

Hezbollah's European Enablers

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Given Hezbollah's long and sordid history in Europe, and the fact that it has now resumed violent operations there, what will it take to get EU member states to ban the group?

This week, Prime Minister Stephen Harper will welcome his French counterpart, Jean-Marc Ayrault, who is making his first official visit to Canada since taking office last May. Their meeting provides a timely opportunity for Ottawa to teach Paris a thing or two about how to deal with Hezbollah.

Hezbollah has long sought to engage in financial and logistical support activities in Canada. Thankfully, Canadian law enforcement investigators and intelligence agencies have taken the threat seriously.

Hezbollah has been banned in Canada since 2002. But not so in France or the European Union as a whole. Indeed, France remains ardently opposed to banning Hezbollah. But recent events in Europe may bring change. This includes the conclusion of Bulgarian investigators that Hezbollah was behind the Burgas bus bombing in Bulgaria last July, which killed five Israelis and a local bus driver.

In fact, Hezbollah has been active in Europe since the terrorist group's founding in the early 1980s, when it engaged in a long list of attacks across the continent. But while it has continuously raised funds, procured arms and provided logistical support from Europe for attacks to be carried out elsewhere, it had been years since Hezbollah last carried out an attack on European soil. Then came the Burgas bombing in 2012.

In Cyprus, meanwhile, authorities arrested a suspected Hezbollah operative who collected information about Israeli tourists arriving in Cyprus in a plot eerily similar to the one that killed six people a few days later in Bulgaria. The suspect initially denied ties to terrorist activity, but later admitted being a Hezbollah operative. Before sending him on his mission to Cyprus, Hezbollah first used him as a courier, dispatching him to deliver packages to Hezbollah operatives in places such as Turkey, the Netherlands and France.

That there are Hezbollah operatives in Europe should not surprise. Hezbollah has maintained networks throughout

Europe for some 30 years. Indeed, Hezbollah's first documented attack in Europe was in 1983 -- the same year Hezbollah bombed French, Italian and American troops in Beirut -- when Hezbollah's Islamic Jihad Organization claimed responsibility for bombs placed at a train station and aboard a train from Paris to Marseilles. This was followed in 1984 by the hijacking of TWA flight 847 from Athens to Rome and the arrest at Zurich airport of a Hezbollah operative carrying explosives in a cloth belt around his waist. He was on his way to Rome at the time, leading Italian authorities to arrest a Hezbollah cell there two weeks later. 1985 saw Hezbollah bombings in Spain, Denmark and France.

Between December 1985 and September 1986, Hezbollah operatives using a variety of cover names bombed 15 targets in Paris. The Paris cell finally was disrupted only after German authorities arrested Mohammad Ali Hamadi -- one of the TWA 847 hijackers -- who was caught at the Frankfurt airport in January 1987 carrying explosives destined for Paris. More arrests followed in Germany, including the 1989 arrest of Bassem Makki, who was plotting attacks on Israeli and American interests in Germany. Over the next few years, Hezbollah operatives and Iranian hit men assassinated Iranian dissidents in a series of murders across Europe.

In the 1990s, Hezbollah founded a special unit -- Unit 1800 -- dedicated to supporting Palestinian terrorist groups and infiltrating its own operatives into Israel to collect intelligence and execute terrorist attacks within Israel's borders. Hezbollah infiltrated a small number of operatives into Israel through Southeast Asia, but Europe was its preferred stepping stone into Israel. Some operatives, such as Hussein Mikdad, were Lebanese citizens with fair complexions who traveled on false documents. Others, such as Stephan Smyrek, a German convert to Islam, or Jihad Shuman, a British citizen, traveled to Israel through Europe on their European passports.

More recently, FBI investigations revealed the amazing extent to which Hezbollah forgers are producing counterfeit Euros and other European currency. Another investigation exposed Hezbollah robberies around the world and plans to launder and sell the stolen currency, including \$2-million worth of stolen Swedish Krona. Yet another case involved a dual Lebanese-German citizen who used his Slovakian import-export company as a front to procure weapons -- including shoulder-fired anti-aircraft rockets -- for Hezbollah.

Given Hezbollah's long and sordid history in Europe, and the fact that it now has resumed violent operations in Europe, what will it take to get EU member states to agree to ban Hezbollah as the terrorist group it is? Last summer, Cyprus' foreign minister pledged that "should there be tangible evidence of Hezbollah engaging in acts of terrorism, the EU would consider listing the organization." Now here we are, tangible evidence in hand: The Burgas bombers traveled through Romania and Poland, the defendant in Cyprus though France and the Netherlands.

Yet unlike the Netherlands and Canada, which have designated Hezbollah as a terrorist group and proactively countered its terrorist activities, France remains a holdout, effectively protecting it from any meaningful European action. Perhaps Mr. Harper will take the opportunity to talk some sense into his French counterpart on this important issue.

Matthew Levitt is director of The Washington Institute's Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence and author of the forthcoming book [Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/hezbollah-the-global-footprint-of-lebanons-party-of-god) (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/hezbollah-the-global-footprint-of-lebanons-party-of-god>). ❖

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