

Hizbullah casing sites for terror attacks across Europe

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LONDON — French intelligence has obtained evidence of a Hizbullah network aided by Iran, Lebanon and Syria that conducted reconnaissance of key facilities and prominent figures in several European Union capitals.

The intelligence agency has arrested Hizbullah operatives — some of whom were granted diplomatic immunity — and seized diplomatic pouches as well as maps that indicated possible targets in Paris, London, Berlin and Rome.

"Hizbullah, directed by Iran and Syria, is believed to have a cell in every major EU capital," an EU intelligence source said.

The source said the Hizbullah network in Europe was believed to have been directed by the late Hizbullah operational chief Imad Mughniyeh, assassinated in a car bombing in Damascus on Feb. 12. Mughniyeh was said to have planned strikes on Israeli and Jewish interests in several EU states.

On Jan. 30, the French external security intelligence service, or DGSE, raided a suspected Hizbullah safehouse in downtown Paris and arrested six Arab nationals. Three of the nationals presented diplomatic passports and claimed immunity.

French sources said the purported Hizbullah safehouse had been under intelligence and police surveillance for weeks prior to the raid. They said the maps indicated Hizbullah plans to abduct Israelis or prominent Jews in Europe.

On Jan. 31, the Italian daily Libero reported from Paris that French intelligence was alerted by agents in Beirut of a Hizbullah abduction plot. The newspaper said DGSE was told of a meeting chaired by Hizbullah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah, who ordered cells in Europe to abduct prominent Europeans.

At that point, France notified the intelligence communities of Britain, Germany, Italy and Spain. DGSE also sent a report on the Hizbullah plot to French President Nicolas Sarkozy.

"DGSE agents are very well acquainted with Nasrallah and do not underestimate the danger posed by Hizbullah, which has a logistical support network in all the European capitals," Libero said. "The British, Spanish, German, and Italian secret services have been notified."

On Feb. 26, Israel acknowledged that Hizbullah was expected to conduct a major strike. Israeli military intelligence chief Maj. Gen. Amos Yadlin said Hizbullah could act as early as late March, following the 40-day mourning period for Mughniyeh.

Mughniyeh's widow has blamed Syria for her husband's death. For its part, Hizbullah said several Arab countries helped Israel in the assassination of Mughniyeh.

"We view these statements as a way to get Israel to lower its guard," an Israeli official said. "Israel will be the leading target of Hizbullah, regardless of who actually killed Mughniyeh."

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