

Ban Hizballah in Europe

by [Matthew Levitt \(/experts/matthew-levitt\)](/experts/matthew-levitt)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Matthew Levitt \(/experts/matthew-levitt\)](/experts/matthew-levitt)

Matthew Levitt is the Fromer-Wexler Fellow and director of the Reinhard Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence at The Washington Institute.



Brief Analysis

The assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri in a massive car bombing in downtown Beirut highlights the need for increased attention to terrorism in Lebanon. Today, European Union (EU) officials will have a perfect opportunity to do so at a meeting in Brussels where they will debate whether or not to include Lebanon's Hizballah organization on the European Union's list of banned terrorist organizations. The United States and Israel have long pressed their European allies to take action against Hizballah, but France in particular has refused to follow America, Israel, Canada, and Australia in banning Hizballah, ostensibly for fear of upsetting the domestic political balance in Lebanon where members of the group hold seats in Parliament. The Hariri assassination, however, highlights the reality that failure to implement proper security measures for political expedience can have potentially devastating consequences.

Targeting the Peace Process

The issue of banning Hizballah in Europe is back on the table at the request of Palestinian Authority (PA) officials. "We know that Hizballah has been trying to recruit suicide bombers in the name of al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades to carry out attacks which would sabotage the truce," stated one Palestinian official. Indeed, just hours after the ceasefire announcement, al-Aqsa members fired on a car near an Israeli settlement in the West Bank and then attacked the army unit sent to investigate the shooting. Another PA official cited intercepted email communications and bank transactions indicating that Hizballah has increased its payments to terrorists: "Now they are willing to pay \$100,000 for a whole operation whereas in the past they paid \$20,000, then raised it to \$50,000." Indeed, in a late January meeting in Beirut, even as ceasefire negotiations were well underway, Hassan Nasrallah and Khalid Mishal, the leaders of Hizballah and Hamas, respectively, declared that resistance against Israel was the only option until "all of Palestine" was liberated. A Palestinian official concluded, "Hizbullah and Iran are not happy with Abbas's efforts to achieve a ceasefire with Israel and resume negotiations with Israel. That's why we don't rule out the possibility that they might try to kill him if he continues with his policy."

European Operations

On top of its efforts to cripple the peace process, Hizballah warrants European attention for its operations there. In the 1980s Hizballah operatives carried out bombings in France and assassinations in Germany. But the group continues to operate out of Europe today. For example, German intelligence estimates that 800 Lebanese Hizballah

members live in Germany. The organization publishes a weekly newsletter in Germany, al-Ahd, though it scaled back its overt presence there after September 11, fearing a clampdown.

Over the past few years, Hizballah has used Europe as a launching pad from which to infiltrate operatives into Israel to conduct surveillance and carry out attacks. For example, in 1996 Hussien Makdad, a Lebanese member of an elite Hizballah squad, flew from Switzerland to Israel on a stolen British passport. A few days later he was badly injured preparing RDX explosives in his East Jerusalem hotel room. In 1997, Hizballah operative Stephan Smyrek, a German convert to Islam trained by Hizballah in Lebanon, left Lebanon and flew from Amsterdam to Israel on his own German passport. He was tasked with photographing prospective targets for attacks but was arrested at Israel's Ben Gurion airport. In 2000, Hizballah dispatched Fawzi Ayub, a highly trained operative whose mission was to train Palestinians and facilitate operations, to infiltrate Israel from Europe. Ayub, a Canadian of Lebanese descent, traveled from Lebanon on his own Canadian passport, and then sailed to Israel on a forged American passport he received in Europe. And in 2001 Hizballah operative Gerard Shuman, a dual British-Lebanese citizen, flew from Lebanon to Britain on his Lebanese passport and then on to Israel on his British passport. Arrested in Israel, Shuman is believed to have been sent to conduct surveillance operations.

In at least one case, Hizballah's European operations and the group's efforts to undermine the peace process intersect. In mid-2003, Israeli forces arrested Ghulam Mahmoud Qawqa for his role in several al-Aqsa bombings in Jerusalem. According to information discovered after his arrest, Qawqa was in the process of engineering attacks on Israeli interests in Europe and Asia on behalf of Hizballah. In late 2002, Qawqa tasked a Lebanese woman he knew in Germany to photograph the Israeli embassy in Berlin from multiple angles for a possible attack.

European Attitudes Toward Hizballah

French Foreign Minister Michel Barnier stated earlier this month, "Hizballah has a parliamentary and political dimension in Lebanon. They have members of parliament who are participating in parliamentary life. As you know, political life in Lebanon is difficult and fragile."

But both France and Germany have taken recent action against Hizballah, suggesting European officials may seriously consider the Palestinian request to ban Hizballah. On December 13, 2004, after a yearlong debate, France's highest administrative court ordered France-based satellite provider Eutelsat to discontinue all broadcasts of the Hizballah's satellite channel, al-Manar. The ban was finally instituted after a guest asserted there were Zionist attempts to spread AIDS among Arabs. And in January, a German court upheld a lower court's deportation order against a Hizballah representative who had lived in Germany for some 20 years. The Dusseldorf court denied the Hizballah member a visa, saying he "is a member of an organization that supports international terrorism." In a statement, the court said "Hizballah is waging a war with bomb attacks against Israel with 'inhumane brutality' against civilians." The court also ruled that the fact that Hizballah is not on the EU terrorism list should not prevent Germany from deporting its members.

Political Expedience

On May 3, 2002, the EU added eleven organizations and seven individuals to its financial-blocking list of "persons, groups, and entities involved in terrorist acts." The action was significant because it marked the first time that the EU froze the assets of non-European terrorist groups. But in an effort to maintain a distinction between terrorist groups' political and charitable activities on the one hand, and their direct terror wings on the other, the EU placed several individual Hizballah terrorists on its list, but not the organization itself. The decision implied Hizballah operatives are somehow independent of the group that recruits, trains, and funds them.

At the time, the EU decided not to ban the social welfare or political wings of Hamas either. But in August 2003 the EU reversed its decision, recognizing the entirety of Hamas as a terrorist organization and banning its political and

social wings as well. Tomorrow's meeting will provide the EU with the opportunity to follow suit regarding Hizballah and ban the terrorist organization despite the fact that alongside its terrorist and guerilla activities it also provides humanitarian support and fields candidates for political office.

Conclusion

Now that the PA has joined the chorus of those calling on Europe to take action against Hizballah, Washington should press the EU collectively, and its constituent members individually, to add Hizballah to the EU terrorism list. Israel and the PA agree that the organization represents the single most dangerous threat to the peace process. Hizballah is the only so-called political party that finances suicide bombings and has an arsenal of 13,000 rockets. Its terrorist operations must not be forgiven for its parallel political activities. Banning Hizballah would show that the EU is prepared to actively engage where it counts to facilitate Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Matthew Levitt, a senior fellow and director of the Terrorism Studies Program at The Washington Institute, is the author of *Exposing Hamas: Funding Terror Under the Cover of Charity*, (Yale University Press, forthcoming 2006). ❖

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