Germany extends ban on Hezbollah

German police raided five sites linked to the Lebanese Shia group Hezbollah, as authorities announced Thursday that they were banning activities by its political wing in Germany.

The raids, intended to prevent evidence about possible front organisations being destroyed, took place at mosques and community centres in Berlin, Bremen, Muenster, Recklinghausen and Dortmund.

German lawmakers last year called on the government to extend an existing ban on activities by the group’s militant wing to include those of its political branch. At the time, officials had warned that such a move was legally difficult, because Hezbollah doesn’t have any official presence in Germany.

The Interior Ministry said the decree issued on Thursday bans all activities in support of the group in Germany, including the use of its symbols or publications. Hezbollah supporters have staged annual anti-Israel marches in Berlin for several years.

Hezbollah

- Hezbollah, Arabic ?izb All?h (“Party of God”), also spelled Hezbullah or Hizbullah, political party and militant group that first emerged during Lebanon’s civil war as a militia after the Israeli invasion of that country in 1982.

Hamas

1. Hamas is a Palestinian Islamist political organization and militant group that has waged war on Israel since the group’s 1987 founding, most notably through suicide bombings and rocket attacks. It seeks to replace Israel with a Palestinian state. It also governs Gaza independently of the Palestinian Authority.
2. Hamas’s charter long called for the destruction of Israel. It was revised in 2017 to allow for acceptance of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip rather than the entire territory, though Hams still refuses to recognize the legitimacy of the Israeli state.
3. Hamas led the charge in using suicide bombings against Israel in the 1990s and 2000s, though in recent years it has shifted to rockets and mortars as its weapons of choice. The organization also offers Palestinians a robust network of social services, which it developed as an alternative to deeply corrupt PA institutions.
4. In 2006, Hamas won a slight majority of the seats in the Palestinian Authority legislative elections. This would have put Hamas in a commanding position for both the West Bank and Gaza, but there was a problem: Hamas refused to accept previous deals that the PA had made with Israel. That lead Western powers to freeze out aid, which the PA depends on, to any Hamas-led PA. Tensions between the PLO and Hamas eventually escalated to outright war between the two factions, which ended up with Hamas governing Gaza independently from the West Bank–based PLO.
5. Unity talks between Hamas and the PLO have broken down repeatedly, which means there is no unified Palestinian authority, complicating peace talks significantly. In late 2017, the two sides reached a preliminary unity agreement, but it’s still unclear whether this will lead to an actual united government of any kind.
How is Hezbollah involved in the Syrian Civil War?

- Hezbollah finds a loyal ally in Syria, whose army occupied most of Lebanon during Lebanon’s civil war. The Syrian government remained as a peacekeeping force in Lebanon until it was driven out in the 2005 Cedar Revolution, a popular protest movement against the foreign occupation.
- Hezbollah had unsuccessfully pushed for Syrian forces to remain in Lebanon, and has since remained a stalwart ally of the Assad regime. In return for Tehran’s and Hezbollah’s support, experts say, the Syrian government facilitates the transfer of weapons from Iran to the militia.
- Hezbollah publicly confirmed its involvement in the Syrian Civil War in 2013, joining Iran and Russia in supporting the Syrian government against largely Sunni rebel groups. Prior to 2013, the group had sent a small number of trainers to advise the regime. More than seven thousand Hezbollah militants are estimated to have fought in the pro-Assad alliance, which has been instrumental in the survival of the Assad regime, including by winning the 2013 Battle of al-Qusayr, which secured a route for regime forces between the major cities of Damascus and Homs.
- Analysts say that Hezbollah’s experience fighting in Syria has helped it become a stronger military force, but that it faces a growing sentiment in Lebanon that focusing on the war led the group to neglect its domestic interests.
- Additionally, Hezbollah’s support from Sunni Muslims in Lebanon has waned over the group’s backing of the Assad regime, which particularly threatens Sunni Muslims. In recent years, Sunni extremists have committed terrorist attacks in Lebanon, including 2015 suicide bombings in Beirut claimed by the self-proclaimed Islamic State. Hezbollah’s involvement in the war has also provoked Israel, which has struck targets in Syria thought to be supplying Hezbollah with weapons.