

## Hezbollah's Organized Criminal Enterprises in Europe

by Matthew Levitt

### *Abstract*

*Hezbollah plots in Europe over the past year exposed a return to violent operations being conducted by the Iranian supported Lebanese Shi'ite group. Plots in Bulgaria and Cyprus led to a rigorous debate among European Union member states over whether or not to ban the organization's military wing. But this only marks Hezbollah's return to violent operations in Europe. Hezbollah has long used Europe as a staging ground for operations to be carried out elsewhere, as a logistical hub, and as a place where the group and its supporters could raise funds through a variety of criminal enterprises. The focus of this article is the wide variety of criminal activities Hezbollah engages in, revealing a global network that conducts extensive criminal operations throughout Europe.*

Hezbollah plots in Europe over the past year have led to a rigorous debate among European Union (EU) member states over the efficacy of adding the military wing of Hezbollah to the EU's list of banned terrorist groups (which they did in July of this year). But Hezbollah plots in places like Cyprus and Bulgaria are far from the totality of Hezbollah activities in Europe. Indeed, Hezbollah has long used Europe as a staging ground for operations to be carried out elsewhere, as a logistical hub, and as a place where the group and its supporters could raise funds through a variety of criminal enterprises. the latter is the focus of this article.

### *"Special Operations Abroad"*

In June, Germany's domestic intelligence agency reported that Hezbollah's uses German-based mosques and their affiliated organizations to raise funds for the group.[1] In fact, Germany has long been a center of Hezbollah activity in Europe, and for years German security officials saw Hezbollah's terrorist chief Imad Mughniyeh, in close concert with Iran, as the key leader of the group's efforts related to "planning, preparing and carrying out terrorist operations outside of Lebanon." [2] Bassam Makki's 1989 plot to bomb Israeli targets in Germany offers one stark case in point but Hezbollah's activities in Germany did not end there. In 1994, for example, Germany issued a warning related to the possible entry into the country of "a group sent by Mughniyeh to carry out attacks against U.S. targets." [3] According to Hezbollah scholar Magnus Ranstorp, several senior Hezbollah commanders shared responsibility with Mughniyeh for the group's "special operations abroad" in Europe, including Hussein Khalil, Ibrahim Aqil, Muhammad Haydar, Kharib Nasser, and Abd al-Hamadi.[4]

Over time, the Hezbollah support network in Germany would grow. According to the annual reports of Germany's domestic intelligence service, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, some 800 members or supporters of Hezbollah lived in Germany in 2002. That number increased to around 850 by 2004 and to 900 by 2005. Among "Arab Islamist groups" in Germany, Hezbollah had become the second largest by 2005.[5]

That year, a German court deported a Hezbollah member who had lived in the country for twenty years. Though Germany had not banned Hezbollah as a terrorist group, the Dusseldorf court ruled the man was "a member of an organization that supports international terrorism" and refused to extend his visa.[6] German security agencies "intensively watch" groups like Hezbollah and Hamas, German minister of interior Wolfgang Schaueble commented in summer 2006. He noted that one reason for his concern was that "in the past, there were attempts to recruit suicide attackers in Germany." [7] The latest report shows that there are now 950 Hezbollah members, with 250 of them in Berlin. One way that money raised by supporters goes to the group is through a charity called Orphan Project Lebanon, which is also the branch that "promotes suicide bombings." [8]

Currently in Germany, and in almost all of the EU member states, this type of fundraising is legal because Hezbollah is not listed as a terrorist organization (only fundraising that is explicitly for the military wing of Hezbollah is banned). This allows Hezbollah to raise money in Europe hand-over-fist like the Red Cross. However, Hezbollah raises funds in a variety of other ways that are explicitly criminal worldwide and notably in the EU where a debate on whether or not to designate Hezbollah as a terrorist organization is taking place.

### *Criminal Enterprises*

Hezbollah's involvement in crime stems from a few different motives, the basic necessity of funding, insurance from failure of patrons' contributions, and as a way to establish independence from its patrons. In the past it was estimated that Hezbollah received somewhere between US \$100-\$200 million a year from Iran and additional resources from Syria. The past few years however, these partners have not been as generous with their funding. Iran is undergoing devastating economic sanctions and the Syrian state is caught up in a civil war. Today, these realities impact Europe as Hezbollah operatives' criminal activity increases, including narcotics trafficking, money laundering, fraud and counterfeiting. And, once again, Hezbollah's activities in Europe have turned violent, as exposed in the successful attack in Bulgaria in July 2012.

In March 2013 a Cypriot court convicted Hossam Yaccoub—a dual Swedish-Lebanese citizen—and sentenced him to four years. Among other charges, Hossam Yaccoub was convicted of participation in an organized crime group and the preparation of a criminal act. The head of the three-judge panel declared: "It has been proven that Hezbollah is an organization that operates under complete secrecy. There is no doubt that this group has multiple members and proceeds

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with various activities, including military training of its members. Therefore, the court rules that Hezbollah acts as a criminal organization.”[9] This is the most recent and prominent case of Hezbollah acting as an organized criminal group in Europe, but in fact, Hezbollah has been acting as an organized criminal group for years.

Despite being discovered in several cases, Hezbollah operatives continue to run one of the largest and most sophisticated global criminal operations in the world. These criminal activities have strengthened Hezbollah and made it more difficult for Western nations to counter. In the 2013 SOCTA (Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment) report, Europol identified several “crime enablers.” These included, “logistical hotspots, diaspora communities, corruption, the use of legal business structures, cross-border opportunities, identity theft, document forgery, and violence.[10] Hezbollah exploits all of these, not only in Europe, but worldwide. Much of the publicly available material regarding Hezbollah activities in Europe comes from US investigations. Hezbollah has long been designated as a terrorist organization by the US government; therefore its law enforcement and intelligence agencies have legal authority to pursue investigations into Hezbollah activities. This is now the case in Europe as well, but again only for alleged military wing members. Nearly all the cases involving Hezbollah are transnational in nature allowing even US investigations to uncover some Hezbollah activity in Europe. Due to these limitations, it is likely that there is more activity that has not been discovered.

### *Narco-trafficking*

Hezbollah has taken advantage of cross border opportunities to traffic arms, cash, and drugs. In 2008, German authorities at the Frankfurt airport arrested two Lebanese men carrying more than eight million euros raised by a Hezbollah cocaine smuggling ring. The two had trained in Hezbollah camps, however, they were not arrested for terrorist or militant activities, but for cocaine trafficking. The subsequent investigation led to a surprising discovery, traces of cocaine on the bills along with the fingerprint of an infamous Dutch drug kingpin.[11] A year later, two other men from the same ring involved in moving drugs from Beirut into Europe were arrested in house raid in Speyer.[12] In 2009, Admiral James Stavridis, then commander of U.S. Southern Command, noted an expanded presence of terrorist drug traffickers in West Africa, which had become their “springboard to Europe.”[13] By late February 2012, Yuri Fedotov, head of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, informed the UN Security Council that “The West African transit route feeds a European cocaine market which in recent years grew four fold... We estimate that cocaine trafficking in West and Central Africa generates some US \$900 million annually.”[14]

In January 2011, one of the largest Hezbollah narcotics trafficking and money laundering schemes was disrupted. The U.S. Department of Treasury identified Ayman Joumma, along with an additional nine persons and nineteen businesses involved in the scheme. A Drug Enforcement Administration investigation revealed that Joumma laundered as much as US \$200 million a

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month from the sale of cocaine in Europe and the Middle East through operations located in Lebanon, West Africa, Panama, and Columbia, using money-exchange houses, bulk cash smuggling, and other schemes. Joumma's network laundered money through Lebanese Canadian Bank (LCB) accounts, which he used to execute sophisticated trade-based money laundering schemes. For example, LCB used U.S. correspondent banking relationships to send suspiciously structured electronic wire transfers to U.S.-based used car dealerships, some of which had already arisen in other, unrelated drug-related investigations. The proceeds of the used car sales were ultimately repatriated to Joumma's network in Lebanon.[15] In June 2013, the LCB was fined US \$102 million for its role in laundering the money.[16]

Nine months after his designation as a narco-trafficker in February 2011, Ayman Joumma was indicted on charges of conspiracy to distribute narcotics and money laundering, including coordinating cocaine shipments for sale in the United States.[17] Joumma had first emerged on DEA agents' radar when he placed a call to a phone tied to Chekry Harb, a Hezbollah-affiliated drug trafficker in Colombia. Joumma had arranged for the proceeds of cocaine sales to be picked up at a Paris hotel and then laundered back to Colombia, but the pickup turned out to be a sting operation. Listening in on the line, agents heard Joumma nonchalantly muse, "I just lost a million euros in France." Cell phones seized at the Paris hotel tied Joumma, himself a Lebanese Sunni Muslim, to Hezbollah.[18]

### *Stolen Goods and Weapons Trafficking*

This was not the only U.S. investigation to expose Hezbollah's criminal links to Europe. For example, in the late 2000s Hassan Karaki was helping lead a broad criminal conspiracy to sell counterfeit and stolen currency to an undercover FBI informant posing as a member of the Philadelphia criminal underworld.[19] In a parallel plot overseen by Hezbollah politician Hassan Hodroj, Hezbollah sought to procure a long list of sophisticated weapons in a black market scheme involving Hezbollah operatives across the globe.

In the Philadelphia case an undercover officer posed as someone who could fence stolen goods to the group of suspected Lebanese criminals. Members of the group bought what they believed to be stolen property from the undercover agent and sent the merchandise to destinations as diverse as Michigan, California, Paraguay, Brazil, Slovakia, Belgium, Bahrain, Lebanon, Syria, and Iran. The money for these purchases came from Danni Tarraf, a German-Lebanese procurement agent for Hezbollah with homes in Lebanon and Slovakia and significant business interests in China and Lebanon.[20] Tarraf wasted little time before asking whether the agent could supply guided missiles and 10,000 "commando" machine guns from the United States.[21] With that, a massive Hezbollah criminal fundraising and weapons procurement case was all but delivered to investigators on a silver platter.[22]

When Tarraf visited the United States in March 2009, the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) and its member agencies put on a show, giving him a tour of a fake criminal network capable of procuring many of the weapons Tarraf sought for Hezbollah through his company, Power Express. Law enforcement officers concluded that Power Express essentially "operated as a subsidiary of Hezbollah's technical procurement wing." [23] In another meeting three months later, Tarraf was very clear about why he wanted guided and shoulder-fired missiles: they had to be able to "take down an F-16." Tarraf showed the undercover agent exact weapons specifications on the internet as the FBI taped the conversations and captured the computer search records. Within weeks Tarraf and the undercover agent met in Philadelphia again, where Tarraf paid the agent a US \$20,000 deposit toward the purchase of Stinger missiles and 10,000 Colt M4 machine guns. Tarraf noted that the weapons should be exported to Latakia, Syria, where Hezbollah could shut down all the cameras when the shipment arrived. [24]

In November 2009, Tarraf visited the United States one last time to inspect the missiles and machine guns the undercover agent had procured for him. [25] On November 21, 2009, Tarraf was arrested on terrorism and other charges and quickly confessed in full, admitting to being a Hezbollah member, receiving military training from the group, and "working with others to acquire massive quantities of weapons for the benefit of Hezbollah." [26]

Given Tarraf's global contacts, investigators saw him as the most valuable target of their operation. But their next priority was Dib Harb, the son-in-law of senior Hezbollah official Hassan Hodroj and a close associate of Hezbollah militant Hasan Karaki. While an undercover agent worked to build Tarraf's trust, an FBI source worked another angle of the case, building rapport with Moussa Ali Hamdan, a naturalized U.S. citizen from Lebanon involved in petty crime but also well connected to senior Hezbollah officials. [27] In late 2007, Hamdan met with someone who promised to deliver a reliable flow of bulk stolen goods—cell phones, laptops, game consoles, and automobiles—that Hamdan could resell for a nice personal profit. But Hamdan's new supplier was actually an FBI source, who helped authorities unwind an extensive international Hezbollah network.

### *Counterfeit and Stolen Currency*

As the business relationship between the two men grew, Moussa Hamdan introduced the FBI source to the Hezbollah official mentioned earlier, Beirut-based Dib Hani Harb. In a conversation with the source, Harb explained that Iran produces high-quality counterfeit currencies in facilities staffed by people in the Baalbek working eighteen hours a day to produce the fake bills for Hezbollah's use. Harb was shopping for a buyer. Hezbollah officials would need approval to sell the source this particular type of high-quality counterfeit currency, he added. The necessary approvals apparently came through, because two months later Hamdan and the source were hashing out the details of a deal for US \$1 million in counterfeit U.S. currency to be sold at

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around forty cents to the dollar. But something strange happened when Hezbollah officials in Lebanon sent sample counterfeit notes to the source for inspection. The supposedly counterfeit notes were in fact genuine currency.[28]

Law enforcement officers thought Hezbollah was trying to scam the source by passing off genuine bills as extremely high-end forgeries and then providing low-end forgeries when the deal actually came through. In fact, Hezbollah suddenly had an acute interest in dumping a stockpile of genuine currency stolen by Hezbollah supporters around the world. In support of its international terrorist activities, Hezbollah had a program in place through which Hezbollah supporters sent stolen currency to Iran for later use by Imad Mughniyeh and members of Hezbollah's IJO. Following Mughniyeh's assassination, a decision was made to sell the stockpile of stolen money.[29]

So it was in early December 2008, just about a week after Moussa Hamdan and the source met outside Philadelphia to discuss plans for the sale of the counterfeit bills, that the source found himself on the phone with Dib Harb in Beirut discussing plans to buy stolen currency at a rate of about sixty-five cents to the dollar. The scene was now set for a meeting in person to firm up the relationships underpinning the source's illicit dealings with Hezbollah. After receiving another photo album containing a new batch of stolen currency, the source traveled to Beirut in mid-February to meet Harb's boss, Hasan Antar Karaki, who seemed at ease, unguardedly discussing Hezbollah and his own ties to the group.[30]

Karaki reiterated to the source that the stolen currency could not be spent in Lebanon because it was "blood money" Hezbollah smuggled from Iran through Turkey and Syria into Lebanon. Some of the money—just under US \$10,000—was money stolen from Iraq, the source was told, explaining why Hezbollah was sensitive the funds be spent in small amounts only, and not in Lebanon. Karaki's assistant followed up on the meeting, not only sending samples of counterfeit US \$100 bills but European €200 notes as well.[31] In April 2009, Karaki sent Harb to meeting in southern Florida with the source and the source's purported Philadelphia crime boss. The men negotiated terms for the sale of stolen U.S. currency and multiple counterfeit currencies. According to Harb, the eighteen- to twenty-hour days worked by Hezbollah's representatives to counterfeit U.S. dollars also included currency from "Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the European Union." [32] At one point, Harb showed the undercover agent a Swedish krona bill with stains from a dye-pack security system used by banks to mark stolen funds. According to Harb, the bill was part of a US \$2 million bank heist Hezbollah supporters pulled off in Sweden. He explained that Hezbollah cells conduct robberies all over the world and send the money to Iran, where it is held before ultimately being distributed to Hezbollah in Lebanon.[33]

Karaki sent Dib Harb to an April 2009 meeting in southern Florida with the source and the source's purported Philadelphia crime boss. The men negotiated terms for the sale of the stolen

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U.S. currency and multiple counterfeit currencies. All told, the Hezbollah officials provided the source a little less than \$10,000 in counterfeit U.S. currency.[34]

Harb also explained that Hezbollah does not just produce counterfeit currency, but false European documents as well. Karaki is a major figure in Hezbollah's forgery operations, a role that would also allow for the production of forged passports and visa stamps if desired. He offered several varieties of passports, explaining that the Italian passports he acquired were genuine books from Italian immigration officials. He also noted that Czech passports were possible to obtain as well. In fact, at the moment he had a man traveling to the Czech Republic for the purpose of obtaining passports. A few months after the meetings in Florida, Harb and Karaki delivered a couple other varieties in the form of fraudulent British and Canadian passports to the source using the pictures and biographical information he had provided.[35]

The meetings in southern Florida went so smoothly that the source was invited back to Beirut in mid-June to meet senior Hezbollah officials, including Karaki and Harb's father-in-law, Hassan Hodroj, who served on Hezbollah's political council. Publicly described as a Hezbollah spokesman and the head of its Palestinian issues portfolio, Hodroj was also involved in Hezbollah's procurement arm.[36] Hodroj knew what he wanted: 1,200 Colt M4 assault rifles, which the source said he could procure for US \$1,800 apiece. Hezbollah only needed "heavy machinery," he added, for the "fight against the Jews and to protect Lebanon." Like Dani Tarraf, Hodroj wanted the weapons shipped to the port of Latakia, Syria, which he described as "ours." [37]

Before the meeting ended, Hodroj broached one more subject: Hezbollah's desire to procure still more sensitive items from the United States, specifically communication and "spy" systems. Hodroj confided that he was involved not only in weapons but also technology procurement for Hezbollah and asked him to keep his eyes open for technologies that could help Hezbollah secure its own and spy on its adversaries' communications. In the meantime, Hodroj directed the source to work through Dib Harb to complete the deal for the M4 machine guns.[38]

While investigators succeeded in luring Dani Tarraf back to the United States, bureaucratic infighting undermined their effort to do the same for Dib Harb.[39] The case came to a head in November 2009, when authorities rolled out three sets of indictments and exposed a Hezbollah politician's role in global arms deals and criminal enterprises.

### *Money Laundering and Smuggling*

Further US investigation exposed still other types of Hezbollah criminal activities with ties to Europe. With so many successful fundraising schemes at the ready, Hezbollah needed effective means of moving the proceeds of its criminal enterprises to Lebanon. Often, operatives would send money back with friends, relatives, or others from the Lebanese community who were traveling to Lebanon. Some were couriers by happenstance, pleased to help a friend transport money home, possibly not even aware the money was intended for Hezbollah. Others were

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knowing participants who willingly carried funds to Lebanon for Hezbollah, either out of ideological devotion or for a fee. But Hezbollah never put all its eggs in one basket, using *hawala* dealers (informal value transfer systems based on trust), money-service businesses such as Western Union, charities, and various old-fashioned smuggling techniques to move money to Lebanon. In some cases, the means Hezbollah operatives used to move their money also effectively laundered the money as well.

Whatever money he raised in the United States, Mahmoud Youssef Kourani who had furtively entered into the United States through Mexico in 2001,[40] was confident he could get it back to Hezbollah. Once, Kourani told an FBI informant that he had recently sent US \$40,000 in money orders and cash to Hezbollah and could send as much money back to Lebanon as he liked because a friend who worked at the Beirut airport helped smuggle the money into the country.[41] Nine different FBI informants independently identified Kourani as a Hezbollah operative, alternately describing him as a Hezbollah fundraiser, member, and fighter.[42]

Hezbollah supporters in the United States also had access to an airport employee much closer to home. From 1999—three years after immigrating to the United States from Lebanon—until his arrest in 2007, Riad Skaff worked as a ground services coordinator for Air France at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport. With an active airport security badge, Skaff had full access to all secure areas of an international terminal. For a fee, Skaff smuggled bulk cash packages onto airplanes, circumventing security inspections. At one point, Skaff told an undercover agent posing as an individual seeking to smuggle US \$25,000 in cash to Lebanon, "I am in charge of the plane, everything.... It is dangerous, if they catch [me], they take me to jail..." Skaff did smuggle the money onto an Air France flight to Paris, noting to the undercover agent that millions of dollars pass through Paris to Lebanon daily. Skaff later smuggled US \$100,000 and a cellular jammer on another Paris-bound flight for the undercover agent. A month later, he smuggled a package containing four night vision rifle scopes and two night vision goggles onto a Paris-bound flight. [43]

In a government sentencing memorandum filed after Skaff pleaded guilty to all the charges against him, prosecutors put Skaff's illicit conduct in the context of Hezbollah support activity. Arguing that Skaff's conduct "in essence was that of a mercenary facilitating the smuggling of large amounts of cash and dangerous defense items for a fee," prosecutors noted he was fully aware the items were destined for Lebanon, "a war-torn country besieged by the militant organization, Hezbollah." [44] Prosecutors never accused Skaff of being a Hezbollah supporter, just a criminal happy to accommodate the needs of potential Hezbollah supporters for a fee. [45]

### *Hossam Yaacoub in Cyprus*

These investigations reveal a global criminal network, including longstanding and substantial networks in Europe. The latest example of Hezbollah's ability to operate freely within Europe

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comes from the case of Hossam Yaacoub, whose trial and conviction in Cypriot court opened a window into the other types of activities that Hezbollah is involved with in Europe. In contrast to recent Hezbollah plots in Bulgaria in January and July 2012, which led to largely intelligence investigations that did not lend themselves to sharing much information publicly, a treasure trove of information has poured out of the trial in Cyprus of Hossam Yacoub, the Lebanese-Swedish dual citizen and self-confessed Hezbollah operative arrested just days before the Burgas, Bulgaria bombing.

Yaacoub was arrested—just two weeks prior to the deadly attack in Bulgaria, where five Israelis and a Bulgarian bus driver were killed when a bus exploded leaving the airport in Burgas—after performing a surveillance operation on the airport in Cyprus. Yaacoub not only was helping to plan similar operations in Cyprus but in fact had already helped carry out other “missions” in Europe. As a dual citizen, he used his legitimate Swedish passport to perform several courier missions for Hezbollah. In the first, in 2008, he delivered a large, thin envelope to a person in Antalya, Turkey. Then, in 2009, he traveled to Lyon France where he picked up a bag from one person using identification signs and code words and transported it to another, again using identification signs and code words. On the second mission, he went to Amsterdam, where he retrieved a cellphone, two SIM cards, and unknown object wrapped in newspaper, which he brought back to Lebanon.

Yaacoub was sent to Cyprus in 2009 for the express purpose, according to his account of the instructions his Hezbollah handler gave him, “to create a cover story for people to get to know me, to keep coming with a justifiable purpose and without giving rise to suspicions.” He traveled to Cyprus via Dubai to strengthen his cover, and spent a week vacationing in Ayia Napa at Hezbollah’s expense. When he returned to Cyprus two years later he would be able to say that the idea for importing merchandise from Cyprus came to him while on vacation there in 2009.[46]

Then, in December 2011 and again in January 2012, Aiman sent Yaacoub back to Cyprus “to create a cover story” as a merchant interested in importing to Lebanon juices from a specific local company in Cyprus. He was also tasked with collecting information about renting a warehouse in Cyprus. “I did all these things after receiving clear instructions from Hezbollah, so to have Cyprus as a basis [sic] and be able to serve the organization,” he said. Yaacoub maintained he did not know why Hezbollah wanted this base of operations, but speculated “perhaps they would commit a criminal act or store firearms and explosives.”[47]

Yaacoub conceded to police that his December 2011 visit to Cyprus actually involved several separate missions. First, his Hezbollah handler tasked Yaacoub with scoping out a parking lot behind the Limassol Old Hospital and near the police and traffic departments. He wanted Yaacoub to take pictures and be able to draw a schematic of the area on his return. Yaacoub was to specifically look for security cameras, if payment was required on entry, if car keys were left with a parking attendant, if there was a security guard, among other observations. Yaacoub was also told

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to find internet cafes in Lamassol and Nicosia, which he marked on a map, and to purchase three SIM cards for mobile phones from different vendors on different days, which he did. He also found good meeting places, such as at a zoo in Limassol and outside a castle in Larnaca. In the event a meeting was necessary, Yaacoub would receive a text message. A text about the weather meant to go to the Foinikoudes promenade in Larnaca that day at 6 PM. If no one showed up, Yaacoub was to return the following day at 2:00 PM, and then again the next day at 10:30 AM. Aiman also wanted Yaacoub “to spot Israeli restaurants in Limassol, where Jews eat ‘kosher,’” but an internet search indicated there were none. Later, in January 2012, Yaacoub was instructed to check out the Golden Arches hotel in Limassol, collect brochures and reconnoiter the area (he did survey the area, but the hotel was being renovated).[48]

*“Hezbollah knows Cyprus very well,” Yaacoub told police, adding he thought his taskings were intended to update the group’s files “and create a database.” He insisted he was not part of any plot “to hit any target in Cyprus with firearms or explosives,” adding that he would have had the right to refuse the mission if asked to do such a thing.[49] Yaacoub expressed support for “the armed struggle for the liberation of Lebanon from Israel,” but was “not in favor of the terrorist attacks against innocent people.”[50]*

Then, he added: “I don’t believe that the missions I executed in Cyprus were connected with the preparation of a terrorist attack in Cyprus. It was just collecting information about the Jews, and this is what my organization is doing everywhere in the world.”[51]

On March 21, a Cypriot criminal court convicted Yaacoub of helping to plan attacks against Israeli tourists on the island last July. In their 80-page decision, the judges rejected Yaacoub’s defense that he collected information for Hezbollah but did not know what it would be used for. There could be no “innocent explanation” of Yaacoub’s actions, the court determined, adding that he “should have logically known” his surveillance was linked to a criminal act.[52]

### **Conclusion**

Hezbollah is once again extremely active in Europe, but no longer limits itself to fundraising and logistics as it did for many years. Speaking last August, just weeks after the Cyprus and Bulgaria plots, a senior US government official bluntly stated: “We assess that Hezbollah could attack in Europe or elsewhere at any time with little or no warning.”[53] More recently, in its annual Country Reports on Terrorism the US State Department noted that 2012 showed “a marked resurgence of Iran’s state sponsorship of terrorism, through its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF), its Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), and Tehran’s ally Hizballah.”[54] Europe is no exception and as the debate on whether to designate the group as a terrorist organization continues it is important to bear in mind that under the EU’s Common Position 931, “a designation provides for a freezing of all funds, other financial assets and economic resources belonging to the persons, groups and entities concerned” and “are subject

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to enhanced measures relating to police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters.”[55] Given Hezbollah’s extensive criminal network, it is clear that such a designation would be a powerful policy prescription, and until the EU takes such a step Hezbollah’s criminal and terrorist activities will remain at high levels.

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***Notes***

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[27] *United States of America v. Hassan Hodroj et al*, Affidavit Samuel Smemo, Jr.; Newall, “Road to Terrorism;” Author interview with law enforcement officials, March 11, 2010.

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[44] *USA v. Riad Skaff*, Government's Sentencing Memorandum; *USA v. Riad Skaff*, Affidavit of ICE Special Agent Matthew Dublin, January 29, 2007.

[45] *USA v. Riad Skaff*, Affidavit of Colonel Kevin M. McDonnell, April 24, 2008.

[46] Depositions of Hossam Taleb Yaacoub (some spelled Yaakoub), Criminal Number Σ/860/12, File Page 110, by interviewing police officer Sergeant Michael Costas. Depositions taken on, July 14, 2012.

[47] *Ibid*.

[48] Depositions of Hossam Taleb Yaacoub (some spelled Yaakoub), Criminal Number Σ/860/12, File Page 134, by interviewing police officer Sergeant Michael Costas. Depositions taken on, July 16, 2012.

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