

# Israel threatens Iran over Bulgarian bombing

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21 July 2012

The Israeli government has seized on a bus bombing in Bulgaria to issue a menacing warning of retaliation against Iran, amid the escalating confrontation initiated by the US and its allies over Tehran's nuclear programs.

Five Israeli tourists were killed, together with a Bulgarian bus driver and an alleged suicide bomber, on Wednesday when explosives were detonated at Burgas airport. At least 30 people were injured in the blast. Details of the bombing are still unclear. In particular, the identity of the suspected bomber has not been established.

Bulgarian authorities released CCTV footage on Thursday showing a man dressed as a tourist with long blonde hair and a large backpack, who they claimed was the bomber. On Friday, Bulgarian prosecutors said the man had short hair, leading to speculation that he had been wearing a wig.

Bulgarian Interior Minister Tsvetan Tsvetanov told reporters that the bomb, reportedly made of 3 kilograms of TNT powder, was in the backpack, which had been placed in the luggage compartment of the bus carrying Israeli tourists. He said the investigation had determined that the bomber was not a Bulgarian citizen. He dismissed speculation that the bomber was former Guantánamo Bay detainee Mehdi Ghezali, a suspected Al Qaeda member.

Yet within hours of the bomb blast, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had accused the Lebanese Shiite organisation, Hezbollah, and Iran of carrying out the attack. Ominously, he warned that Israel would "respond forcefully to Iranian terror."

Netanyahu kept up the steady drumbeat, declaring on Thursday: "The time has come for all countries that know the truth to speak it. Iran is the one behind the wave of terror. Iran is the No. 1 exporter of terror in the world." He added: "A terrorist state must not have a nuclear weapon."

These denunciations of "Iranian terrorism" are utterly hypocritical. Israeli authorities have tacitly acknowledged that their intelligence agencies have been waging a covert war of assassination and sabotage that has resulted in the killing of four Iranian nuclear scientists in the past three years and a number of unexplained explosions at Iranian military installations.

Netanyahu's last remark points to the real purpose behind Israel's unsubstantiated denunciations of Tehran: to create the pretext for Israeli military strikes on Iran. Both Israel and the US have repeatedly threatened to attack Iran over claims that it is constructing a nuclear weapon.

The Bulgarian bombing is the latest in a series of unexplained "terrorist" plots in recent months in Georgia, Azerbaijan, India, Cyprus, Kenya and Thailand. All have been poorly planned and amateurish. Most have been foiled before any attack took place. In each case, Israeli authorities have immediately blamed Iran.

Earlier this month, Kenyan authorities arrested two Iranian nationals for allegedly preparing to carry out terrorist attacks on Western targets. They were accused of importing 100 kilograms of explosives. Netanyahu seized on the arrests to accuse Iran of plotting terror attacks on Israeli interests in Kenya.

In May, the *Washington Post* published an account of "Iran-linked assassination plots" that were allegedly aimed at US, Israeli and other Western officials. The murky story, which relied heavily on unnamed intelligence sources, involved criminal outfits in "a jumble of overlapping plans." None of the plots came to fruition after Azerbaijani authorities arrested some two dozen people in January and March. (See: "Washington Post airs another unlikely Iranian assassination plot")

In February, the international media highlighted an “Iranian” explosion in Bangkok. Several Iranian citizens were supposedly involved in a plan to attack Israeli diplomats that never eventuated. Thai police captured the suspects after one of their bombs apparently detonated accidentally. (See: “A strange ‘Iranian’ explosion in Bangkok”)

Last October, US officials claimed to have unearthed a plot involving a failed Iranian-American used car dealer from Texas, who allegedly hired a Mexican drug cartel to blow up the Saudi ambassador to the US.

The level of amateurishness involved in all these “terrorist plots” by itself makes it highly unlikely that the Iranian regime or security apparatus was involved. What cannot be ruled out is that some or all of these failed plans were deliberately concocted by Israel to create the excuse for launching military strikes against Iran.

The whipping up of an Iranian terrorist scare campaign is all the more necessary for the Netanyahu government because the latest opinion polls show popular opposition in Israel to military strikes on Iran. A survey commissioned by the *Maariv* newspaper this week found that only 19 percent of respondents supported an Israeli attack on Iran, and just 26 percent backed military action in league with the US.

While supporting Israel, the Obama administration is yet to unequivocally accuse Hezbollah and Iran of carrying out the Bulgarian bombing. Yesterday, White House spokesman Jay Carney declared: “It is certainly the case that Hezbollah and Iran have been bad actors, as a general matter. But we’re not, at this point, in a position to make a statement about responsibility.”

At the same time, however, the Obama administration is pressing ahead with its military build-up in the Persian Gulf in preparation for a war on Iran. In recent months, the Pentagon has doubled the number of aircraft carriers and mine sweepers and stationed a squadron of advanced F-22 fighters in the region. It has also boosted missile defence systems and armaments on its warships.

With international talks over Iran’s nuclear programs at a standstill, the US and the European Union have imposed crippling sanctions on Iran’s oil exports—itself an act of economic warfare that has greatly heightened tensions in

the Gulf.

An article in the *Wall Street Journal* on Thursday demonstrates that the Obama administration is concocting its own pretexts for war against Iran. Entitled, “US says Iran plans to disrupt oil trade,” the report was long on accusations by unnamed American officials, and lacking in facts. It claimed that “Iran could take action both inside and outside the Persian Gulf” to interfere with oil exports from the Middle East.

Quite apart from the cynical character of the accusation, given that the US has unilaterally blocked Iranian exports, the article was based on pure speculation. “Defence officials cautioned there is no evidence that Tehran has moved [military] assets in position to disrupt tankers or attack other sites, but stressed that Iran’s intent appears clear,” it stated. However, the article offered no proof of “Iran intent” either.

The purpose of such reports is to demonise the Iranian regime as the US readies for war. The focus on the Gulf points to the preparation of an American pretext for an unprovoked attack on Iran. The US naval build-up has already greatly raised tensions, creating the conditions for an incident, real or manufactured, to become the *casus belli* for a potentially catastrophic conflict.



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