

Responding To Hybrid Terrorist Organizations: The European Union's Approach to Hezbollah

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Abstract

Recently, there has been a growing trend toward hybridization in terrorism. This trend is evident in the actors involved and their scope of action, which makes terrorism highly complicated and often not fully addressed by counterterrorism efforts. This thesis examines the case of the European Union's approach to Hezbollah, a hybrid terrorist organization, and attempts to address the gap regarding how the European Union (EU) approaches such actors and whether it considers their complexity. Using the framework of a hybrid terrorist organization, the thesis applies qualitative content analysis to examine the EU's approach to Hezbollah from 2020 to 2024. This is accomplished by analyzing 112 documents from the EUR-Lex register. The thesis concludes that the European Union does not adequately address the complexity and multidimensionality of Hezbollah in documents from 2020 to 2024. Without fully integrating all three different wings the group operates in, the EU fails to address Hezbollah fully in its hybrid structure and actions, which threatens to render its countermeasures ineffective.

Author's Declaration

I, the undersigned, Lena Stelzmüller, candidate for the MA degree in International Relations declare herewith that the present thesis titled “Responding to Hybrid Terrorist Organizations: The European Union’s Approach to Hezbollah” is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person’s or institution’s copyright.

I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Vienna, 23 May 2025

Lena Stelzmüller

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Introduction

Hezbollah in Lebanon is a case that repeatedly leads to disagreements about its definition and classification. It is a group that simultaneously engages in terrorist operations, political governance, welfare provision, transnational operations and more. Its hybrid nature has made Hezbollah a unique and unusually challenging subject for policymakers, particularly in the realm of counterterrorism. It raises the question of how institutions should approach actors who so clearly blend the roles of state and non-state actors and defy conventional categories. For the European Union, Hezbollah must be divided into a military wing and a political wing, with only the former on the EU's list of terrorist organizations. The group itself states that it does not have separate wings, but rather functions as a single entity (Levitt 2013). Categorizing Hezbollah as a hybrid terrorist organization helps to better understand and approach this actor (Ganor 2015). The challenge remains how organizations such as the European Union can counter Hezbollah, as most organizations are not prepared for this type of terrorist actor (Stockhammer 2024).

This thesis aims to analyze the European Union's approach to Hezbollah by defining it as a hybrid terrorist organization. Research on more complex and hybrid actors and how to counter them was strongly influenced by the emergence of the concept of hybrid warfare and hybrid threats (Hoffman 2007). While terrorism mostly falls under the umbrella of hybrid threats, researchers emphasize that there are also developments towards a "hybridization of terrorism", which highlights how terrorist groups are increasingly acquiring hybrid capabilities (Sadik 2024, 294). The European Union's approach to Hezbollah has been little studied. One research that captured the complex nature of Hezbollah, albeit by taking a different definition and approach to the group, emphasized that the European Union focuses more on the armed characteristics of Hezbollah (Lecocq 2020). While this author has already examined the EU's approach to Hezbollah, there is a lack of comprehensive research that integrates the broader

theories of counterterrorism and hybrid threats with an in-depth analysis of the EU's approach to Hezbollah in recent years. Therefore, this thesis addresses the research question: *How does the European Union approach Hezbollah as a hybrid terrorist organization, and to what extent does this approach take into account the complex nature of the group?*

This research is important because understanding the hybrid nature of terrorist organizations, such as Hezbollah, raises awareness of the complexity of these groups and helps policymakers develop improved, more effective policies to counter them. By integrating the concepts of terrorism and hybrid threats, the research will establish a foundation for a more nuanced understanding of actors such as Hezbollah. Methodologically, this thesis will integrate secondary academic literature with Mayring's qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2022). Secondary academic literature will help to develop a theoretical understanding of Hezbollah and lay the groundwork for grasping the reasons behind viewing Hezbollah as a hybrid terrorist organization. The qualitative content analysis will help clarify how the EU approaches Hezbollah and whether its approach captures the group's complex nature. Therefore, this thesis will analyze over 100 policy documents published between 2020 and 2024 in the EUR-Lex register, which is the official online portal where the European Union publishes its laws, regulations, directives, and more. Based on existing research, the analysis will focus on the time period from 2020 to 2024, providing a better understanding of how the EU has approached Hezbollah in recent years. This thesis will use a deductive category application and categories will be developed based on the theoretical aspects discussed in existing literature on EU counterterrorism, Hezbollah, and hybrid terrorist organizations. This approach will be used to answer both parts of the research question.

Based on the analysis, this thesis finds that the EU primarily views Hezbollah in relation to terrorism and illegal networks that fund the organization, as well as its connection to Iran. Therefore, the EU uses sanctions and intelligence to counter Hezbollah's illegal activities while

upholding international law and human rights principles. While most references addressed Hezbollah's military or terrorist nature, some also mentioned its role as a political actor. However, none of the references highlighted the group's social welfare arm — a characteristic typical of hybrid terrorist organizations. This suggests that the European Union only partially considers Hezbollah's complexity and hybrid nature.

Three chapters will present the findings of this thesis. The first chapter, which follows the literature review, will examine the case of Hezbollah and specifically how this type of actor can be defined. The second chapter will provide the context of counterterrorism, specifically the European Union's strategy on counterterrorism, in order to gain a better understanding of how the EU can approach Hezbollah. The third chapter will focus on the methodology and analysis, helping to clarify the categories and the rationale behind the method. The fourth chapter will present the findings of the analysis with the aim of determining how the European Union approaches Hezbollah and its complex nature. The conclusion chapter is the final part of the thesis and it will summarize the main findings and point out the thesis' limitations.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The concept of hybridity is a central one that has emerged recently and begun to shape the way policymakers and scholars look at conflict and war. One of the first and most prominent definitions of how we can understand these hybrid concepts is Hoffman's, which emphasizes that hybrid threats can be understood as "threats that incorporate a full range of different modes of warfare, including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder, conducted by both sides and a variety of non-state actors" (Hoffman 2007, 8). This definition was an early recognition of the complex and diverse nature and structure of hybrid threats. The European Union gave us another definition to understand hybrid threats when it published its meaning of hybrid threats in 2016. It understands them not only as a mixture of activities, but also as a threat used "by state and non-state actors" (European Commission 2016). It further emphasizes that the cause that the hybrid threat seeks is not only direct damage but also destabilizing a society and obstructing decision-making (European Commission 2016). However, the concept of hybrid can be seen not only in terms of capabilities and actions, but also in terms of the range of actors involved and the goals they pursue. The hybrid nature and the number of actors make "usual conceptions of insurgent and counterinsurgent warfare" inadequate (Schroefl and Kaufman 2014, 867). Hybrid actors are often defined as those who seek to "harness and control some but not all spheres of the state's authority" (Cambanis et al. 2019, 10). These actors engage in multiple spheres, such as diplomacy, propaganda, war, and politics, and although they may be proxies in some cases, they seek to make their own policies (Cambanis et al. 2019, 10). Lecocq further defines that hybrid threats may not be globally recognized state actors, but they still overlap "with Weberian and functional conceptions of statehood" (Lecocq 2024, 609). These actors operate both inside and outside the state, making them transnational (Lecocq 2024, 609).

Stockhammer (2024) provides a first approximation to the question of how terrorism fits in with the hybrid concept. He adds further nuance to the hybrid concept, noting that while terrorism is sometimes associated with hybrid warfare, the overlap between the two is only conditional (Stockhammer 2024, 76). Sadik (2024) builds on this premise by arguing that in a strategic landscape, the connection between hybrid warfare and terrorism is often made in such a way that the act of terrorism is seen as part of a hybrid threat, making terrorism part of a hybrid strategy (Sadik 2024, 294). This role of terrorism can be further highlighted with an emerging trend that Sadik (2024) calls the "hybridization of terrorism," which describes the phenomenon of terrorist organizations having more and more hybrid capabilities (Sadik 2024, 294). The term "hybrid" has evolved in many ways in recent years and is used in many ways as a multifaceted concept. Although the boundaries of the concept appear broad, it is clear that the term "hybrid" goes far beyond different forms of warfare and can instead refer to the actors and their scope of action. This means that hybrid actors can also be hybrid threats, operating in multiple domains, nationally or transnationally, and using different tactics, including terrorism. This goes back to a framework introduced by Giannopoulos, Smith, and Theocharidou (2021), who developed what they call the "Hybrid Threat Conceptual Model". This includes four pillars that need to be analyzed to understand the full landscape of hybrid threats, namely the "actors (and their strategic objectives), tools applied by the actor, the domains that are targeted, and the phases (including the types of activities observed in each phase)" (Giannopoulos, Smith and Theocharidou 2021, 11).

The case of Hezbollah serves as an example of the complex relationship between hybrid warfare and terrorism (Gasztold and Gasztold 2022, 1261). Hezbollah is repeatedly referred to in the academic literature under various names. Lecocq (2020) argues that the hybrid actor concept seems to be a better way to understand this type of actor, as on the one hand it recognizes the diverse nature and operations, but on the other hand it also makes the cases less

prone to a false categorization that would reduce the actor to a single characteristic, which could happen with a terrorist organization (Lecocq 2020, 366). The academic literature repeatedly refers to Hezbollah under various terms. Other academics refer to cases like Hezbollah as also insurgencies (Moghadam, Berger and Beliakova 2014, 9). Byman (2005) explicitly calls the group a terrorist group that is also an insurgency (Byman 2005, 5). Azani (2013) goes further and points out the complex structure of the group with all the different spheres in which it operates, namely the civilian, social, religious, political and military. For this reason, he refers to Hezbollah as "a prototypical hybrid terrorist organization" (Azani 2013, 899). The concept of a hybrid terrorist organization was developed in depth by Ganor (2015), who clearly outlined that in these cases, the group operates on two levels. On the one hand, the organization engages "in pseudo-legitimate and voluntary activities such as providing charity, welfare, education, and religious services" (Ganor 2015, 74). At this level, it may also engage in politics at various levels of the country. The second level at which these organizations operate is one where they are "involved in illegitimate and illegal activities" (Ganor 2015, 74). As such, a hybrid terrorist organization may consist of two or even three elements, namely a militant terrorist wing, a social welfare wing, and a political wing (Ganor 2015, 74). While the existing literature provides us with a thorough understanding of the complex nature of Hezbollah, it becomes clear that an accurate definition of the group is far more complicated, which is why a more precise classification can be found in the next chapter.

What complicates the issue is how to address these threats effectively. Cronin (2015) has already stated that the classic counterterrorism approach will not help in countering threats such as ISIS, as they also have a state function (Cronin 2015). This information is also relevant for Hezbollah. A 2019 policy brief also drew attention to the fact that counterterrorism intelligence, if too narrow, can be blind to hybrid threats (Braun 2019, 6). Other authors propose a solution to this problem by recommending that the best way to counter hybrid threats is through a

blended approach (Lushenko, Bose and Romaniuk 2024, 90). The recommendation of a blended approach can also be found in Londras (2017). While the approach is more from a legal perspective, counterterrorism itself is conceptualized as hybrid (De Londras 2017, 66), which is why "all counter-terrorism law research needs to be cross- or multi-disciplinary" (De Londras 2017, 70). Sadik (2024) argues for a strategy that is comprehensive in the sense that it involves not only organizations and their members, but also civil society and the private sector (Sadik 2024, 296). Therefore, organizations need to prepare for hybrid threats by integrating a diverse strategy (Nowicka et al. 2024, 488). While this argument centers on organizations, other authors also underscore the need for counterterrorism to be prepared for hybrid actions. Hybrid strategies can only be successfully countered if targets are able to assess and decide quickly and respond effectively (Jungwirth et al. 2023). While there is a clear call for organizations and targets to develop a diverse strategy to effectively counter hybrid threats, Stockhammer (2024) stresses that most institutions are not prepared. Counterterrorism institutions have not caught up with the hybrid tactics of terrorists (Stockhammer 2024, 6). For this reason, Gasztold and Gasztold (2022) also raise the question of whether counterterrorism policy for actors such as Hezbollah needs to be redesigned in light of the use of hybrid tools (Gasztold and Gasztold 2022, 1272). This section has shown that traditional approaches to counterterrorism are inadequate for actors with a hybrid nature, and thus for hybrid terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah, which, like ISIS, also perform state-like functions. Several scholars argue that countering such threats requires a blended and effective multidisciplinary strategy. However, most institutions remain unprepared, and counterterrorism strategies need to be redesigned to effectively address the hybrid nature of actors such as Hezbollah.

In the post-9/11 era, the European Union has assumed an increasingly important role as a counter-terrorism actor. At the same time, it has always been confronted with problems such as insufficient operational capabilities and the highly complex nature of cross-border

coordination (Monar 2015, 333). However, the terrorist attacks in Madrid in 2004 stressed that many were in favor of greater cooperation within the EU in the fight against terrorism (Keohane 2005, 1). Moreover, changes in EU policy regarding terrorism typically occurred in response to an attack (Argomaniz, Bures and Kaunert 2015, 203). Another important development that came with the attacks in Madrid was the creation of a counterterrorism coordinator who plays an important role at the international level (Mackenzie et al. 2013, 325-326). However, as the European Union has evolved, it has been described as a "paper tiger" in terms of its counterterrorism policies (Bures 2006). This fact can be seen, for example, in the period from 2001 to 2013, during which the EU introduced 238 counter-terrorism measures (De Londras 2015, 205-207). Despite the introduction of a large number of counterterrorism measures, authors such as Natalie Tocci, in her article written in 2007, stated that "the policies of the US and the EU have not achieved their intended results of weakening or 'moderating' either Hamas or Hezbollah" (Tocci 2007, 157). While we can see the European Union's efforts to help Lebanon develop a national counterterrorism strategy (Seeberg 2018, 6), little research has been done on the EU's counterterrorism approach to Hezbollah as a hybrid terrorist organization. While Lecocq is looking at the EU's approach to Hezbollah, she wants to find out "how the EU accounts for hybrid actors in its foreign policy" (Lecocq 2020, 374). From a foreign policy perspective, the EU's institutional debates emphasize the group's transnational and armed characteristics and less so its governmental activities (Lecocq 2020, 375).

Numerous studies and research incorporate the concept of hybridity. While the concept has no real boundaries and is used in different variations, it can help in understanding organizations such as Hezbollah. These groups are highly complex, not only in their nature but also in their actions. They blur traditional distinctions between state and non-state actors, as well as between legality and illegality. Despite their complexity, little research has been done on what this actually means for countries or organizations in terms of countering these actors.

As far as the EU is concerned, the existing literature is either not recent enough or focuses primarily on the issue from a foreign policy perspective. All of this research leaves several aspects unaddressed. First, there is a lack of focus on the EU's current approach toward Hezbollah, one that would include the hybrid characterization. Second, the question persists as to whether the concept of hybridity, especially hybrid terrorist organizations, is being overlooked in the context of the European Union. All of this leaves us with a significant research gap around the European Union's counterterrorism policies and its approach to more complex actors like hybrid terrorist organizations.

Chapter 1: Hezbollah as a Hybrid Terrorist Organization

This first chapter of the thesis aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex nature of Hezbollah. Therefore, the first step in this study will be an examination of the various types of terrorist organizations, followed by an analysis of the case of Hezbollah. This includes providing a short overview of the group's historical background and its diverse range of activities. The chapter will be concluded with a subchapter that will address the subject of hybrid terrorist organizations and the justification for classifying Hezbollah as such.

1.1 Different Types of Terrorism – Religious Terrorism

One of the most popular classifications of terrorism was developed by David C. Rapoport. He distinguishes between different types of terrorism as a wave phenomenon. This means that global terrorism has occurred in several historical waves. The first was the anarchist wave, which began in 1880 and was followed by the anti-colonial wave. They were followed in the 1960s by the New Left wave, before the religious wave began in 1979 (Rapoport 2013, 282-283). While this distinction may be helpful in classifying terrorist groups, it makes more sense to speak of strains rather than waves. A classification of different types of terrorism into socialist, nationalist, religious, and exclusivist strains seems more helpful because it also takes into account the fact that terrorist groups learn not only from the present but also from the past in order to develop their tactics and goals (Parker and Sitter 2016, 197). The most important strain for this thesis is religious terrorism. This type of terrorism first appeared in 1856 with John Brown, who committed religiously motivated violence. Religious terrorism is not an Islamist phenomenon, as John Brown demonstrates. While religious beliefs have influenced other forms of terrorism, religious terrorism has long been absent. With the emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1929, an actor reappeared for whom militancy and martyrdom were central values. The case of the Muslim Brotherhood became a model for the creation of other Islamist terrorist organizations, as the organization also combined militancy with social service.

The importance of providing social services is evident in this group due to the stronger connection between the armed group and its constituents. An example of this, which will be discussed below, is Hezbollah, which also followed the model of the Muslim Brotherhood (Parker and Sitter 2016, 207-209). In addition, religious terrorism is described by Bruce Hoffman as violence that is seen as a "sacramental act or divine duty" in which the terrorists see themselves as outsiders who want to change the existing system (Hoffman 2017, 90-91). They seek to eliminate their defined enemies and justify it as necessary to achieve their goals (Hoffman 2017, 90-91).

1.2 Hezbollah's Historical Background

Hezbollah, which translates to the Party of God, is a Shiite movement in Lebanon that benefits from the fact that approximately 30 percent of the country's population is Shiite. They are predominantly located in southern Lebanon (Philipp 2011). The beginnings of Hezbollah can be traced back to 1982, to the aftermath of Israel's invasion of Lebanon (Worrall, Mabon and Clubb 2016, 154). In 1985 the group was established as a real organization. However, it existed in a different form before that (Worrall, Mabon and Clubb 2016, 39). Hezbollah was not the only militant Shiite group actively supported by Iran at the time, nor was it the most dominant (Norton 2014, xii). Nevertheless, both Iran and Syria were interested in supporting the group (Norton 2014, 24). The more popular movement at the time was the Amal movement, which, unlike Hezbollah at the time, also wanted to engage in politics. But less than a decade later, Hezbollah would become the most powerful Shi'i group in Lebanon. Major attacks were carried out as early as 1983, before Hezbollah was even founded (Norton 2014, xii). In 1985, Hezbollah published an open letter that provides insight into the group's goals and strategies. It clearly identifies its enemies as the imperialist world and America as the root of all evil. They see themselves as "the sons of the faction of God" whose goal is to liberate their land from

Israel and regain their freedom through the sacrifice of their blood (Avon, Khatchadourian and Todd 2012, 103-112).

The period from 1982 to 1992 may be considered the most violent and active period of the group (Worrall, Mabon and Clubb 2016, 41). Hezbollah is known to have played a major role in holding foreigners hostage during this period. At the same time, Hezbollah developed more and more in its role of fighting against the occupying Israeli military. Although there were other groups fighting the Israeli military, Hezbollah was the most effective, and some even argue that when Israel left Lebanon in 2000, it was because of Hezbollah's pressure (Norton 2014, xii-xiii). Lebanon's first elections since the end of the civil war were held in 1992. Despite controversy within its own ranks over Hezbollah's participation in the 1992 elections, the organization ran and won eight seats, marking a significant development in the political landscape (Norton 2014, 85-90). After the Israeli withdrawal in 2000, there were discussions within Hezbollah about whether to continue the resistance or to focus more on Lebanese politics. Hezbollah decided to expand paramilitary operations against Israel. Nevertheless, the period between 2000 and 2006 can be classified as a relatively peaceful phase (Norton 2014, 79-80). This changed dramatically in July 2006, when there was a renewed escalation between Hezbollah and Israel after Hezbollah attacked and killed Israeli soldiers. The following war lasted 33 days and ended on August the 14th (Avon, Khatchadourian and Todd 2012, 82-83). The war caused many casualties, with more than 1,000 Lebanese killed and enormous damage to many parts of the country. It also caused many Lebanese to reconsider their views on Hezbollah, as many had previously been frustrated with the organization. As a result, Hezbollah was able to return to the government in July 2008 (Philipp 2011). Another important part of the historic context is the involvement of Hezbollah and its ties to Syria. Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian civil war stems from several objectives, including its interest in preserving the regime of Bashar al-Assad, but also its need for a stable Syria in order to maintain its supply

route to Iran. By 2017, Hezbollah was estimated to have lost at least 1,100 fighters in Syria (Norton 2014, 183-190).

While the aforementioned historical events are only a small excerpt from the history of Hezbollah, which could fill an entire book, it is worth briefly reviewing the current events since October 7, the Hamas attack on Israel. The renewed escalation with Israel led to a huge weakening of Hezbollah, which included not only the Israeli pager attack on Hezbollah members, but also the targeted killing of Hezbollah leaders, especially long-time leader Hassan Nasrallah (Ghaddar 2024). In addition, after the fall of the Assad regime, the new government in Syria now targets illegal arms smuggling and Hezbollah cells, further weakening the latter. At the same time, however, armed clashes between the new Syrian government and Hezbollah continue in March 2025 (Zelin 2025).

1.3 Hezbollah's Diverse Activities

The next step in this thesis will be to focus more closely on the key areas in which Hezbollah operates. This should provide an understanding of the complexity of Hezbollah as an actor and as a threat.

While many people associate Hezbollah with terrorism, one of the areas in which it is active is social welfare. The group has created a broader narrative of oppression in order to foster a sense of community among Shi'a communities with the goal of creating a "resistance society" (Worrall, Mabon, and Clubb 2016, 74). Hezbollah has divided its work into three main areas: education, health, and social work, each with its own specialized organizations. Initially, Hezbollah mainly supported its fighters and their families, but over the years it has expanded its assistance to include its supporters and potential supporters. The first major area in which Hezbollah became active, education, has led over the years to the establishment of a network of schools where subjects, such as religion and others are taught. The schools form the very foundations for building a resistance society. Hezbollah's school system now covers the entire

age range, from babies to eighteen-year-olds. In the second area, health care, Hezbollah already operated four hospitals in 2016, providing medical care to about 400,000 people. The health network also includes a number of other facilities, such as dental clinics. Another area in which Hezbollah is active is construction. Initially, this area was mainly used to build houses for its members or for its meetings. However, it has steadily expanded to include the provision of clean water and road maintenance. Especially after the 2006 war and the severe damage to many houses, Hezbollah financed a large part of the reconstruction in many areas. In addition to these activities, the group is also active in agriculture, where it has created a network of centers that help in several areas related to agriculture. Hezbollah's social welfare activities also include other social services. For example, it provides small loans, sports clubs, and garbage collection. It also runs a think tank that holds conferences and publishes various reports (Worrall, Mabon and Clubb 2016, 76-80).

The next element, which is an important cornerstone, is the role of Hezbollah in Lebanese politics. As mentioned earlier, Hezbollah participated in Lebanese elections for the first time in 1992. Seats in the Lebanese parliament are always divided equally between Christians and Muslims. Therefore, all Christian factions received a total of 64 seats, and all Muslim factions similarly received 64 seats. This arrangement was established in the so-called Ta'if Accords of 1989 after the civil war (Norton 2014, 81). The complexity of the parliamentary seats is also reflected in Hezbollah's politics. For example, it is not possible for Hezbollah to govern with a purely Shi'a bloc, it must always cooperate with other blocs and religions, which means that compromises must be made (Worrall, Mabon and Clubb 2016, 87-88). An important step for Hezbollah in politics was its first participation in a government in 2005. Since then, Hezbollah has increasingly learned to exercise its power in the political arena, as evidenced by several incidents in which veto politics were exercised or weapons were used to secure Hezbollah's position in Lebanese politics. This exercise of power has also served to

remove the issue of Hezbollah's disarmament from the political agenda (Worrall, Mabon and Clubb 2016, 105-107). To gain a better understanding of Hezbollah's politics, it is also worth taking a look at the political charter they published in November 2009. In it, they again emphasize the importance of resistance and the focus on their own country, Lebanon, as well as the imminent threat posed by Israel. According to them, a state should protect the country and be powerful and effective (Avon, Khatchadourian and Todd 2012, 130-145). From 2008 to 2019, Hezbollah had effective veto power in the Lebanese cabinet, as it and its supporters held the majority of ministerial posts. Even after the explosion in Beirut and the formation of a new technocratic government in 2020, Hezbollah still wielded enormous influence. One of the ways it uses its political power is to hide illegal activities through ministerial control. With money laundering being just one activity that Hezbollah has hidden through its control of the Ministry of Finance (Khatib 2021).

Thirdly, another important part of Hezbollah is its military and terrorist activities. Initially, Hezbollah had only basic weapons and was by no means militarily superior. This explains, among other things, the tactics used in the early days, such as kidnappings and suicide bombings. These tactics were extremely effective for Hezbollah at the time and also reinforced the narrative that the group was pursuing. The group's successful strategy, in turn, led to increased support and meant that by the 1990s Hezbollah had not only greatly expanded its arsenal of weapons, but also had the experience and expertise to use them. In the years that followed, this arsenal was further expanded to include rockets and missiles, making Hezbollah many times more dangerous to Israel (Worrall, Mabon and Clubb 2016, 43-46). Recently, new types of weapons have been added, and Hezbollah has demonstrated advanced cyber and information warfare capabilities, using small UAVs for surveillance and attack (Forest and Stockhammer 2024, 231-232). In 2024, Hezbollah's military capabilities were estimated to range from 120,000 to 200,000 different types of rockets and missiles. The number of warriors

fighting for Hezbollah is estimated at 20,000 reservists and 30,000 active fighters (Jones et al. 2024).

In the late 1990s, it was assumed that Hezbollah's terrorism against the West would decrease as Hezbollah became more politically active and distanced itself from its terrorist roots. However, the 2000s saw a resurgence, especially after the 2006 war. Since 2005, there have been numerous attacks worldwide, mostly targeting US or Israeli citizens. Not only have these attacks targeted individuals, but they have also targeted embassies. In the European Union, there was a bus bombing in Burgas, Bulgaria in 2012 that killed several people. Because of the proximity to Iran, it is sometimes difficult to determine whether Hezbollah has been involved in other additional attacks (Worrall, Mabon and Clubb 2016, 65-68).

1.4 Defining Hezbollah

The previous chapters have provided an insight into the history and complexity of Hezbollah. In a further step, we will now examine in more detail how organizations such as Hezbollah can be understood and, above all, defined. This question is particularly important in view of the research question. At the same time, the question of defining a complex organization like Hezbollah is at least as complex as the organization itself, which means that there will never be just one way to understand this actor.

The complexity of defining what Hezbollah is begins with the difficulty of defining terrorism itself. Even this term is explained by a variety of definitions. One of the most prominent definitions, however, is by Bruce Hoffman, who defines terrorism as "the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change" (Hoffman 2017, 43-44). He further emphasizes that terrorism generates fear and has wide-reaching psychological effects, and is carried out by an organization, a conspiratorial cell structure, or individuals¹ (Hoffman 2017, 43-44).

¹ The full definition can be found in Hoffman (2017) pp. 43-44.

Another approach that can help in classifying Hezbollah is to examine the European Union's definition, as outlined in its Directive on combating terrorism. According to the EU, a "terrorist group" is defined as a "structured group of more than two persons, established for a period of time and acting in concert to commit terrorist offences" (European Union 2017, Art. 2). The offenses committed by terrorist groups listed in the Directive that are applicable to Hezbollah include "attacks upon a person's life which may cause death" and "kidnapping or hostage-taking," as well as "possession, acquisition, transport, supply or use of explosives or weapons" with the intent of "seriously intimidating a population" (European Union 2017, Art.3).

As mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, Hezbollah is called a wide range of different definitions in the literature and there is no common agreement on what is right. It has been shown that it can be seen as an insurgency (Assaf, Berger and Beliakova 2014, 9). Or as Byman (2005) posits even as a terrorist group that is also an insurgency (Byman 2005, 5). Furthermore, there are also definitions of the group as a hybrid actor that stay away from categorizations such as terrorist, as this would not capture the whole group, especially in light of its social activities (Lecocq 2020).

As Martha Crenshaw and Gary LaFree points out, many cases in the real world simply don't fit into a single organizational framework. Reality consists of complicated and diverse organizational categories (Crenshaw and LaFree 2017, 111). The participation of terrorists in legitimate political parties makes it even more difficult for governments to contain the threat. The problem, as seen with Hezbollah, is that when governments ban them or put them on terror lists, there is a political cost because these organizations are democratically elected (Crenshaw and LaFree 2017, 113). The clear delineation of an individual actor is further complicated by the fact that their actions are increasingly blurred, and the distinction between what constitutes

a crime and what is a crime carried out in pursuit of a terrorist act is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain (Clutterbuck 2004, 146-147).

Classifying a group like Hezbollah is therefore highly complex, but Ganor's definition of a hybrid terrorist organization is one of the most suitable approaches. He states that this type of organization is the one that needs to be understood most in today's multidimensional warfare (Ganor 2015, 74). This is something that also aligns with developments such as the "hybridization of terrorism" (Sadik 2024, 294) and the ongoing hybridization of the tools used by Hezbollah as well, such as cyber and information warfare capabilities and drones (Forest and Stockhammer 2024, 231-232).

Several factors led to the decision to understand Hezbollah as a hybrid terrorist organization. First, the concept perfectly describes the dimensions in which Hezbollah operates. While labeling it as a terrorist organization would fail to understand its social activities such as health care or schools and its political role, labeling it as a hybrid actor would ignore its use of violence. Furthermore, a hybrid terrorist organization includes the political wing, the militant terrorist wing, and the social wing, all of which are subject to the organization's leadership (Ganor 2015,74). Hezbollah's leadership has also stated that the group is not divided into different arms but is under one organization (Levitt 2013). Another reason for not labeling it as a hybrid actor or simply a terrorist organization is the group's financial activities. Hezbollah operates an extensive criminal enterprise around the world that is involved in money laundering, illegal arms sales, or drug trafficking. This has been demonstrated by several arrests around the world (Levitt 2020, 2-3). The importance of recognizing the complex nature of the organization, and thus the need to classify Hezbollah as a hybrid terrorist organization, can be illustrated by another example. One of the organization's activities in Germany was to set up a charity whose real purpose was to raise funds for the group itself (Levitt 2020, 4). In addition, the group has been shown to use political offices in Lebanon to conceal its illegal activities.

All of this suggests that the multi-layered structure of the organization cannot be viewed in complete isolation from one another, which is why its classification as a hybrid terrorist organization seems to be the most appropriate, as it neither completely reduces it to a terrorist organization, which would leave out the social aspects of the group, nor downplays the violent part of the organization, as would be the case without the terrorist label.

Chapter 2: Counterterrorism

After discussing Hezbollah in more detail, the second chapter will focus on counterterrorism. Therefore, different approaches or concepts of counterterrorism will be presented before the EU's approach to counterterrorism will be discussed in more detail. In addition to the EU's institutional structure with regard to counterterrorism and two explicit EU policies will be presented in order to provide a better understanding of the EU's counterterrorism approach. Finally, this chapter will also discuss the EU's relationship with Hezbollah, which will serve as a transition to the following empirical chapter.

2.1 Counterterrorism Approaches

The prevailing approaches to counterterrorism can be broadly classified into three main models: the police or legal model, the military model, and the political model. Each employs a different set of policy tools, with varying degrees of success and results.

Police- or law enforcement-based strategies are primarily concerned with monitoring suspects, gathering intelligence, and conducting law enforcement operations, with police and intelligence agencies as primary actors (Wilkinson 2011, 87-92). Another tool of this model is specific anti-terrorist legislation, which is highly controversial. The problem with legislation stems from the different designs and goals it can have, as it can be aimed at deterrence, ensuring better public safety, or simply as a psychological function. In all counterterrorism legislation, it is important that it is democratically accountable and that actors operate within the law, including in terms of trials (Wilkinson 2011, 92-96).

The second approach is the military approach, which prioritizes the use of force to neutralize terrorist threats. This approach uses military tactics such as air strikes, intervention, and targeted killings (Cronin 2009, 24-25 & 120). After a terrorist attack, there is a natural inclination to respond with force. Military action may seem like the right response. It responds to domestic pressure and the perceived need for action. The use of military force boosts morale,

especially when retaliating against terrorism. States must use their own military power to punish those who harm their citizens (Cronin 2009,120). Repression doesn't work against terrorism because terrorists take advantage of a state's weaknesses. The use of repression, often brutal, led to the elimination of terrorist groups in Brazil, Uruguay, and Czarist Russia. But the response itself undermined the legitimacy of the state. The effectiveness of repression as a strategy for ending terrorism depends on two key variables: the mobilization of the population and the degree to which a regime is despised as a result of its response (Cronin 2009, 141-142). Counterterrorist strategies carry a much greater danger than just tactical failure. Ill-conceived measures may inadvertently exacerbate the very threat they seek to mitigate, leading to the emergence of a more dangerous adversary. Any action taken by a state is bound to have unintended or originally unanticipated consequences for the environment as a whole (Parker 2007, 158-159).

The third approach, which is political in nature, seeks to address the root causes of terrorism through negotiation and diplomacy, socio-economic reforms and policies, and the inclusion of marginalized communities (Wilkinson 2011, 64-67). The problem with this approach is the constant fear that governments will increasingly surveil their citizens to prevent terrorism (Crenshaw 2010, 5). As Crenshaw notes, certain measures, such as the acknowledgement of genuine grievances and the need for socio-economic progress and deeper cultural integration, have proven to be useful by-products of counter-terrorism policies (Crenshaw 2010, 6). Consider a more holistic approach to counterterrorism . Bjørge suggests that the effectiveness of any mechanism that addresses root causes depends on an understanding of the multiple levels at which it operates, including the macro, meso, and micro levels, and that it requires nine preventive mechanisms for this holistic approach (Bjørge 2016, 25-29).

2.2 The European Union's Counterterrorism Approach and Framework

To get a better understanding of the European Union's counterterrorism measures, it is important to understand its institutional framework. EU counterterrorism efforts can be traced back to the founding of the TREVI group in the 1970s. TREVI stands for "Terrorism, Radicalism, Extremism, and Violence" (Doody 2015, 42). Another important step in the timeline was the establishment of the European Arrest Warrant and Eurojust by the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council following the 9/11 attacks (Doody 2015, 43). Significant shifts in EU counterterrorism policy have typically been reactive, occurring primarily in response to major attacks (Argomaniz, Bures and Kaunert 2015, 203). This development can be seen in the aftermath of the Madrid attacks, for example, when a Counterterrorism Coordinator was created to play an instrumental role at the international level (Mackenzie et al. 2013, 325–326).

The European Commission, the executive arm of the European Union, is the first major institutional arm that shapes EU counterterrorism policy alongside the Parliament. It proposes policies and legislation and develops targeted actions. Counterterrorism is part of the Home Affairs Directorate-General (Doody 2015, 45–46). The adoption of legislation and the issuance of decisions are subject to three different actors (Doody 2015, 47). First, the European Parliament has played an important role in shaping counter-terrorism policy, particularly as a co-legislator, but also through initiatives and resolutions (Bąkowski 2023, 10). Another player is the European Council, consisting of heads of state from member countries. Although it does not pass laws, it does issue Council Conclusions (Doody 2015, 47). The last of these three actors is the Council of Ministers, with the Justice and Home Affairs Council being the most important for the topic of terrorism (Doody 2015, 47). Another important group is the EU agencies, particularly Europol. Europol's role has been strengthened since 2022 with a new mandate and the creation of a European Counter-Terrorism Center. This Europol unit will address online terrorist propaganda and the financing of terrorism. Additionally, the EU Agency for Criminal

Justice Cooperation (Eurojust) assists judicial bodies in fighting terrorism (Bąkowski 2023, 6-7).

The EU's policy and legal framework for fighting terrorism is extensive and difficult to summarize. One of the most important strategies recently is the Counter-Terrorism Agenda 2020, which is part of the EU Security Union Strategy. Examples of counterterrorism measures enacted through legislation include those related to fighting terrorist financing, regulating arms, protecting borders, and improving cybersecurity (Bąkowski 2023, 4-6). Externally, the EU integrates counterterrorism into its foreign policy through cooperation with global organizations such as the United Nations, regional coalitions such as the Global Coalition against Da'esh, and strategic partnerships with countries such as the United States (Bąkowski 2023, 8). One problem with EU counterterrorism efforts is that national states view terrorism as a national security issue rather than an EU-wide one. This is partly because national laws are a source of national pride, and people generally trust their own laws more than those of neighboring countries (Wilkinson 2011, 98).

In terms of EU counterterrorism, the organization has been described as a "paper tiger" regarding its number of published policies (Bures 2006). The EU has published a high number of policies, which can be seen by looking at the period from 2001 to 2013, during which the EU introduced 238 counterterrorism measures (De Londras 2015, 205-207). To gain a clearer understanding of EU counterterrorism efforts, it is worth examining two policy documents published by the EU in recent years. The first is the 2017 Directive on Combating Terrorism.

The directive primarily addresses the establishment of comprehensive definitions for "criminal offences and sanctions in the area of terrorist offences, offences related to a terrorist group and offences related to terrorist activities, as well as measures of protection of, and support and assistance to, victims of terrorism" (European Union 2017, Art. 1). Not only the act of terrorism but also offenses related to it, such as recruitment for terrorism or terrorist

financing, are addressed in the directive (European Union 2017, Art. 5-12). Furthermore, the directive emphasizes the European Union's principles and values regarding human rights, considering terrorism to be "one of the most serious violations" (European Union, 2017, Recital 2).

The second policy document that should be examined is the EU's 2020 Counter-Terrorism Agenda. It proposes a four-pillar strategy for anticipating, preventing, protecting, and responding to terrorism (European Commission 2020, 2). The agenda identifies a wide range of actors and highlights the "jihadist threat from or inspired by Daesh, al-Qaeda, and their affiliates." It also notes that "threats from violent right and left-wing extremists are on the rise" (European Commission 2020, 1). These actors target "densely populated or highly symbolic spaces" (European Commission 2020, 1). Much of the agenda focuses on the emergence of new technologies, such as drones, as well as new technologies that aid detection, like AI. Other areas of focus include developing strategic communication between EU members to counter terrorist content online (European Commission 2020, 6-10). The prevention pillar focuses on areas such as public spaces and critical infrastructure. At the same time, the member states are called upon to improve chemical and biosecurity (European Commission 2020, 16). The final pillar, response, focuses largely on financial investigation, with the European Commission seeking to establish a network of counterterrorism financial investigators to track financial flows across borders. This includes foreign financing and the sourcing of funds through NGOs (European Commission 2020, 19).

2.3 The European Union's Approach to Hezbollah

The next subchapter will shed light on the European Union's multifaceted approach as well as its complicated relationship with Hezbollah. The EU's approach to Hezbollah is shaped by several incidents within the EU. Hezbollah has established a network in Europe that carries out espionage operations and attacks, primarily against Israelis, in addition to serving logistical

and financial purposes. One known case is the 2012 arrest of a Hezbollah member who was supposed to spy on Israeli targets in Cyprus. Another example is Hezbollah's 2012 bomb attack on a bus in Bulgaria, which killed six people and injured numerous others. Other criminal activities include collecting funds for official charitable purposes, which were used to finance the organization's fighters. Germany uncovered these activities in 2014. Additionally, there are several known cases of Hezbollah-related arms trafficking and money laundering (Alami 2020, 119).

Following the attack in Bulgaria and Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian civil war, Hezbollah was reclassified in 2013, with its military wing added to the terrorist list but its political wing kept off (Alami 2020,117). However, defining the group remains a highly controversial issue to this day. It has led to renewed discussions in light of the war in Gaza and the resulting clashes on the Lebanese border (Brzozowski 2024).

As previously mentioned, EU counterterrorism is always a member state decision. This is evident in the decision to designate only the military wing as a terrorist organization, while some EU member states list the entire organization as such. The EU has been careful over the years regarding this decision, trying to recognize all Lebanese political actors (O'Sullivan 2013, 12). Since the decision required unanimous approval from all member states, it was difficult to take action due to the different preferences of the member states. One country that strongly opposed the full designation of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization was France, which has strong historical ties to Lebanon. On the other hand, the Netherlands, which has listed both wings as terrorist organizations since 2004, was in favor of putting the whole organization on the terror list (O'Sullivan 2013, 9–10). In addition to the Netherlands, Germany banned Hezbollah in 2020, and Austria prohibited symbols associated with the entire organization. Similar measures were taken in the Czech Republic, Estonia, and Slovenia. (Der Standard,

2021). The varying attitudes toward Hezbollah demonstrate the complexity of the European Union's interactions with the group.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In the following chapter, this thesis will take a closer look at the method that will help in answering the research question. First, this chapter will introduce the research method and explain its suitability for this research project. Then, the data material will be presented, explained and the coding used for the analysis will be discussed. The method presented here is qualitative content analysis according to Philipp Mayring (Mayring 2022). The choice of method depends on the research question. The aim is to find out how Hezbollah is approached in EU documents and to what extent the hybrid nature of the terrorist organization is taken into account. This method allows a systematic evaluation of the documents. To ensure a structured analysis, the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA© is used. The software allows an organized approach and is also a sensible choice for the creation of categories, as structured code systems and memos can be created in the software.

3.1 Qualitative Content Analysis and Justification

Qualitative content analysis is a method used in the empirical social sciences that can help to systematically evaluate large amounts of data. One of the most prominent methods is Mayring's qualitatively oriented, category-guided text analysis (Blatter, Langer and Wagemann 2018, 115-116). Qualitative content analysis is not only suitable for interviews or speeches in parliamentary debates, as one might expect, but also for documents and files (Blatter, Langer and Wagemann 2018, 117). Rather than determining the intended meaning of a statement, the focus is on analyzing the written material to answer one's own research question. This is achieved by reducing information to its most basic elements. Mayring's analysis concentrates on forming categories to which the empirical material is assigned, thereby reducing its complexity (Blatter, Langer and Wagemann 2018, 115-116). Category formation is a crucial process in Mayring's analysis. There are two ways to approach this: one is deductive category definition, which is the formation of categories from existing theoretical considerations. The

other is inductive category formation, in which the categories are formed during the analysis from the material under study (Mayring 2022, 82).

After the initial stage of extraction and processing, it may be necessary to revise the material. For instance, reclassifying the categories may be necessary. Following this, a main material run takes place, during which processing and extraction occur. Then, the content is structured by filtering and compressing the material into specific content areas (Mayring 2015, 97-99). Using this type of structuring allows for the extraction of content and aspects from the material. First, the filtered material is noted in paraphrases, followed by summaries in the respective main or subcategory (Mayring 2015, 103).

This thesis uses deductive categorization, which means that the categories are derived from the stated problem and the research question, which specifies certain dimensions and values that are then used to form categories. These categories are then given a label, a definition, an anchor example, and coding rules that are then used to conduct the analysis (Mayring 2022, 90-92). The reason for choosing deductive categories was based on the research question: *How does the European Union approach Hezbollah as a hybrid terrorist organization, and to what extent does this approach take into account the complex nature of the group?* The research question implies, on the one hand, that the EU's approach to Hezbollah should be identified, allowing for a deductive categorization based on the existing literature on the EU and its approach to Hezbollah, as well as the EU's counterterrorism measures. On the other hand, deductive categorization also makes sense for the second part of the research question, since based on the existing classification of Hezbollah as a hybrid terrorist organization in the research, categories can be formed with regard to the hybrid nature of the group.

3.2 Data Explanation

Before going into more detail about the deductive categories, a brief introduction to the sources used is given here. The selected documents are various documents that can be found in

the EUR Lex register online. The documents were chosen because they contain the word “Hezbollah” in the text. In addition to the spelling “Hezbollah”, the search also included “Hisbollah”, “Hizbullah”, and “Hizballah”. Filtering with this keyword ensured that the EU's approach to the organization itself was present and could therefore be analyzed. This also ensured that the documents for the second part of the research question were correctly narrowed down.

In addition to the search term, a time frame was set, from 2020 to 2024, which is due to existing research. Lecocq (2020) also analyzes documents found under the search term Hezbollah, but only until 2019. For this analysis, the search returned a total of 112 documents for the period January 2020 through December 2024. It should be noted that many documents are duplicates because they are older documents that have been modified. The decision to include the documents from EUR Lex was based on the wide range of documents available, including both legally binding and non-binding documents. The sources range from Council Regulations, Council Decisions, Verbatim Reports and European Parliament Resolutions, among others. Furthermore, a search in EUR-Lex is useful for the research question, as the aim is to determine the position of the EU rather than that of its Member States, while the register contains documents from the main EU institutions.

3.3 Deductive Categorization

As discussed above, deductive categorization is based on existing literature, so categories are first formed based on the literature on EU counterterrorism and existing EU strategy papers. This results in the following categories, which allow us to address the first part of the research question:

- **Counterterrorism measures:** References to concrete security policy instruments (sanctions, designations), but also possible future counterterrorism measures discussed.

- **Financing and networks:** References to financial flows, money laundering and links to organized crime.
- **International cooperation:** References to diplomatic or multilateral cooperation against terrorism.
- **Normative framing:** Mentions of human rights, rule of law, legal standards in the fight against terrorism.

The second part of the research question can be addressed by creating additional categories based on the literature on Hezbollah, which will be explained below:

- **Political/Military Wing Distinction:** Indications of a distinction between military and political wings
- **Threat assessment:** Mentioning the severity of the threat posed by Hezbollah
- **References to Hybrid Structures:** Mentioning the different nature of Hezbollah - references to social-welfare, political or terrorist nature
- **Dealing with multidimensional threats:** Mentioning strategies for dealing with complex, multifunctional actors.

Chapter 4: Findings

This final chapter of the master's thesis will discuss the results of the analysis method. The analysis is based on the previously explained categories and will help answer the research question. Although examples are used for each category, it is important to note that they are not taken from all the analyzed documents.² Furthermore, it must be emphasized that some of the filtered material falls under two or more categories. Each category will begin with a table that highlights the expected results from the literature and the results of the analysis.

Category	Theoretical Expectation	Empirical Finding
<i>Counterterrorism Measures</i>	Concrete security policy instruments like sanctions, designations, intelligence and laws.	Sanctions against Iran that influence Hezbollah as its proxy; use of intelligence as counterterrorism measures against Hezbollah; strengthening of reliable partners.

Table 1 Counterterrorism measure - expectations and findings

Counterterrorism measures accounted for a substantial portion of the examined documents. Hezbollah was mentioned 54 times in the context of counterterrorism measures that were being implemented directly or that were planned for future measures. The organization is mentioned several times in connection with measures against Iran. For example, due to its connection with Iran, Hezbollah is mentioned as having used "Qods Force-supplied rockets, anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs), man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS), and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs)" (Council of the European Union 2020, 83). Therefore, the EU imposed restrictive measures against Iran, particularly the IRGC Qods Force. This case is one example of how the EU imposes measures that indirectly affect Hezbollah (Council of the European Union 2020, 83). In addition to the imposition of sanctions on Iran, another analyzed

² The appendix lists all the documents that were analyzed. The EU documents referred to in this chapter can be found in the References section.

document — a joint review report on an agreement to improve financial messaging data cooperation between the U.S. and the E.U. — discusses Hezbollah's illegal activities. The document mentions using TFTP (Terrorist Finance Tracking Program) data for counterterrorism sanctions investigations. Furthermore, the document highlighted the use of the Terrorist Identification Task Forces (TITF), which was developed by the European Counter Terrorism Center and investigated subjects with ties to Hezbollah (European Commission 2022, 49-50). It emphasizes international cooperation by facilitating the exchange of data and information, which assists the European Union in counterterrorism efforts. The first examples illustrates a counterterrorism approach based more on law enforcement through intelligence gathering. Another analyzed document showed a more political approach to counterterrorism measures. Regarding the conflict between Hezbollah and Israel, the EU stresses that "support from reliable partners must be strengthened in the region, and work must be done to counter destabilising actors" (European Parliament 2024d, 4). This part highlights a way of countering terrorism that addresses the root causes of the situation and can be seen as a more political approach to counterterrorism.

Category	Theoretical Expectation	Empirical Finding
<i>Financing and Networks</i>	References to financial flows, money laundering and links to organized crime.	Mentioning illegal ties to drug trade; illegal use of development funds; Iranian regime financing terrorism.

Table 2 Financing and networks - expectations and findings

This next category of financing and networks had by far the most findings as the EU's approach to Hezbollah in its documents resulted in over 60 findings related to its illegal financial network and its connection to Iran. Many of the mentions in this category are primarily related to Iran's financing of Hezbollah. For example, during a debate in the European Parliament, MEP Lukas Mandl said that “the Iranian regime is threatening Israel, the only

Jewish State on earth, directly, not only via its proxies, like in the past, Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthi in Yemen and other parts of the world. The Iranian regime is also threatening us via financing terrorism” (European Parliament 2025, 17). Another example that highlights Hezbollah's illegal activities worldwide comes from a European Parliament resolution concerning European development funds. The resolution mentions how funds in the Republic of Congo were “paid out to a company that is linked to a well-known Hezbollah financier” (European Parliament 2022b,14). The European Parliament also mentioned illegal activity in a recommendation to the Council, the Commission, and the EEAS. The recommendation states that "Hezbollah has repeatedly and successfully sought to receive Iranian weapons through Syrian territory" (European Parliament 2024, 2). Furthermore, it highlights the illegal trafficking of Captagon in Syria by "the Assad family and its allies, including Hezbollah" (European Parliament 2024, 5). This category highlights the EU's approach to Hezbollah's illegal financing, particularly its links to Iran and the global network that finances its activities. The findings also align with theoretical expectations from previous literature. As shown in previous EU counterterrorism measures, the EU largely emphasizes financial investigations in its response against terrorism (European Commission 2020, 19).

Category	Theoretical Expectation	Empirical Finding
<i>International Cooperation</i>	Diplomatic or multilateral cooperation against terrorism with partners like the U.S.	Cooperation with the United States and the United Nations.

Table 3 International cooperation - expectations and findings

The next category, international cooperation, was less extensive than expected. Hezbollah was primarily mentioned in connection with an intelligence exchange with the United States. “The U.S. Treasury Department provided 681 TFTP leads that assisted in the investigation of a Europe-based Lebanese Hizballah fundraising network” (European

Commission 2022, 49). Cooperation with the U.S. against terrorism was anticipated based on existing literature. Furthermore, mentions of cooperation with the United Nations are discussed, as it is stressed that "all armed groups, including Hezbollah, must disarm in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1701 (2006)" (European Parliament 2024b, 4). Overall, the findings in this category indicate that although EU documents refer to international cooperation against terrorism in relation to Hezbollah, this topic is not as comprehensive or prominent as one would expect based on literature about the EU's counterterrorism framework.

Category	Theoretical Expectation	Empirical Finding
<i>Normative Framing</i>	The EU's commitment to human rights, rule of law and legal standards in the fight against terrorism.	Commitment to human rights, international law and against discrimination.

Table 4 Normative framing - expectations and findings

The normative framing category demonstrates the EU's commitment to its human rights principles and values. It therefore reflects the European Union's ongoing effort to position itself as a value-driven actor, which is a key part of its identity. The 2017 Directive on Combating Terrorism also mentions this principle, and individual findings that fall under this category clearly demonstrate it. For example, in regard to Hezbollah in Lebanese politics, the European Parliament "urges all political factions in the government to end sectarianism and implement vital reforms for all people living in Lebanon, with no religious or ethnic discrimination"(European Parliament 2022, 7). While Hezbollah isn't mentioned directly in this finding, it is part of a broader critique of political structures in which Hezbollah plays a dominant role. Furthermore, Hezbollah is mentioned regarding Iran's human rights violations (European Parliament 2024c, 9).

Additionally, Hezbollah was mentioned in relation to the Assad regime and its role in supporting a government responsible for "atrocities and violations of human rights and

international humanitarian law" (European Parliament 2021, 6). The findings show that normative considerations are an integral part of the EU's approach, reflecting its values and, therefore, its identity.

Category	Theoretical Expectation	Empirical Finding
<i>Political / Military Wing Distinction</i>	Clear distinction between military and political wings.	Focus on the military wing but also findings that had no distinction at all.

Table 5 Political / military wing distinction - expectations and findings

The next category is based on the EU's designation of Hezbollah's military wing separately from its political wing. The analysis revealed several findings that could be classified in this category. For example, Hezbollah was referred to in relation to its military wing in the following passage: "including terrorist organizations such as the military wing of Hezbollah" (Council of the European Union 2024, 1).

This category is intriguing because Hezbollah was often mentioned regarding terrorism, but the distinction of its military and political wings was left out. This may seem surprising, as the strict distinction between military and political wings was the European Union's approach to the diverse opinions of its member states. This can be evident in the diverse opinions of France or the Netherlands. It is therefore noteworthy that some documents do not use the distinction at all in the context of terrorism, referring only to Hezbollah without mentioning a wing (European Parliament 2024c, 4). It is surprising that the EU does not clearly distinguish between the military and political wings in its documents, especially in the context of terrorism. The EU's imprecise use of terminology raises questions about its position's clarity and whether it makes distinctions differently depending on the political context.

Category	Theoretical Expectation	Empirical Finding
<i>Threat Assessment</i>	Hezbollah as a terrorist threat and a threat for the political stability of Lebanon.	Hezbollah as terrorist threat, threat to Lebanese politics and as a proxy of Iran.

Table 6 Threat assessment - expectations and findings

The threat assessment category showed that Hezbollah was mentioned in connection with several threats the group poses. The first example of Hezbollah being mentioned as a terrorist threat was found in the following statement: The “threat of domestic and foreign terrorism stems primarily from groups such as ISIS and its affiliates, but also Hezbollah” (European Parliament 2024c, 4). Hezbollah's threat to Lebanese politics and, therefore, to the stability of the country can also be found in several documents (European Parliament 2022d, 12). Additionally, there is a connection in regard to Assad, as "Iran and Hezbollah have been directly involved in supporting the Syrian regime's repression of civilians" (European Parliament 2021, 8). This category is noteworthy because the awareness of Hezbollah's threats extends beyond terrorism. It has become apparent that Hezbollah is not only a terrorist threat but also a threat to the stability of the entire country due to its political involvement.

Category	Theoretical Expectation	Empirical Finding
<i>References to Hybrid Structures</i>	Mentioning of the different nature of Hezbollah - references to social-welfare, political or military/ terrorist nature.	Only mentioning political or terrorist/ military nature.

Table 7 References to hybrid structures - expectations and findings

The category of hybrid structures presented different results than expected. When examining Hezbollah as a hybrid terrorist organization, it was found to have not only political and military/terrorist structures but also a social welfare arm. While the military wing designation was shown in the political and military distinction category, none of the analyzed documents showed a reference to Hezbollah's social welfare arm. While the political nature of

the group was mentioned in relation to the “abuse of power exerted by political actors including Hezbollah” (European Parliament 2024e, 2), there were no references to Hezbollah as a social welfare provider. This example from Josep Borrell Fontelles, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, demonstrates references to Hezbollah's political activity, stating, that the “presence of Hezbollah in the government is not new, and we are convinced that engaging in a constructive dialogue with all political parties gives the possibility of strengthening its institutions” (European Parliament 2024g, 46). The complex and multifaceted nature and structure of Hezbollah were not fully addressed. However, this raises the question of whether the European Union's failure to recognize the social welfare wing of Hezbollah is due to its strict distinction between the political and military wings.

Category	Theoretical Expectation	Empirical Finding
<i>Dealing with multidimensional threats</i>	Mentioning strategies for dealing with complex, multifunctional actors.	Findings of measures to counter more complex actors but not Hezbollah directly.

Table 8 *Dealing with multidimensional threats - expectations and findings*

The last category, which concerned multidimensional threats, revealed different findings than expected as well. Although the literature noted that countermeasures must be adjusted due to increasingly complex actors, the documents showed no specific strategies to address Hezbollah's complexity. The only recommendation for countering Hezbollah was related to designating it as a terrorist organization. The European Parliament called for the EU to add Hezbollah and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to its list of banned terrorist organizations (European Parliament 2024f, 6).

The only finding that mentioned more specific measures was about the situation in Lebanon. Although it does not mention Hezbollah directly, it is still noteworthy that the EU mentions that “any financial help from the EU must be conditional on a democratic and inclusive government that adopts a clear stance against corruption” (European Parliament 2023,

6). It further called on the EU and “the Member States to continue to firmly pressure Lebanon’s political representatives towards reform ... and to increase humanitarian assistance to the Lebanese people, coupled with support for core public services, grassroots organisations and civil society” (European Parliament 2023, 6).

However, the findings revealed that Hezbollah was not addressed as the complex, multidimensional actor it is. Furthermore, they proposed no specific countermeasures. This is not surprising, given that earlier categorizations showed the EU's approach was largely limited to distinguishing between Hezbollah's military and political wings.

Conclusion

Using qualitative content analysis, this thesis examined the approach the EU is taking to multidimensional and complex actors by taking an in-depth look at 112 documents found in the EUR-Lex register under the keyword Hezbollah between 2020 and 2024. The thesis aimed to improve the understanding of the EU's approach by adopting a different stance on Hezbollah's classification. It demonstrated that Hezbollah should be addressed and defined as a hybrid terrorist organization. Given the organization's multilayered structure, none of its parts can be viewed in complete isolation from one another. This classification does not completely reduce Hezbollah to a terrorist organization, which would leave out the group's social aspects. Nor does it downplay the violent nature of the organization, as would be the case without the terrorist label.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding, the thesis posed the following research question: *How does the European Union approach Hezbollah as a hybrid terrorist organization, and to what extent does this approach take into account the complex nature of the group?* The first part of the research question was primarily answered through findings in the first four categories, which provided insight into the EU's approach during the period from 2020 to 2024. The research indicated that the EU largely approaches Hezbollah in relation to terrorism and illegal networks that fund the organization, as well as its connection to Iran. Therefore, it uses sanctions and intelligence to counter Hezbollah's illegal activities while upholding principles of international law and human rights. These documents showed that the EU is primarily pursuing a legal approach to counterterrorism regarding Hezbollah.

The second part of the research asked to what extent this approach takes into account the complex nature of the group. Through the analysis of the other four categories, the thesis found that the European Union fails to truly acknowledge the complex nature of Hezbollah. While Lecoq (2020) previously emphasized that documents up to 2019 primarily focused on

the group's military aspect, this emphasis remains relevant for the documents analyzed in this thesis. Most references to Hezbollah focused on its military or terrorist nature, while a few also acknowledged its role as a political actor as well. However, none of the references highlighted the social welfare arm of the group — a characteristic typical of hybrid terrorist organizations. Additionally, the EU fails to make a distinction when referring to Hezbollah in the context of terrorism in certain documents. This seems surprising given that the terminology is an important cornerstone of the EU's and its member states' approach to Hezbollah. In the analyzed documents, the European Union seems to be unaware of Hezbollah's hybrid nature. However, this does not mean that the EU is completely unaware of this fact, but rather it indicates the EU's distinction between the military and political wings. Recognizing Hezbollah as a hybrid terrorist organization with different wings would help the European Union better tackle the group. The EU could take a more political approach to counterterrorism by incorporating Hezbollah's social welfare wing into its terminology. Including this approach could address the root causes and align with the multidimensionality of actors like Hezbollah. Integrating the group's social welfare arm would broaden the EU's perspective and address the group's hybrid nature. Furthermore, as was demonstrated, the EU has implemented numerous measures against Hezbollah's illegal financing and financial networks. Understanding and addressing the group, including all its wings, could also help in tackling illegal activities in the financial sector.

The thesis's conclusions also have limitations. First, the limited literature on counterterrorism measures against complex actors and hybrid terrorist organizations makes it difficult to determine whether these actors' complexity should be considered in the context of EU counterterrorism. Due to a lack of information on how to counter such organizations, it is impossible to determine if a different understanding of Hezbollah by the EU truly leads to more effective measures. The effectiveness of counterterrorism measures is beyond the scope of this

thesis, but identifying the most effective strategies against these organizations is certainly an important area for future research.

Second, Hezbollah is best described as a hybrid terrorist organization because its multi-layered structure cannot be viewed in isolation. This classification is appropriate because it doesn't reduce Hezbollah to a terrorist organization, leaving out the social aspects, and doesn't downplay the group's violent activities. However, the chapter on EU counterterrorism showed that defining Hezbollah is more difficult in reality. The current distinction that the EU is making by differentiating between the military and political wing is the EU's approach to reconciling the different positions of its member states. Since counterterrorism is strongly influenced by the member states, the results showed that, while the distinction may not always be clear, this is a way for the EU to approach a complex, multidimensional actor.

Third, the selected material, primarily consisting of legally binding and non-binding documents, limits the analysis. Including statements by EU representatives on different platforms would have made the thesis more in-depth. However, the scope of the thesis was limited to publications in the EUR-Lex register for the 2020-2024 time. Additionally, discussing a variety of actors would have been helpful. Hezbollah was chosen to better understand these multifaceted and complex actors, but it is not the only organization that would fall into the classification of a hybrid terrorist organization. Analyzing two or more cases could have provided a more comprehensive analysis.

Lastly, a discussion of the implications of classifying the group as a terrorist organization, a hybrid terrorist organization, or a hybrid actor could improve the research by deepening the analysis and clarifying the policy implications of the EU's approach. Such discussion would also facilitate a critical assessment of how this classification influences EU counterterrorism policy. Despite its limitations, this thesis contributes to a better understanding

of the EU's approach to Hezbollah. The evidence suggests that complex, multidimensional and hybrid actors should be addressed in their entirety, as doing so could enhance the likelihood of successful counteraction.

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Appendices

All documents used from EUR-Lex³ in English are listed with their CELEX number.

2020

- CELEX: 02010D0413-20200620
- CELEX: 02010D0413-20201114
- CELEX: 02011D0235-20200408
- CELEX: 02011R0359-20200408
- CELEX: 02012R0267-20200620
- CELEX: 02012R0267-20201114
- CELEX: 32020D0512
- CELEX: 32020R0510
- CELEX: 52020XG0603(01)
- CELEX: 52020XG1130(02)
- CELEX: C/2024/04415
- CELEX: C/2024/04887
- CELEX: C/2024/04892

2021

- CELEX: 02010D0413-20210731
- CELEX: 02011D0235-20210413
- CELEX: 02011R0359-20210413
- CELEX: 02012R0267-20210731
- CELEX: 32021D1192
- CELEX: 52021IP0053
- CELEX: 52021IP0088
- CELEX: 52021IP0290
- CELEX: 52021IP0394
- CELEX: 52021SC0206
- CELEX: 52021XG0520(01)
- CELEX: 52021XG1112(05)
- CELEX: C/2024/05359
- CELEX: C2022/079/04

2022

- CELEX: 02010D0413-20220629
- CELEX: 02011D0235-20220412
- CELEX: 02011D0235-20221017
- CELEX: 02011D0235-20221114
- CELEX: 02011D0235-20221212

³ Online: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/homepage.html?lang=en>

- CELEX: 02011R0359-20220413
- CELEX: 02011R0359-20221017
- CELEX: 02011R0359-20221114
- CELEX: 02011R0359-20221212
- CELEX: 02012R0267-20220413
- CELEX: 02012R0267-20220629
- CELEX: 52022BP1714
- CELEX: 52022IP0039
- CELEX: 52022IP0408
- CELEX: 52022SC0357
- CELEX: 52022XG0513(01)
- CELEX: 52022XG1115(10)
- CELEX: 62020TJ0249
- CELEX: C2023/240/02
- CELEX: C2023/292/02

2023

- CELEX: 02010D0413-20230404
- CELEX: 02010D0413-20230426
- CELEX: 02010D0413-20231011
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- CELEX: C/2024/01468

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- CELEX: C/2024/06172
- CELEX: C/2025/00470
- CELEX: C/2025/00983

2024

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- CELEX: 52024IP0109
- CELEX: 52024SC0252
- CELEX: 52024XP03416
- CELEX: 52024XP07493
- CELEX: C/2025/00619
- CELEX: C/2025/00620
- CELEX: C/2025/01347
- CELEX: C/2025/01573
- CELEX: C/2025/02132
- CELEX: C/2025/02133