

## CLAIM

---

**“There aren’t that many Hezbollah operatives in European countries.”**

---

### SHORT RESPONSE

**THERE IS NO ACCURATE ASSESSMENT OF THE NUMBER OF HEZBOLLAH OPERATIVES AND/OR SUPPORTERS ON EUROPEAN SOIL. HOWEVER, THE U.S. LED OPERATION CASSANDRA REVEALED A WELL-ESTABLISHED INFRASTRUCTURE THROUGHOUT EUROPE.**

---

### THE FACTS

To date, the German security services are the only ones to publish a count of Hezbollah operatives in their territory. **Their latest report speaks of approximately 1,500 operatives vs. 950 operatives in years past.** Other European countries refrain from publishing any data. Still, findings from Operation Cassandra, an effort led by the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to undercut Hezbollah funding from illicit drug sources, revealed a well-established infrastructure in several European countries that could include hundreds or thousands of operatives.

## GENERAL OVERVIEW

In Europe, Hezbollah operatives live among the Shi'ite diaspora. They engage in international criminal activity, drug trafficking, and money laundering. Under the command and guidance of Hezbollah's terrorist wing, some gather intelligence and provide the logistical support and infrastructure required to carry out terror attacks. The most glaring example of this phenomenon is **in Germany**, where Hezbollah's infrastructure includes operatives, crime families, and Shi'ite Islamic centers.

**Most of Hezbollah's illegal revenue comes from drug trafficking (mostly cocaine), contraband trade, and money laundering.** Just in the past ten years, two major crime rings have been directly linked to Hezbollah's European enterprise. The first was involved in the Lebanese-Canadian Bank affair uncovered in 2011. A drug trafficking network led by Ayman Jumma smuggled cocaine from South America through Western Africa and Europe to the Middle East. The value of the money laundered was estimated at \$200 million/month.

The second crime ring was uncovered in 2016 during Operation Cedars. Sixteen Hezbollah members were arrested in France, Belgium, Germany, and Italy for laundering money through the international acquisition and sales of luxury goods. At the height of the crime ring's activity it laundered 1 million euros per week, primarily through Germany.

**Hezbollah also conducts legitimate business activity.** On behalf of for-profit corporate entities owned by Hezbollah or the charities under its control, Hezbollah operatives engage in the oil trade, real estate and small commerce. Only during May 2018 did the Terrorism Financing Targeting Center (TFTC) announce new sanctions on Hezbollah and some of its senior members. Ali Youssef Charara, chairman of the Lebanese telecom company Spectrum, which provides telecom services in EMEA and Africa, was included on that list based on his activity raising and laundering money for Hezbollah.

## THE INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF HEZBOLLAH OPERATIVES IN GERMANY

In the past 20 years Hezbollah leveraged its presence in Europe to recruit terror activists with Caucasian features. For example, in 1997 Israel arrested a Hezbollah operative by the name of Steven Smirk who underwent training in Lebanon before he was sent on a suicide mission. Smirk converted to Islam and was radicalized by Hezbollah operatives in Germany.

**Hezbollah takes advantage of the fact that not all European countries have made a full designation.** Most (except the Netherlands in 2004 and the UK in 2019) have not designated Hezbollah in its entirety and are relying on the EU law in that regard.

### HEZBOLLAH TERROR INFRASTRUCTURE UNCOVERED:

**Germany:** In January 2018 the German police raided the homes of 10 individuals suspected of being members of Al Quds force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards who had been gathering intelligence on Jewish and Israeli targets such as the Israeli Embassy, senior dignitaries and kindergartens. Al Quds Force is an Iranian special force tasked with international operations, such as training and supervising Iranian proxies, Hezbollah included.

In 2002, Germany shut down the German extension of two entities that raised money for Hezbollah: "Al Shahid Charity" that

supported the families of fallen Hezbollah fighters and the "Al Aqsa Foundation," a Hamas entity. Al Shahid Charity apparently didn't resume its operations. Germany outlawed the Al-Aqsa Foundation in 2002 due to its ties with Hamas.

Additional reports from the last year suggest fundraising at the Al Mustafa Center in Bremen, where about 800 people raised funds for the Lebanon Orphan Children Project that was outlawed in Germany in 2014. The German Interior Ministry reports that the organization raised over \$4 million between 2007 and 2013 and the money was transferred to the Al Shahid Charity in Lebanon.

**Belgium:** In 2003, Belgian police raided the offices of Soafrimex, a food exporter to Africa headed by Kassim Tajideen, one of Hezbollah's major donors. Tajideen was arrested for tax fraud, money laundering, and diamond smuggling valued at tens of millions of Euros.

**France:** French police searched the headquarters and home of the leaders of the Shi'ite organization "Zahra Center," which has ties to Hezbollah. Authorities closed the center, in the city of Grande-Synthe, in northern France, as it served as logistical support for Iranian operations in France. In 2015, a joint U.S.-French operation arrested Iman Kobeissi and Joseph Asmar on charges of conspiracy to launder money from drug trafficking and gun smuggling for Hezbollah.

**Cyprus:** In 2012 Hezbollah was involved in several failed attempts to carry out terror attacks. Additionally, in recent years several safe houses and warehouses were located around Europe that housed tremendous amounts of explosives and explosive raw materials. The one in Cyprus held 8.3 tons of ammonium nitrate.

**UK:** Four safe houses were discovered in London that held three tons of ammonium nitrate.

Hezbollah also engages in money laundering from seemingly legitimate activity in the UK. Three charities that have laundered money for Hezbollah — Lebanese Welfare Committee, HELP Charity Association for Relief and Arbar Islamic Foundation — recently urged people to partake in the Al Quds Day march in London.

**Bulgaria:** On 18 July, six people were killed, and 32 others injured when a suicide bomber detonated a bomb inside a bus full of Israeli tourists at Burgas airport. The bombing coincided with the 18th anniversary of the attack on the AMIA Jewish community center in the Buenos Aires, Argentina, in which 85 people were killed. It should be noted that the explosive charge used in this attack contained ammonium nitrate.

**Italy:** Between 2008 and 2018, Italian law enforcement alongside authorities from the U.S., South America, France, Belgium, and Germany arrested several Hezbollah operatives as part of Operation Cassandra, an international task force to uncover Hezbollah's drug trafficking. German authorities in Frankfurt arrested two Lebanese citizens with over eight million Euros collected as profit from drug trafficking and en-route to Hezbollah. A year later, in the German city of Speyer, two other members of the same network were arrested in a raid of their homes.

**The Czech Republic:** Hezbollah conducts arms trafficking in the Czech Republic and endangers European citizens. In 2014, a gun runner for Hezbollah named Ali Fayed was arrested. In response, Hezbollah kidnapped a few Czech citizens who were released in return for Fayed.

Hezbollah is also criminally active in cyberspace. In October 2018, Czech servers were shut down when Hezbollah used them to hack into computers and networks around the world for information theft and extortion purposes.