

## Europe's Half-Solution on Hezbollah is No Solution at All

Written by B'nai B'rith Europe

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*By Eric Fusfield*

In a development long awaited and much debated, Europe is finally moving closer to designating Hezbollah a terrorist organization.

Or are they? Reports of Europe's newfound resolve in stopping the Hezbollah threat, regrettably, may be exaggerated.

The main obstacle in the effort to undercut Hezbollah in Europe has always been France, which has historic ties to Hezbollah's home country of Lebanon. France has long argued that blacklisting Hezbollah would upset the balance of power in Lebanon, where the organization plays a political role.

In recent weeks, though, French officials have signaled their government's willingness to designate Hezbollah's military wing a terrorist organization if the latter's role in a bus bombing in Burgas, Bulgaria last year is confirmed. Germany has also indicated it might favor blacklisting Hezbollah's armed branch, while the United Kingdom already has such a ban in place.

With the European Union's Big Three – France, Germany and Great Britain – on board, Europe might finally muster the consensus required to impose an EU-wide ban on Hezbollah's military wing.

But what would such a move really mean? Unfortunately, not as much as Europeans would like to suggest.

A ban on Hezbollah's military branch would not stop the political wing of the organization from operating openly in Europe, as it has done for years. Raising funds, recruiting, acquiring technological training and materials – all of these activities would continue with impunity. And no authority could stop the political arm of Hezbollah from repurposing fungible assets to support the organization's military and criminal activities.

Hezbollah is an organization with a unified command structure that oversees all of the group's disparate, and often illicit, activities. Many of Hezbollah's leaders, including current Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah, have been linked to the organization's terrorist activities; indeed, their terrorist and criminal exploits have been instrumental to their rise within Hezbollah's structure.

What makes Europe's propensity to differentiate between the military and political branches of Hezbollah almost comical is that Hezbollah itself makes no such distinction. "Hezbollah has a single leadership," Nasrallah deputy Naim Qassem told a reporter in 2009. "The same leadership that directs the parliamentary and government work also leads jihad actions in the struggle against Israel."

So far the Netherlands is the only EU member-state to blacklist Hezbollah outright, in doing so joining the United States, Israel, Canada, and even Bahrain.

But as the rest of Europe continues to suspend disbelief that Hezbollah is a single entity, the cost of such willful denial – including the cost to European security – continues to rise.

Overwhelming evidence points to Hezbollah's involvement last year not only in the Bulgaria attack, but in a foiled plot in Cyprus, as well.

Hezbollah today is increasingly coming to resemble the Hezbollah of the 1980s and 1990s, when the group routinely attacked civilian targets related to Israeli and other Western interests.

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Add to this the destructive role Hezbollah is playing in Syria by allying itself with the Assad regime, and the case for Europe blacklisting Hezbollah is more compelling than ever. Europe's reluctance to ban Hezbollah outright can largely be attributed to fear of armed reprisal at home or abroad, as well as concern for how such a move might stir Europe's own restive Muslim population. However, Europeans cannot continue to mask their fecklessness by embracing the chimera of two separate and discrete Hezbollahs: one political, one military; one good, one bad. The consequences of perpetuating this falsehood are far more frightful than the alternative.

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