

# ISSUE BRIEF

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## On Hezbollah, the U.S. Should Work Around the EU

*By Luke Coffey and James Phillips*

The European Union (EU) has repeatedly failed to designate Hezbollah as a terrorist organization. This failure makes Europeans and the Euro-Atlantic region less safe. It also shows the EU's shortcomings when it comes to agreeing on common positions and demonstrates why individual European countries need to develop their own policies regarding national security.

Since the ineffective EU offers more roadblocks than opportunities regarding Hezbollah's terrorist designation, the U.S. should bypass dealing with the EU and work with individual European countries regarding Hezbollah status.

**Hezbollah's Bloody History in Europe.** Although Israel has felt the brunt of Hezbollah's terrorist campaign, Europeans have not been immune. Hezbollah killed 58 French paratroopers with a truck bomb in October 1983—on the same day that it killed 241 American servicemen who also were part of the multinational peacekeeping force in Lebanon.

In April 1985, Hezbollah killed 18 Spanish citizens in a bombing of a restaurant near the U.S. air base at Torrejon. In June 1985, Hezbollah terrorists hijacked TWA Flight 847 after its departure from

Athens, Greece, and held its passengers and crew as hostage for more than two weeks, murdering Robert Stethem, an American serviceman. Hezbollah also launched a 1985–1986 bombing campaign in France that killed 13 people and wounded 250 in 15 different attacks meant to punish France for supporting Iraq in the Iran–Iraq war.

Hezbollah terrorist attacks trailed off in the 1990s after Hezbollah's Iranian sponsors accepted a truce in their war with Iraq and no longer needed a surrogate to punish European states that were perceived to support Iraq. But Hezbollah recently resumed its terrorist activities in Europe as part of Iran's shadow war with Israel.

It was indicted by a U.N. tribunal for the 2005 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. It also triggered a 2006 war with Israel, continues to launch terrorist attacks against Israelis around the world, and has sent fighters to Syria in support of Bashar al-Assad's despotic regime.

In July 2012, Hezbollah killed five Israeli tourists and a Bulgarian bus driver in a terrorist bombing in Burgas, Bulgaria. In March, a Cypriot court convicted a Hezbollah member for plotting a terrorist attack against Israeli tourists in Cyprus last year.

**Time for Europe to Step Up to the Plate.** It is important that European countries recognize Hezbollah for what it is: a terrorist organization. The more European countries recognize that fact, the more its extensive criminal, financing, and fundraising activities on the continent will be severely curtailed, and the less it will pose a potential threat to Europeans, Americans, and others.

Furthermore, designating Hezbollah as a terrorist group would cost it what little political legitimacy

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This paper, in its entirety, can be found at  
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it enjoys, and its members would have their movements within Europe curtailed, if not stopped altogether. In addition, once Hezbollah members are arrested, they could be prosecuted under anti-terrorism laws.

The European Union (EU) cannot afford to ignore the danger posed by Hezbollah, which has staged at least two terrorist operations in Europe in the past year that have targeted Israeli civilians. Iran—Hezbollah’s creator, chief backer, and ideological puppet-master—has increasingly used Hezbollah as a surrogate in its shadow war with Israel in recent years. Although Hezbollah has shied away from targeting Europeans in recent decades, this could change suddenly if the ongoing standoff over Iran’s nuclear program devolves into armed conflict. Therefore, as The Heritage Foundation has warned:

The EU can no longer afford to ignore Hezbollah’s festering threat or hope to deflect its attacks onto other countries. The longer the EU balks at effective action, the stronger the potential threat grows, funded by the free flow of donations, diverted charitable funds, and criminal booty out of the EU and the payments for drugs smuggled into the EU.<sup>1</sup>

**Some Europeans Have Acted.** The EU has increasingly become a dysfunctional supranational organization with cumbersome decision-making institutions largely operating in an undemocratic and opaque fashion. When it comes to foreign and security policy, the 27 members of the EU work on a consensus basis—meaning that a common position on major issues is rarely agreed. Consequently, it should come as no surprise that the EU as an organization has not designated Hezbollah as a terrorist group.

Within the EU, only the Netherlands and the United Kingdom have made the designation. The U.K. designates only the “military” wing of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization.

Some Europeans believe that Hezbollah plays a stabilizing role in Lebanon and that to list them

would disrupt the country’s stability. But Hezbollah actually has been a destabilizing force with its many acts of violence in the Middle East and beyond.

Some EU leaders are likewise cautious about naming Hezbollah a terrorist organization due to past court cases where the European Court of Justice ruled invalid attempts to list other groups as terrorist organizations. This was the case in 2011 when the European Court of Justice rejected a French appeal that would have kept the People’s Mujahideen Organization of Iran on an EU terrorism list.

**Work Around the EU.** The U.S. is on a fool’s errand trying to change EU policy on Hezbollah. Instead, Washington should work with individual European partners to encourage like-minded allies to designate Hezbollah as a terrorist organization.

The U.S. should continue to pressure its European partners to act by working bilaterally with EU countries—i.e., outside the EU framework—and non-EU countries such as Norway, Switzerland, and Turkey to take action against Hezbollah.

**EU’s Head Is in the Sand.** The EU mistakenly absolves Hezbollah’s political leadership for the crimes of its terrorist wing. A change in the EU’s ostrich-like policy is long overdue.

European countries can pull their heads out of the sand and designate Hezbollah as a terrorist organization without waiting for the EU to do so. This would enable a long-overdue crackdown on the group’s fundraising, recruitment, and operational networks that would make the world safer for Europeans and Americans while helping to stabilize the volatile Middle East. Only through concerted action by both the U.S. and its European partners will the Euro-Atlantic region become safer from Hezbollah’s growing threat.

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1. See James Phillips, “Hezbollah’s Terrorist Threat to the European Union,” testimony before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Europe, U.S. House of Representatives, June 20, 2007, <http://www.heritage.org/research/testimony/hezbollahs-terrorist-threat-to-the-european-union>.