

A Ceasefire Won't End Iran's Terror War on Europe

by [Michael Jacobson \(/experts/michael-jacobson\)](/experts/michael-jacobson)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Michael Jacobson \(/experts/michael-jacobson\)](/experts/michael-jacobson)

Michael Jacobson is the Mark and Wayne Levy Senior Fellow in The Washington Institute's Jeanette and Eli Reinhard Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence.



Articles & Testimony

Even if Washington resumes negotiations, Tehran will keep sending its proxies to commit attacks, buy weapons, and establish sham charities on the continent, so European governments must crack down harder.

With the US-Iranian ceasefire breaking down, and President Trump declaring the MOU “over,” there is major uncertainty about what’s next. But whenever the United States and Iranians do return to the negotiating table, there is one thing that is clear. It is highly unlikely that Iran will agree to any restrictions on support for its proxies and partners, including the Iraqi Shia militias, Hezbollah, the Houthis and Hamas. This is hardly surprising, but still bodes poorly for future Middle East stability.

It is also bad news for Europe, where Iran-linked actors have been active in plotting attacks, raising funds, and procuring weapons. European governments must step up and make their territory a more hostile operating environment. This would be essential in preventing these groups from rebuilding their financial, terrorist and weapons capabilities, which will undoubtedly be a high priority for Tehran.

Iran has been particularly active in recent months in wreaking mayhem on European soil. A new organization, Harakat Ashab al-Yamin al-Islamiyah (HAYI), emerged in the early days of the war, with a series of attacks on Jewish targets across Europe. Hayi was quickly tied to Kataib Hezbollah, an Iraqi terrorist group closely linked to the Iranian regime. Hayi has been recruiting mostly young, low-level criminals through social media to go after Jewish targets in the UK, the Netherlands, Belgium, France and elsewhere. Both the IRGC’s Quds Force and Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) have also conducted and planned numerous terrorist plots in recent years in many of the same locales.

Hezbollah has a long history of terrorist activity in Europe, including most notably the deadly 2012 bus bombing in

Bulgaria, with many other plots discovered before execution. Hamas is a fairly new entry into the European plotting space, with its terrorist planning traditionally limited to Israel, Gaza and the West Bank. Soon after the October 7 attacks, German and Danish authorities arrested Hamas operatives who were developing arms caches in Europe. And last year, additional Hamas operatives were charged in a plot to conduct attacks in Europe timed to coincide with the October 7 anniversary.

In a late 2025 press conference, the German prosecutor general warned about this new threat, stressing that for Hamas, Germany and other European countries are “being increasingly viewed as operational areas for possible attacks,” using operatives with European citizenship, which allows for unimpeded travel.

Europe has been a prime fundraising locale as well for Iranian proxies, particularly Hamas. Hamas has established a network of charities in Europe that portray themselves as humanitarian organizations, but which instead divert the funding to support their military and terrorist activities. As US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent bluntly put it earlier this year, “Hamas continues to finance its military wing by exploiting sham charities to support terrorist operations.”

Europe has been a vital source of technology for Iranian proxies, particularly Hezbollah. Hezbollah has sought European technology to develop its drone capabilities for its military campaign against Israel. In 2025, European authorities disrupted a large-scale Hezbollah procurement network operating in Spain, Germany, France and the UK. In bringing charges, prosecutors contended that companies linked to Hezbollah were obtaining drone components (including engines, chemical compounds and electronic systems) for use in targeting Israel.

To their credit, the European governments have taken some steps to address the rising Iranian threat. In addition to the multi-state drone prosecution, a number of European governments have prosecuted Hamas financing cases since October 7—a notable shift from their historical reluctance to do so. Earlier this year, the European Union also designated the IRGC, Iran’s primary arm for its global terrorist network and activities, as a terrorist organization. And last month, many European countries joined a US-led statement to condemn Iran for its terrorist plotting around the world.

While these are significant steps, more will be required. At the EU level, the Europeans will need to dramatically build out their sanctions targets beyond the terrorist organizations themselves to include the relevant Iran-linked front companies, charities, financiers, and money exchange houses. They will also need to fully empower Europol—the EU’s police agency—to coordinate these complicated cross-border investigations. Furthermore, the European governments will need to surge resources on the intelligence, sanctions and law enforcement fronts against these sophisticated and dangerous Iranian networks. Finally, European governments will also need to employ more aggressive measures against Tehran, including expelling Iranian intelligence officers and closing down Iranian diplomatic establishments.

Even if the US eases its maximum pressure against Iran, the Europeans should resist the temptation to follow suit. This will not be easy, given the wide frustration in Europe at the US and Israel that the elevated Iranian threat level is a direct result of the war that was initiated with no European consultation.

Instead, the Europeans should approach this issue more strategically and continue building on their post-October 7 actions to hold Iran accountable for its behavior, and to make it more difficult for the Iranian networks to regain their strength. This will ultimately be key not only to the long-term stability of the Middle East, but to the security of European citizens.

Michael Jacobson is the Mark and Wayne Levy Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute and former director of strategy, plans, and initiatives in the State Department’s Counterterrorism Bureau. This article was originally published on the Times of Israel website (<https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/a-ceasefire-wont-end-irans-terror->

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