

Mounting evidence Mossad behind Dubai assassination of Hamas leader

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18 February 2010

There is mounting evidence that Mossad, Israel's secret service, organised the hit squad that murdered senior Hamas official Mahmoud al Mabhough in Dubai on the evening of January 19. The assassins used the stolen identities of six British citizens and faked at least five other European passports. Not only does this fit a pattern of previous Israeli operations, but five of those whose identities were used live in Israel.

Eleven people have been identified as part of the assassination team, but Dubai has said it is seeking 17 agents with a command centre working from Austria.

Mabhough was a prime target for Israeli security. One of the founders of Hamas's military wing, he was considered the key figure in the smuggling of weaponry from Iran to the Gaza Strip and was wanted by Israel after boasting of the kidnapping and killing of two Israeli soldiers—Ilan Saadon and Avi Sasportas—while on leave in 1989.

The assassination was highly professional. Dubai has issued warrants for “premeditated murder” against 10 men and 1 woman and is seeking a “red notice” from Interpol so they can be sought abroad. Dubai's attorney general, Essam al-Humaidan, said that the United Arab Emirates had signed judicial treaties with a number of European countries.

The six as yet unknown killers include a second woman, who was accompanied by a large man. Another unknown man was part of the core team of seven that carried out the actual killing.

Two Palestinians are being questioned in Dubai, after having been extradited from Jordan on “strong suspicion” that one of them had met a member of the suspected hit team before the assassination.

The hit squad arrived on different flights and checked into different hotels. They were captured on surveillance cameras following Mabhough when he arrived in Dubai—reportedly to buy weapons. He was murdered in

his room at the Al-Bustan Rotana hotel last month near Dubai's international airport by suffocation or strangulation. The assassins paid in cash for everything and used several cell phones. They left Dubai on flights to Europe and Asia—all within two hours of Mabhough's death. His body was discovered on January 20.

The *Independent* noted: “Surveillance videos shown by the Dubai police indicate that the 11 suspects achieved remarkable penetration. They were in and out of Dubai in less than 19 hours.”

A former Mossad operative told the newspaper that the operation appeared meticulously planned and executed. “This was super-, super-professional,” he said. “It seems logical that this was a Mossad operation.”

The ex-agent added that it would “not be surprising” if other “positively inclined” countries had helped Israel, including Egypt.

A number of former Mossad staff made statements admiring the “professionalism” of the assassination. National security specialist Yossi Melman wrote in *Ha'aretz* last month, “The intelligence [about Dubai] was reliable and accurate.... Even though Mabhough knew Israeli-intelligence had him in its sights and took stringent precautions they still managed to get him.”

Dubai police named 11 suspects they were searching for: 6 from Britain, 3 from Ireland and 1 each from France and Germany. The faked UK passports were in the names of Paul John Keeley, Melvyn Adam Mildiner, Jonathan Louis Graham, Stephen Daniel Hodes, Michael Lawrence Barney and James Clarke. UK authorities confirmed that the killers had not altered the names and numbers in the passports, but had changed the photographs.

The three Irish citizens named—Gail Foliard, Kevin Daveron and Evan Dennings—are all said to be fictitious names.

The German passport was in the name of Michael Bodenheimer. The German government said the passport

number was either incomplete or wrong. The French authorities refused to comment on the authenticity of a French passport used.

There is a long record of Mossad either utilising or seeking to gain possession of foreign passports for its operations.

In July 1973, Mossad agent Sylvia Rafael, from South Africa, was arrested in an assassination attempt in Norway that ended in the killing of a Moroccan waiter. She utilised the forged identity of a Canadian photographer, Patricia Roxburgh. Her fellow assassins were arrested with the forged or borrowed identities of British and French citizens.

In 1987, an Israel Military Industries courier left British passports in a public telephone booth in Bonn, meant for use by Mossad agents. Britain protested and said it received assurances that steps had been taken to prevent future occurrences.

In 1997, a Mossad assassination squad used altered Canadian passports in a failed attempt to kill Khaled Meshal, now the leader of Hamas. Two agents were arrested in Amman after trying to spray poison into his ear.

The Israeli government, then as now headed by Binyamin Netanyahu, was forced to hand over an antidote that saved Khaled Mashal's life and to release Hamas spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin.

One of the passports belonged to a Jewish Canadian studying in Israel who when first questioned said that he had been contacted and asked for his passport to be used.

In 2005, two Israeli agents were jailed for six months in New Zealand for obtaining the country's passports illegally.

Killings by Mossad include PLO military chief Abu Jihad in Tunisia in 1988, as well as leaders of Islamic Jihad, Hamas and Lebanon's Hezbollah.

The near-certain confirmation that Mossad was behind the assassination was met with a perfunctory denial by the Israeli government. Israel's foreign minister, Avigdor Lieberman of the far-right Israel Beiteinu, said yesterday that the use of the identities of foreign-born Israelis did not prove the involvement of Mossad.

"There is no reason to think that it was the Israeli Mossad, and not some other intelligence service or country up to some mischief," he told Army Radio. However, he made a point of not denying absolutely Israeli involvement, stating instead that Israel has a "policy of ambiguity" on intelligence matters.

Lieberman claimed that there would be no diplomatic

problems arising from the suspicions of Mossad involvement. And an article in *Ha'aretz* also claimed that "Israel has nothing to worry about." Yossi Melman wrote, "Many of the countries whose passports were allegedly used do not like Hamas; and the government of Dubai, despite its impressive investigation, does not really want to get to the bottom of this.... There are other Arab countries who do not consider Hamas a friend and who are in a secret war—no less bitter than Israel's—against the Islamist organisation. Jordan is one of them, as is Egypt."

He concluded that "unless dramatic evidence is found to definitively prove an Israeli connection, it is likely that the State of Israel will emerge from this affair unblemished and the Mossad will continue enjoying a reputation of fearless determination and nearly unstoppable capabilities."

Despite such confident claims, what has been revealed so far has created a major crisis for Israel, particularly coming so soon after the UN Goldstone report accused it of war crimes during last year's Gaza offensive.

Britain's Prime Minister Gordon Brown was forced to call for a "full investigation" into how fraudulent British passports were used by the killers in an interview with London's LBC 97.3 FM radio station. He did so after demands from Liberal Democrat MP Sir Menzies Campbell for the Foreign Office to summon the Israeli ambassador to give an explanation and Hugo Swire, chairman of the opposition Conservative Middle East Council, calling on the government to investigate claims of Israeli involvement. "You cannot conduct foreign policy at this extremely sensitive time by this sort of illegal behaviour," he said.

Ha'aretz and others have called for the resignation of Mossad chief Meir Dagan.



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