

János Kemény¹: Terrorist activity linked to Iran in Europe since the 2026 US–Israeli war against Iran

Executive Summary

- The number of terrorist acts with Iranian links, support or organisation has increased significantly since the beginning of the 2026 Iran war. These were carried out in the name of a new group, the Islamic Movement of the Companions of the Righteous (Harakat Ashab al-Yamin al-Islamiya, HAYI), previously unknown to authorities.
- The primary target area for the attacks has been Western Europe, specifically the UK, the Netherlands and Belgium.
- The primary targets of the attacks in Western Europe were local Jewish communities, with American interests as secondary targets, though Iranian opposition media outlets had also been hit.
- Eastern Europe was not spared from the series of Iranian attacks either, with one attack also taking place in North Macedonia.
- According to current European and American sources, Iranian proxy groups operating in Iraq (primarily Kataib Hezbollah) are behind the attacks. These organised criminal networks carried out the attacks with the help of operatives recruited online, and the attacks were motivated by financial rather than ideological reasons.

Since the beginning of the 2026 Iran War, there have been a number of terrorist attacks in Europe in which authorities suspect or have proven an Iranian connection. Iran has previously carried out armed operations in European territory, primarily targeting members of the Iranian opposition diaspora living in Europe. However, since March 2026, a previously unknown organization, the Islamic Movement of the Companions of the Righteous (*Harakat Ashab al-Yamin al-Islamiya*, HAYI), has claimed responsibility for European operations. The analysis reviews the trends of Iranian state-sponsored terrorism and assesses its current characteristics in Western states, particularly in Europe.

Introduction

Iran in previous decades carried out armed operations on European soil, targeting members of the Iranian opposition diaspora living in Europe. The best-known of these is the 'Mykonos assassination' in 1992 in Germany, in which four Iranian Kurdish opposition activists were killed², that led the European Union to impose sanctions on Iran.³

The Iranian threat is not of a historical nature, nor is it confined to a narrow geographical area. Although Iranian ambitions cannot be described as continuous, and the intensity of such operations is also linked to developments in Iranian domestic politics. We

have witnessed an intensification since January 2020, following the killing of General Qassem Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force of the Revolutionary Guards.⁴ In 2016, the British authorities assessed that Iran had made abductions and targeted killings part of its state policy, and was prepared to abduct Iranian dissidents residing in the United Kingdom or, in extreme circumstances, to kill those residing in the United Kingdom. According to a public summary on the subject produced by the British Parliament, Iranian interest is primarily directed at Iranian dissidents residing in the UK, and operations against dissidents are a priority area for the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security and the intelligence arm of the Revolutionary Guards. According to the British, the Iranian regime considers the fight against Iranian dissidents living in the diaspora to be of vital importance, and does not regard its operations of this nature

¹ János Kemény (kemeny.janos@uni-nke.hu) is senior research fellow at John Lukacs Institute for Politics and Strategy at Ludovika University of Public Service.

² Sven GOLDMANN: *The Mykonos Assassination: A Contract Killing in Wilmersdorf*, Tagesspiegel, 16 September 2012. Source: tagesspiegel.de [online, 26 May 2026] and *The verdict that shook Iran and Europe*, Reuters, 2012. Source: reuters.com [online, 24 May 2026]

³ *Declaration by the European Union on Iran*, European Commission, 1997. Source: ec.europa.eu [online, 24 May 2026]

⁴ Yoram SCHWEITZER and Anat SHAPIRA: *Iran's Involvement in the International Terrorism Arena*, Institute for National Security Studies, 2025. Source: inss.org.il [online, 6 June 2026] 35.



John Lukacs Analyses in Strategic and Defense Studies 2026/17

carried out on British soil as actions against the British people.⁵ This analysis can also be applied to the broader operations taking place in Europe.

The case which caused the biggest stir in Europe in recent years was when, acting on information from the French authorities, the Belgian authorities arrested an Iranian diplomat who, according to the French authorities, had planned to carry out a bomb attack at a conference organised by an Iranian opposition group. In the trial that followed, the Iranian diplomat was sentenced to 20 years in prison in 2021.⁶ In 2023, he was exchanged for a Belgian aid worker whom the Iranian authorities had sentenced to 40 years in prison on charges of espionage.⁷ In 2018, the Dutch authorities expelled two Iranian diplomats after finding it proven that they had been involved in the murders of two Iranian dissidents in 2015 and 2017.⁸ In 2023, a German court sentenced a German citizen of Iranian origin to two years' imprisonment for attempting to set fire to a synagogue (he set fire to a school instead). The court found it proven that the arson had been carried out on the orders of the Iranian state.⁹ In 2023, Alejo Vidal-Quadras, a Spanish far-right politician, was shot and wounded in Madrid. According to the Spanish authorities, the attack was linked to his anti-Iran stance.¹⁰ Little attention was paid to the claim by the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service (*Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst*, AIVD) that an assassination attempt was made in 2024 against an Iranian opposition figure living in the Netherlands. According to the AIVD, the similar methodology of the attacks in Spain and the Netherlands makes it likely that Iran was behind both cases.¹¹ In response to these events, on 29 January 2026, the EU designated the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist-supporting organisation and imposed sanctions on it.¹² In June 2026, the British authorities convicted two Romanian nationals for carrying out a knife attack against a journalist from an Iranian opposition media outlet in 2024, which had been commissioned by the Iranian state – as established by a British court rule.¹³ In a speech delivered in the British Parliament on 28 February 2026 reflecting on the war of the United States and Israel against Iran, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer stated that Iran had supported 20 potentially lethal attacks on British soil in 2025.¹⁴

The threat is, of course, not limited to Europe. US authorities have brought charges on numerous occasions in connection with Iranian-backed assassinations and assassination plots: in 2022, plots were hatched against John Bolton¹⁵, in 2024 and in 2025 against Donald Trump¹⁶ as well. Plots to assassinate Iranian dissidents have also come to light on several occasions within the United States,¹⁷ including one case involving members of the Hells' Angels motorcycle gang who are Canadian citizens.¹⁸ In 2024, the US Department of Justice brought charges against a brigadier general of the Revolutionary Guards for

⁵ [Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament Iran](#), House of Commons, 25 July 2025. Source: [isc.independent.gov.uk](#) [online, 25 May 2026] pp. 49–50.

⁶ [Iran diplomat's 20-year sentence for France bomb plot confirmed](#), France24, 5 May 2021. Source: [france24.com](#) [online, 24 May 2026]

⁷ David GRITTEN: [Olivier Vandecasteele: Belgian aid worker freed in exchange for Iranian diplomat](#), BBC, 26 May 2023. Source: [bbc.com](#) [online, 6 June 2026]

⁸ [Netherlands recalls ambassador to Iran](#), Deutsche Welle, 3 April 2019. Source: [dw.com](#) [online, 25 May 2026]

⁹ Jean-Philipp BAECK: [Terror on behalf of Tehran](#), Tageszeitung, 21 December 2023. Source: [taz.de](#) [online, 25 May 2026]

¹⁰ [Spanish court says attempt on former politician's life linked to opposition to Iran leadership](#), Reuters, 9 July 2025. Source: [reuters.com](#) [online, 25 May 2026]

¹¹ [AIVD annual report 2024](#), AIVD, 2025. Source: [english.aivd.nl](#) [online, 25 May 2026] pp. 45–46.

¹² [EU terrorist list: Council designates the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist organisation](#), Council of the European Union, 19 February 2026. Source: [consilium.europa.eu](#) [online, 6 June 2026]

¹³ [Two convicted over targeted knife attack on Iran International journalist](#), Crown Prosecution Service, 5 June 2026. Source: [cps.gov.uk](#) [online, 6 June 2026]

¹⁴ [PM statement on Iran: 28 February 2026](#), Gov.uk, 28 February 2026. Source: [gov.uk](#) [online, 6 June 2026]

¹⁵ [Member of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps \(IRGC\) Charged with Plot to Murder the Former National Security Advisor](#), U.S. Department of Justice, 10 August 2022. Source: [justice.gov](#) [online, 24 May 2026]

¹⁶ [Justice Department Announces Murder-for-Hire and Related Charges Against IRGC Asset and Two Local Operatives](#), U.S. Department of Justice, 8 November 2024. Source: [justice.gov](#) [online, 24 May 2026] and [Iranian Intelligence Agent Convicted of Terrorism and Murder for Hire in Connection With Foiled Plot to Assassinate U.S. Politicians And Government Officials](#), U.S. Department of Justice, 6 March 2026. Source: [justice.gov](#) [online, 24 May 2026]

¹⁷ See, for example: [Justice Department Announces Charges and New Arrest in Connection with Assassination Plot Directed from Iran](#), U.S. Department of Justice, 27 January 2023. Source: [justice.gov](#) [online, 24 May 2026]; [Two Russian Mob Leaders Sentenced to 25 Years in Prison for Murder-for-Hire Targeting a Journalist on Behalf of the Iranian Government](#), U.S. Department of Justice, 30 October 2025. Source: [justice.gov](#) [online, 24 May 2026]

¹⁸ Alexander PANETTA: [Iran allegedly hired Canadians to conduct assassinations on U.S. soil, according to indictment](#), CBC News, 29 January 2024. Source: [cbc.ca](#) [online, 24 May 2026]



John Lukacs Analyses in Strategic and Defense Studies 2026/17

attempting to have an American journalist killed with the help of Eastern European criminal groups.¹⁹ Iranian operations also extended to Canada. Irwin Cotler, a former Canadian justice minister and critic of the Iranian regime, was also the target of a foiled assassination attempt.²⁰

The global reach of Iranian ambitions is demonstrated by the fact that Australia also expelled the Iranian ambassador in 2025, as the Revolutionary Guard was accused of organising attacks against local Jewish communities.²¹ In November 2025, the Australians designated the Revolutionary Guard as a state-sponsored terrorist organisation.²²

In response to the growing threat, fourteen countries issued a joint statement in July 2025, condemning the threat emanating from Iran.²³ A similar statement was issued within the framework of the G7 in September 2025.²⁴

The war against Iran and the emergence of HAYI

In light of the above, one of the expected consequences of the US-Israeli military operation launched against Iran on 28 February 2026 was that the Iranians would respond by carrying out terrorist attacks (in line with this expectation, Europol issued a warning).²⁵ There is experience from the period following the Iran-Iraq War of such attacks having already taken place with the assistance of Iranian proxy groups. The best known of these are the attacks carried out by Hezbollah in Argentina against the Israeli embassy²⁶ in 1992 and against a Jewish cultural centre²⁷ in 1994. Prior to the outbreak of the war, there were indications that Hamas was actively attempting to plan attacks in Europe (German²⁸ and Danish²⁹ authorities arrested suspects on charges of involvement in the preparation of attacks, and since the outbreak of the war, Greek authorities have carried out such arrests³⁰).

It did not take long for terrorist attacks linked to Iran to emerge in Europe, though what we witnessed was not the usual wave of attacks carried out by Iranian proxy groups. Another difference is that, unlike the Argentine examples, they did not focus on large-scale, spectacular attacks resulting in many fatalities and significant material damage, but rather on small-scale, non-lethal attacks causing minimal material damage – attacks that were religious and symbolic in nature, and mostly ‘soft’ targets, the primary targets of which were European Jewish communities. The wave of attacks spread primarily across Western Europe, with the United Kingdom being the most significant target area. (Several attacks also took place in North America, which are not examined in this analysis.)

Responsibility for the European attacks was claimed by a previously unknown organisation, the Islamic Movement of the Companions of the Righteous (*Harakat Ashab al-Yamin al-Islamiya*, HAYI). The group first emerged on 9 March, when it claimed responsibility on Telegram and X for the first attack, which had

¹⁹ Justice Department Announces Murder-for-Hire Charges Against Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Brigadier General and Former Intelligence Officer and Members of an Iranian Intelligence Network, Justice Department, 22 October 2024. Source: justice.gov [online, 25 May 2026]

²⁰ Christian NOEL, Peter ZIMONJIC: Former justice minister Irwin Cotler says RCMP told him Iranian plot to kill him was foiled, CBC News, 18 November 2024. Source: cbc.ca [online, 24 May 2026]

²¹ Kevin SHALVEY: Australia accuses Iran of directing antisemitic attacks, says Iran's ambassador will be expelled, ABC News, 25 August 2025. Source: abcnews.com [online, 6 June 2026]

²² Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps listed as a state sponsor of terrorism, Minister of Foreign Affairs, 27 November 2025. Source: foreignminister.gov.au [online, 6 June 2026]

²³ Joint Statement on Iranian State Threat Activity in Europe and North America, U.S. Department of State, 31 July 2025. Source: state.gov [online, 25 May 2026]

²⁴ G7 Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) Statement on Iranian Transnational Repression and Other Malign Activities, 12 September 2025. Source: state.gov [online, 25 May 2026]

²⁵ Sarantis MICHALOPOULOS: EXCLUSIVE: EU terrorism threat heightened due to Iran, Europol says, Euractiv, 6 March 2026. Source: euractiv.com [online, 25 May 2026]

²⁶ Matthew LEVITT: Hezbollah's 1992 Attack in Argentina Is a Warning for Modern-Day Europe, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 19 March 2013. Source: washingtoninstitute.org [online, 25 May 2026]

²⁷ Argentina court blames Iran for deadly 1994 bombing of Jewish centre, The Guardian, 12 April 2024. Source: theguardian.com [online, 25 May 2026]

²⁸ Hamas attack in Germany apparently foiled, Tagesschau, 1 October 2025. Source: tagesschau.de [online, 25 May 2026] and Suspected Hamas member arrested, Tagesschau, 12 November 2025. Source: tagesschau.de [online, 25 May 2026]

²⁹ Man imprisoned in terrorism case with links to Hamas and criminal gangs, Politiets Efterretningstjeneste, 19 May 2025. Source: pet.dk [online, 25 May 2026]

³⁰ Costas KANTOURIS: Greek police arrest a Palestinian man on suspicion of planning attacks, Associated Press, 7 June 2026. Source: apnews.com [online, 8 June 2026]



John Lukacs Analyses in Strategic and Defense Studies 2026/17

been carried out in Belgium shortly before. The most significant attacks and attempted attacks claimed by HAYI to date are as follows:

- 9 March 2026. Belgium: At 4 am in the city of Liège, an explosion occurred near a historic synagogue.³¹ A video claiming responsibility for the attack on behalf of HAYI was published shortly afterwards.³²
- 13 March 2026. Netherlands: an investigation was launched into whether a bombing targeting a synagogue in Rotterdam constituted terrorism: the four perpetrators were aged between 17 and 19.³³ HAYI claimed responsibility for the attack.³⁴
- 14 March 2026. Netherlands: An explosion near a Jewish school in Amsterdam was investigated; no one was injured.³⁵ HAYI also claimed responsibility for this attack.³⁶
- 15 March 2026. Netherlands: An explosion occurred near an American bank building in Amsterdam, for which HAYI claimed responsibility.³⁷
- 23 March 2026. United Kingdom: Four ambulances belonging to a Jewish charity were set on fire in London.³⁸ The attack was claimed by HAYI,³⁹ but the British authorities did not initially treat the incident as a terrorist act. British police arrested two suspects,⁴⁰ and shortly afterwards took two more suspects into custody.⁴¹ Later, the London police's counter-terrorism unit took over the investigation.⁴²
- The night of 24–25 March 2026, Belgium: a car was set alight in the Jewish quarter of Antwerp. HAYI claimed responsibility for the attack. The police arrested two juvenile perpetrators.⁴³
- 28 March 2026. France: A bomb attack took place near the Bank of America branch in Paris. The French police caught the perpetrators in the act; one was arrested at the scene, the other escaped.⁴⁴ The French authorities arrested a total of three suspects and linked the attack to the war against Iran.⁴⁵ HAYI claimed responsibility for the attack; the French authorities described the method of execution as consistent with the cases in the Netherlands and Belgium.⁴⁶

³¹ [Explosion at Liège synagogue raises fears of Iran-linked terror cells in Europe](#), Belga News Agency, 13 March 2026. Source: belganewsagency.eu [online, 24 May 2026]

³² [Video footage of Liège synagogue attack examined, responsibility claim investigated](#), VRT News, 12 March 2026. Source: vrt.be [online, 25 May 2026]

³³ [Netherlands investigating whether Rotterdam synagogue attack has links to Iran, minister says](#), Reuters, 17 March 2026. Source: reuters.com [online, 24 May 2026]

³⁴ [British police are probing a shadowy Islamic group amid arson spree at Jewish sites](#), NBC News, 20 April 2026. Source: nbcnews.com [online, 26 May 2026]

³⁵ [Explosion at Amsterdam Jewish school 'a deliberate attack' says mayor](#), BBC, 14 March 2026. Source: bbc.com [online, 24 May 2026]

³⁶ [British police are probing a shadowy Islamic group amid arson spree at Jewish sites](#), NBC News, 20 April 2026. Source: nbcnews.com [online, 26 May 2026]

³⁷ [Amsterdam police investigate new blast claimed by the same group that claimed responsibility for the Jewish school explosion](#), Reuters, 16 March 2026. Source: reuters.com [online, 25 May 2026] and [Iraqi National Arrested and Charged with Providing Material Support to Iranian-Backed Terrorist Organizations and Directing Attacks Targeting U.S. Citizens and Interests](#), U.S. Department of Justice, 15 May 2026. Source: justice.gov [online, 26 May 2026]

³⁸ Jill LAWLESS: [UK police arrest 2 men over arson attack on ambulances belonging to a Jewish charity](#), AP, 25 March 2026. Source: apnews.com [online, 24 May 2026]

³⁹ Jill LAWLESS and Danica KIRKA: [An arson attack leaves Britain's Jewish community feeling vulnerable](#), AP, 24 March 2026. Source: apnews.com [online, 24 May 2026]

⁴⁰ [UK police arrest two men in connection with an arson attack on ambulances belonging to a Jewish charity](#), NBC News, 25 March 2026. Source: nbcnews.com [online, 24 May 2026]

⁴¹ [UK police arrest fourth suspect at court over attack on Jewish ambulances](#), CNN, 4 April 2026. Source: cnn.com [online, 24 May 2026]

⁴² Winnie AGBONLAHOR: [Man arrested over attacks on Jewish community in London](#), BBC, 27 April 2026. Source: bbc.com [online, 26 May 2026]

⁴³ Jackie HAJDENBERG: [Antisemitic attacks in Europe raise questions about new, shadowy 'terror group'](#), Times of Israel, 25 March 2026. Source: timesofisrael.com [online, 8 June 2026]

⁴⁴ [French police thwart a suspected bombing outside a Bank of America building in Paris](#), AP, 28 March 2026. Source: apnews.com [online, 24 May 2026]

⁴⁵ Neil MURPHY: [Three arrested in Paris after attempted bomb attack outside Bank of America](#), BBC, 29 March 2026. Source: bbc.com [online, 24 May 2026]

⁴⁶ Sylvie CORBET: [France suspects an Iran link after foiling bomb attack outside Bank of America](#), AP, 30 March 2026. Source: apnews.com [online, 24 May 2026]



John Lukacs Analyses in Strategic and Defense Studies 2026/17

- 4 April 2026. Netherlands: an explosion occurred outside the headquarters of a pro-Israel organisation in the town of Nijkerk.⁴⁷ HAYI claimed responsibility, but the perpetrators did not release a video, only photographs.⁴⁸
- 10 April 2026. Germany: An attempt was made to set fire to a restaurant called Eclipse Grillbar in Munich. HAYI claimed responsibility.⁴⁹
- 12 April 2026. North Macedonia: The door and courtyard of a synagogue in Skopje were set alight by unknown individuals. HAYI claimed responsibility for the attack in a video. The North Macedonian authorities arrested two people in connection with the attack.⁵⁰
- 15 April 2026. United Kingdom: a failed attack on the Finchley Reform Synagogue in London. British authorities arrested two people.⁵¹ HAYI claimed responsibility for the attack.⁵²
- 15 April 2026. United Kingdom: An attempt was made to set fire to the building of the Persian-language media company Volant Media in London, but it failed. British authorities arrested a 21-year-old, a 19-year-old and a 16-year-old British citizen.⁵³ HAYI also claimed responsibility for this attack.⁵⁴
- 17 April 2026. Great Britain: In a video posted on social media, HAYI claimed to have attacked the Israeli embassy in London with drones carrying hazardous materials. The embassy building was not hit; British police searched a park near the embassy wearing chemical protection gear.⁵⁵
- 29 April 2026. Great Britain: a man in London attacked two British Jewish residents, injuring them.⁵⁶ HAYI also claimed responsibility for this attack.⁵⁷

HAYI has also claimed responsibility online for several attacks that did not take place.⁵⁸ There was also an instance where an attack on a disused London synagogue was mentioned by the channel used by HAYI, but the group did not claim responsibility for the attack, even though the modus operandi fitted their previous pattern of attacks.⁵⁹

Online channels linked to Iranian proxy groups, such as the Iraqi Shia group *Asaib Ahl al-Haq*, the Lebanese Hezbollah, and the Yemeni *Ansar Allah*, played a prominent role in disseminating its videos. According to ICCT's analysis, there are striking grammatical errors in HAYI's Arabic-language communications, and the symbolism used by the group closely resembles that used by pro-Iranian Iraqi Shia militias.⁶⁰ The group issued statements in English, Hebrew and Arabic, but not in Persian.⁶¹ A characteristic feature of their communiqués was that they did not employ arguments based on the Islamic

⁴⁷ [Explosion hits pro-Israel centre in the Netherlands](#), Radio France International, 4 April 2026. Source: rfi.fr [online, 25 May 2026]

⁴⁸ [Explosion hits pro-Israel centre in the Netherlands](#), France24, 4 April 2026. Source: france24.com [online, 26 May 2026]

⁴⁹ Shahrzad Eden OSTERER, Lisa WRESCHNIOK, Benedikt NABBEN: [After attack on Munich restaurant: Who is behind HAYI?](#) BR24, 6 May 2026. Source: br.de [online, 25 May 2026]

⁵⁰ Michael STARR: [Two charged with terrorism following arson attack on Skopje synagogue](#), The Jerusalem Post, 1 May 2026. Source: jpost.com [online, 25 May 2026]

⁵¹ Victoria COOK: [Arrests after attempted arson attack on synagogue](#), BBC, 15 April 2026. Source: bbc.com [online, 25 May 2026]

⁵² Meliha KESMER: [What Is HAYI, The Shadowy Islamist Group Claiming Attacks Across Europe?](#) Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 17 April 2026. Source: rferl.com [online, 25 May 2026]

⁵³ Winnie AGBONLAHOR: [Three charged with arson at Persian media offices](#), BBC, 17 April 2026. Source: bbc.com [online, 25 May 2026]

⁵⁴ Meliha KESMER: [What Is HAYI, The Shadowy Islamist Group Claiming Attacks Across Europe?](#) Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 17 April 2026. Source: rferl.com [online, 25 May 2026]

⁵⁵ Aurelia FOSTER: ['Embassy drone threat' closes Kensington Gardens](#), BBC, 17 April 2026. Source: bbc.com [online, 24 May 2026]

⁵⁶ Daniel SANDFORD: [Golders Green attack suspect to stand trial next year](#), BBC, 15 May 2026. Source: bbc.com [online, 26 May 2026]

⁵⁷ Gavin BLACKBURN: [HAYI group claims responsibility for stabbing two Jewish men in north London](#), Euronews, 29 April 2026. Source: euronews.com [online, 26 May 2026]

⁵⁸ Julian LANCHÈS: [Hybrid Threat Signals: Assessing Possible Iranian Involvement in Recent Attacks in Europe](#), International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 23 March 2026. Source: icct.nl [online, 25 May 2026]

⁵⁹ Vikram DODD and Helena HORTON: [Police investigate suspected arson attack at former synagogue in east London](#), The Guardian, 5 May 2026. Source: theguardian.com [online, 26 May 2026]

⁶⁰ Julian LANCHÈS: [Hybrid Threat Signals: Assessing Possible Iranian Involvement in Recent Attacks in Europe](#), International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 23 March 2026. Source: icct.nl [online, 25 May 2026]

⁶¹ Meliha KESMER: [What Is HAYI, The Shadowy Islamist Group Claiming Attacks Across Europe?](#) Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 17 April 2026. Source: rferl.com [online, 25 May 2026]

John Lukacs Analyses in Strategic and Defense Studies 2026/17

faith, but instead referred to the Christian or Jewish faiths. The administrator of one of the group's channels even made a written statement to CBS News.⁶²

According to BBC data, in connection with the attacks in the UK, the authorities had arrested 26 people by 27 April.⁶³ As cases in other countries show, local authorities have in many instances apprehended the perpetrators of the attacks. This clearly illustrates the trend outlined in the introduction: local criminal groups or online-recruited, mainly young perpetrators are used to carry out the attacks, acting out of financial rather than ideological motives. This also explains the wide geographical spread of the attacks. However, this approach underestimates the complexity of the attacks and the damage caused; at the same time, a relatively high volume of attacks has been directed against 'soft' targets, and the aim appears to be to undermine the sense of security among Western European Jewish communities, as well as to generate propaganda favourable to the Iranian side. The London knife attack stands out from the series of attacks so far; there is no clear explanation for it as yet, and it is conceivable that HAYI opportunistically claimed responsibility for it and played no part in its preparation.⁶⁴

HAYI's activities have also shed further light on Iran's cooperation with organised crime groups. As early as 2025, the United States imposed sanctions on an organised criminal group called Foxtrot, based in Sweden, which US authorities suspect, amongst other things, of carrying out an attack on the Israeli embassy in Stockholm in 2024 on behalf of Iran, but it has also been linked to a planned assassination attempt against Iranian dissidents. The primary activity of the transnational criminal network Foxtrot is drug trafficking, and it typically employs young perpetrators in its violent operations. According to US authorities, the group's founder, Rawa Majid, has direct links to Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security.⁶⁵ (This is not the only link connecting the group to the Middle East: in January 2026, Europol reported that a member of Foxtrot had been arrested in Iraq; he was the organiser of violent acts carried out in Sweden and a recruiter of underage perpetrators.)⁶⁶ The British authorities followed the American example and also imposed sanctions on the Foxtrot network.⁶⁷ The ICCT's analysis highlights that the organised criminal group operating in the Dutch-Belgian region has extensive experience in the use of explosive devices deployed by HAYI on several occasions, which makes it likely that local criminal groups were involved in carrying out the attacks.⁶⁸

Iraq's involvement was further confirmed by the US Department of Justice's announcement of the arrest of Mohammad Baqer Saad Dawood Al-Saadi, a member of the Iraqi group *Kataib Hezbollah*. According to US charges, Al-Saadi was involved in organising 18 attacks carried out in Europe and actively attempted to organise attacks in the United States, including in New York. The Americans also point out that Al-Saadi worked closely with General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Revolutionary Guard's Quds Force, and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the former leader of *Kataib Hezbollah*, prior to their killing in 2020. The Americans regard the HAYI network as part of *Kataib Hezbollah*, which cooperates with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps and thus serves Iranian interests. According to the press release, one of the American operatives recruited by Al-Saadi was in fact working for US law enforcement or intelligence agencies, which is how they were able to get close to him.⁶⁹ According to press reports, Al-Saadi believed his American contact to be a member of a Mexican drug cartel. Based on press reports, he was arrested in Turkey and the Turkish authorities extradited him to the United States under an expedited procedure.⁷⁰ Following his capture, Al-Saadi cooperated and told the Americans that he was responsible for strategic

⁶² Joanne STOCKER and Haley OTT: [Group claiming Europe antisemitic attacks tells CBS News it will target "U.S. and Israeli interests worldwide"](#), CBS News, 25 March 2026. Source: cbsnews.com [online, 8 June 2026.]

⁶³ Winnie AGBONLAHOR: [Man arrested over attacks on Jewish community in London](#), BBC, 27 April 2026. Source: bbc.com [online, 26 May 2026]

⁶⁴ Adrian SHTUNI: [Deniable, Disposable, Disruptive: Iran's Hybrid Warfare in Europe Demands a Proactive Response](#), The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 4 May 2026. Source: washingtoninstitute.org [online, 26 May 2026]

⁶⁵ [Treasury Sanctions Swedish Gang and Leader Serving Iranian Regime](#), U.S. Department of the Treasury, 12 March 2025. Source: home.treasury.gov [online, 26 May 2026]

⁶⁶ OTF GRIMM: [Swedish organiser of serious violence arrested in Iraq](#), Europol, 12 January 2026. Source: home.treasury.gov [online, 26 May 2026]

⁶⁷ [UK sanctions Iranian organised crime network](#), Gov.uk, 14 April 2025. Source: gov.uk [online, 6 June 2026]

⁶⁸ Julian LANCHÈS: [Hybrid Threat Signals: Assessing Possible Iranian Involvement in Recent Attacks in Europe](#), International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 23 March 2026. Source: icct.nl [online, 25 May 2026]

⁶⁹ [Iraqi National Arrested and Charged with Providing Material Support to Iranian-Backed Terrorist Organisations and Directing Attacks Targeting U.S. Citizens and Interests](#), U.S. Department of Justice, 15 May 2026. Source: justice.gov [online, 26 May 2026]

⁷⁰ Sareen HABESHIAN: [US charges Iraqi with plots to target Jews in cities from London to LA](#), BBC, 16 May 2026. Source: bbc.com [online, 26 May 2026]



John Lukacs Analyses in Strategic and Defense Studies 2026/17

and intelligence matters, as well as media and psychological warfare operations. His media duties included HAYI communications, which formed part of the psychological operations of the Iranian resistance axis. On the electronic devices found in his possession, the Americans discovered information proving that he was in personal contact with several perpetrators of HAYI attacks, as well as information on how he coordinated with other members of *Kataib Hezbollah* in the dissemination of media content.⁷¹

It is interesting to note that there was at least one attack that HAYI did not claim responsibility for, which fits the pattern in terms of its execution and choice of target: on 8 March 2026, a bomb attack was carried out near the US embassy in Oslo, Norway, resulting in no injuries and only minor material damage. The Norwegian police arrested three Norwegian citizens of Iraqi origin, who were brothers.⁷² As of the completion of this analysis, the authorities had not released any specific details regarding the motive for the attack. There were a few more arson attacks in London, which HAYI did not claim responsibility for, but given the manner in which they were carried out, they fit into the pattern, so it cannot be ruled out that more attacks were carried out than those described.

Conclusions

Iran's actions cannot be described as unprecedented, yet their scale and methodology hold numerous lessons for European authorities. HAYI was a means of exerting pressure on European states at Iran's disposal, carried out with minimal investment and generating significant media coverage, through multiple layers of deniability. The attacks linked to HAYI that have come to light so far have not resulted in any fatalities. During the active military operations and in the initial phase of the ceasefire, the group managed to establish and maintain a spectacular operational tempo, despite the numerous arrests. Based on publicly available information, it is not yet clear what triggered the apparent decline or cessation of HAYI's activities. Al-Saadi's arrest, which took place sometime before 14 May, certainly played a part in this, as according to the US statement, he was taken into US custody at or around that time.⁷³

An interesting lesson regarding counter-terrorism efforts is that British and continental authorities handled the attacks carried out by HAYI differently. In the Dutch and French contexts, charges of terrorism were quickly levelled, whilst British authorities were slower to reach the conclusion that the incidents should be treated as terrorist acts.

It is currently unclear whether the Iranians and their Iraqi partners view the HAYI model as a success or a failure. If they regard it as a success, it is conceivable that, in the future, as the situation in the Middle East escalates, there will be a new wave of attacks carried out either in the name of HAYI, which has already gained 'brand recognition', or in the name of a similar virtual front organisation. If it is seen as a failure, smaller-scale but more spectacular attacks may be organised if Iran deems this necessary.

The attack in North Macedonia also shows that Western Europe is not the only target of Iranian-backed retaliatory actions. Iran has previously attempted to carry out operations in Eastern Europe, both independently and through proxy groups. In 2019, the Albanian authorities announced the dismantling of a group affiliated with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, which, according to the Albanians, was planning an attack against an Iranian opposition group in the country.⁷⁴ In 2012, the Bulgarian authorities blamed Hezbollah for an attack on a group of tourists.⁷⁵ Based on the information currently available, it is not possible to draw far-reaching conclusions as to why this is the only Eastern European location in the current wave of attacks. In any case, it indicates an ambition to broaden the scope of the attacks. Thus, Hungarian authorities must also prepare to detect and, where possible, prevent such operations in the future.

⁷¹ [Dual Iranian-Iraqi National Indicted for Providing Material Support to Terrorist Organisations](#), U.S. Department of Justice, 28 May 2026. Source: justice.gov [online, 8 June 2026]

⁷² [Three brothers arrested in Norway over bomb attack on US embassy in Oslo](#), al Jazeera, 11 March 2026. Source: aljazeera.com [online, 24 May 2026]

⁷³ [Dual Iranian-Iraqi National Indicted for Providing Material Support to Terrorist Organisations](#), U.S. Department of Justice, 28 May 2026. Source: justice.gov [online, 8 June 2026]

⁷⁴ [Albanian police say Iranian 'terror cell' planned to attack exiles](#), The Guardian, 23 October 2019. Source: theguardian.com [online, 6 June 2026]

⁷⁵ Sally Abou ALJOUD: [Lebanese suicide bomber who killed five Israelis in Bulgaria is buried in a Hezbollah cemetery](#), AP, 12 April 2025. Source: apnews.com [online, 6 June 2026]



John Lukacs Analyses in Strategic and Defense Studies 2026/17

'Analyses in Strategic and Defense Studies' are periodical defense policy papers reflecting the independent opinion of the authors only.

The Research Program for Strategy and Defense within the John Lukacs Institute for Politics and Strategy of the Eötvös József Research Center at Ludovika – Public Service University carries out research in strategic studies and defense policy. The views and opinion expressed in its publications do not necessarily reflect those of the institution or the editors but of the authors only. The data and analysis included in these publications serve information purposes.

ISSN 2063-4862

Publisher: John Lukacs Institute for Politics and Strategy

Edited by:
Tamás Csiki Varga

Contact:

1581 Budapest, P.O. Box. 15.

Phone: 00 36 1 432-90-92

E-mail: jli@uni-nke.hu

© János Kemény