to control the Beirut Port and to use ammonium nitrate in many terror attacks, including the 1994 bombing of Argentina's AMIA Jewish community center that killed 85 people.

It is now clear that [Hezbollah stored large-scale amounts of this substance throughout Europe](#) over the last decade as part of its terror infrastructure. In 2015, the British authorities exposed a [Hezbollah storage site containing three tons of ammonium nitrate in London](#) and in the same year, as mentioned, more than eight tons of the substance were found in the possession of Hezbollah in Cyprus. There were also storage sites in Germany. Ambassador Nathan Sales, U.S. coordinator for counterterrorism at the Department of State, recently [disclosed that Hezbollah has transported and stored ammonium nitrate all over Europe](#).

“Since 2012,” Sales stated, “Hizballah has established caches of ammonium nitrate throughout Europe by transporting first-aid kits whose cold packs contain the substance. I can reveal that such caches have been moved through Belgium, to France, Greece, Italy, Spain, and Switzerland. I can also reveal that significant ammonium nitrate caches have been discovered or destroyed in France, Greece, and Italy. We have reason to believe that this activity is still underway. As of 2018, ammonium nitrate caches were still suspected throughout Europe, possibly in Greece, Italy, and Spain.” France and Spain responded that they have no current evidence of such activities on their soil.

Notable operations against Hezbollah’s network in Europe

ARRESTS IN A FRENCH-US OPERATION 2015

Two Hezbollah operatives: Imam Kobeissi and Joseph Asmar arrested in Paris on charges of conspiring to launder narcotics and international gun trafficking for Hezbollah.

CEDAR OPERATION 2016

16 Hezbollah members arrested in France, Belgium, Germany and Italy for laundering money from the sales of luxury goods. €500,000 in cash were seized, 70 watches worth an estimated \$9 million, weapons, a luxury vehicle, and property valued several million dollars.

MOHAMMED AMMAR NETWORK 2018

A cell of 15 Hezbollah members arrested in France on charges of drug dealing, money laundering, and conspiracy. Hezbollah along with South American gangs, had made \$500 million annually from smuggling drugs.

ZAHRA CENTER OPERATION 2018

A Shi’ite organization, the Zahra Center, based in the north of France in Grande-Synthe, was closed by the French authorities for logistical support to Iranian and Hezbollah operations in France.

Using civilians as human shields

The blast in the Beirut Port also raised public awareness and even sparked some **protests against Hezbollah's conduct of placing dangerous explosive materials in populated civilian areas**, including its huge arsenal of rockets - inside, beneath or near civilian homes, schools, hospitals and mosques. On September 22, 2020, a Hezbollah-owned weapons depot accidentally exploded in Ein Qana in southern Lebanon, killing several civilians. This was [not the first such case](#).

Using human shields is strongly forbidden by international law, as codified in the Rome statute (a specific intent war crime) and in protocol I of the Geneva Conventions. The U.S. House of Representatives and Senate banned the conduct in the 2017-1018 Sanctioning the [Use of Civilians as Defenseless Shields Act](#). There is ample ground to take legal action against Hezbollah on this count.

On several occasions in recent years, **Israel publicly exposed numerous Hezbollah arms caches deployed in civilian areas**. In his annual 2018 speech to the U.N. General Assembly, Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu exposed three Hezbollah military sites hidden in residential areas in Beirut. In his September 29th, 2020 address to that body, Netanyahu showed photos of a Hezbollah rocket facility in Beirut, in the vicinity of gas installations. This was followed by IDF-released footage of two more Hezbollah rocket facilities in heavy-populated areas in Beirut. Hezbollah rushed to refute Netanyahu's allegation by inviting journalists to the site, claiming it is an innocent civilian metal factory – only to be further [challenged by an IDF video](#) pointing out that briefing the journalists on the spot were known Hezbollah activists and that the machines in place are specifically connected to the manufacturing of rockets.

Here are some additional websites for further reference to basic source material about Hezbollah as a terror-criminal entity, including Israeli sources:

- [The Washington Institute's interactive map](#) and the [writings of Matthew Levitt](#), the Institute's and a leading world expert on Hezbollah as a global terror and criminal organization.
- The IDF's website ([here is one example](#), but there is lots of materials).
- The [Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center](#).
- The [Abba Eban Institute for International Diplomacy's Janus Initiative](#), focusing on Hezbollah.
- [Alma Research and Education Center](#).

The Designation of Hezbollah as a terror organization

The **U.S.** designated Hezbollah in its entirety as a terror organization as early as 1997¹, followed by **Canada** in 2002 and **Holland** in 2004, while the **UK** designated only the military wing of Hezbollah in 2008. **Australia** designated the External Security Organization (ESO) of Hezbollah in 2003, while New Zealand designated Hezbollah’s military wing in 2010.

In July 2013, the EU decided on a similar measure, designating only the military wing of Hezbollah under the EU’s Common Position on designating terror groups (CP 931). The decision was made following the terror attack in Burgas, which Bulgaria, an EU member state, publicly blamed on Hezbollah, and was heavily impacted by the organization’s involvement in Syria’s civil war. This EU partial designation was then endorsed by a number of EU member states. That same year, **Bahrain** designated Hezbollah in its entirety due to Hezbollah’s subversion on its soil in the service of Iran², and in 2016 the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** and then the **Arab League** followed suit, while **Egypt** already pronounced Hezbollah as a terror organization in 2009.

Momentum gathered force in 2019-20 leading to full designations of Hezbollah in Europe by the UK, Germany, Lithuania, Serbia, Kosovo and very recently Estonia (banning entry of activists, including from the political wing, whose activities support terrorism); and in South America by **Argentina, Paraguay, Honduras, Columbia, Juan Guaido in Venezuela** and **Guatemala** (which recently



1 In 2015, the U.S. Congress passed the Hizballah International Financing Prevention Act, which sanctions foreign institutions that use U.S. bank accounts to finance Hezbollah. Lawmakers amended it in 2018 to include additional types of activities.

2 Bahrain’s population is about 70% Shiite.

announced new legislation designed to counter Hezbollah's drug trafficking and money laundering), while **Uruguay** declared its intention to follow suit. Additional countries, including **Slovenia**, **Austria**,³ the Czech Republic⁴ and **Switzerland** are also considering full designations. **Japan** at one point opened the avenue to designation but has not yet taken a formal, legally binding measure of outlawing Hezbollah. It was also reported that following the recent breakthrough to normalizing Israel's relation with **Sudan**, that country is also going to designate Hezbollah.

Most European countries continue to rely on the EU terrorist list. Several EU members, including **France** and **Spain**, considered filling the gap between partial and full designations by introducing specific measures targeting select Hezbollah entities, such as the Al-Manar TV station (for incitement to violence) and the Martyrs' Foundation. In retrospect, it is quite clear that these partial designations did little to curb Hezbollah's illicit activities in Europe.

Why did most of the Europeans designate only the military wing of Hezbollah and not the organization in its entirety? Here are the main reasons:

1. **Hezbollah is the most dominant political party in Lebanon and in the Lebanese government, where it holds veto power over national decisions.** There is a fear among European governments (especially France) that designating Hezbollah in its entirety may deprive them of important channels of communication and means of influence in Lebanon and with the Lebanese government and political system.
2. **Some of these governments shy away from designating a political party elected in a democratic process.** They also believe it is important to address Hezbollah as a Lebanese political actor, not only a terror organization, because the more it is integrated in the Lebanese political system, the higher the chances of it becoming "moderated." In contrast, they believe that delegitimizing Hezbollah and applying heavy pressure on the organization might push it to even more extremes, to the point of destabilizing Lebanon, since it is the strongest military and political power in the country.
3. **These governments also believe that refraining from designating the political wing of Hezbollah could afford them immunity from Iranian/Hezbollah subversive/terror activities and violent reprisals on their soil and against their interests, including targeting soldiers deployed with UNIFIL in Lebanon.** Approximately one third of UNIFIL's current 10,300 troops come from 14 EU member-states, most notably Italy, France and Spain.
4. **Some European governments tie the issue to their relations with Iran**, preferring not to put too much pressure on existing sensitive relations (including their desire to salvage the JCPOA).

³ On May 29, 2020, the Austrian Parliament unanimously called on the government to take action against Hezbollah and to call on the EU to designate it in its entirety.

⁴ On October 28, 2020, the Czech Parliament passed a resolution by an overwhelming majority, calling on the government to designate Hezbollah in its entirety as a terror organization.

Here are the main responses to the above arguments:

1. **Both the political and the military wings of Hezbollah, as well as its other aspects of its operations, reinforce each other and answer to the same leadership.** This is analogous to two limbs in a body activated by the same head; to absolve one of the two is to deny reality. [Hezbollah itself refuted this distinction on numerous occasions.](#) Governments that promote such a distinction send a clear message of weakness and turning a blind eye to some of the organization's negative activities and policies.
2. **The partial designation yielded limited results in curbing Hezbollah's terrorist and illicit activities in Europe, as was clearly seen in Germany, especially as it makes it easier for Hezbollah to cover funds devoted to military, terror and criminal activities under a political veneer.** It is high time Europe sent a much stronger message to Hezbollah that such activities will no longer be tolerated. The full designation of Hezbollah aligns Europe's long overdue recognition of realities on the ground, namely, Hezbollah's undeniable and ongoing terror activities in Europe and elsewhere, with its own legal stipulations regarding acts of terror.
3. **In practical terms, full designation would provide a much more effective legal framework and tools to pursue the circle of enforcement.** Such actions include monitoring, apprehension, interrogation, prosecution, freezing assets and additional financial countermeasures, as well as improved international coordination (U.S. Congress is moving to enhance anti-Hezbollah legislation, which might contradict partial European designation). These steps are necessary to prevent Hezbollah from building terror networks, recruiting activists, and planning and carrying out terror attacks while engaging in illicit activities, raising and transferring funds, organizing hate events, disseminating propaganda and serving other Iranian interests in Europe.
4. **Designating Hezbollah does not deprive the designator of a means of communications with the Lebanese government and political system.** This was recently demonstrated by the U.S., which achieved a breakthrough in persuading Lebanon and Israel to begin negotiations on the demarcation of their maritime border, as well as by the U.K. and Germany. The EU's own Common Position 931 on designating terror groups does not preclude such contacts. Moreover, the prescription has no bearing on funding for the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), as demonstrated by the U.S., Netherlands, UK and Germany. That being said, Europeans should factor into their decisions regarding assistance to the Lebanon/LAF careful consideration of the possibility that weapons or funds would find their way to Hezbollah.
5. **The fact that the Lebanese political system legitimizes Hezbollah as a political party does not necessitate that Europe grant it such legitimization.** In fact, European states themselves (including France) have a record of dissolving or banning domestic political parties that engage in violence, promote discrimination and propagate ideas supporting such activities.
6. **There is no substantiation or merit to the argument that engaging Hezbollah as a political actor will moderate its behavior. Quite to the contrary, experience shows that Hezbollah**

- responds to leverage applied against it.** In any event, as already noted, Hezbollah prioritizes its Iranian agenda to its Lebanese interests.
7. **It is time for Europe and especially France to internalize that while Hezbollah is a large part of the problem in Lebanon, it is not part of the solution.** Lebanon has become a totally dysfunctional and failed state with a collapsing economy. Suffice it to listen to the voices of protest against Hezbollah emanating from large swaths of Lebanese society, in order to realize this.
 8. **Lebanon's stability is determined by many factors. The designation of Hezbollah abroad is a marginal factor in this equation, if at all.** It could however weaken Hezbollah's political weight in Lebanon, which would be a positive development.
 9. **As for the fear of Hezbollah reprisal attacks, it should be noted that [Hezbollah has never responded to any designation \(and there were many\) by violence](#); it stands much to lose by doing so.** Hezbollah's violent activities against UNIFIL soldiers are predominantly tied to the situation on the ground in southern Lebanon; they are taken in cases where UNIFIL troops encroach on Hezbollah's deployment and operations, in a bid to enforce UN Security Council Resolution 1701 which Hezbollah blatantly violates. Since UNIFIL's mandate is weak, Europe should consider joining hands with the U.S. in demanding its strengthening or, alternatively, scaling down or removing some European forces.
 10. **Hezbollah is no doubt a destabilizing factor in the region in the service of Iran, in view of its role in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Bahrain and history of regional subversion in additional countries. Designating Hezbollah would align Europe with the majority of regional actors and is also an effective way to convey an appropriate European message to Iran.** There is no necessary contradiction between reviving the JCPOA and pushing back against Hezbollah's terror and criminal activities as well as its destabilizing role in the region.

At this juncture, there is a unique opportunity to take action against Hezbollah, which is at an unprecedented low point and is under heavy pressure. This is due to the convergence of U.S. economic pressure on Iran leading to a significant reduction in funding to Hezbollah; U.S. sanctions and international economic measures directed at Hezbollah; U.S. sanctions on Syria; the economic meltdown of Lebanon as a functioning state; the aftermath of the horrific explosion at the Beirut Port; the impact of COVID; and serious domestic criticism against Hezbollah. Public protests in Lebanon have pointed a blaming finger at its role in perpetuating a corrupt, dysfunctional sectarian system; building a "state within a state"; diverting national resources (including European assistance); advancing a foreign (Iranian) agenda; and ultimately playing a crucial role in the devastation of the Lebanese state.