

After Beirut Blast, Israel Revives Tales of Hezbollah Ammonium Nitrate Terror Plots

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Israeli intelligence is polishing off a dubious propaganda campaign to suggest Hezbollah was to blame for the recent catastrophe in Beirut. But the factual record either contradicts Israeli claims or reveals a complete dearth of evidence.

Israeli officials have exploited the [massive explosion at the Port of Beirut this August](#) to revive a dormant propaganda campaign that had accused the Lebanese militia and political party Hezbollah of storing ammonium nitrate in several countries to wage terror attacks on Israelis.

The Israeli intelligence apparatus had planted a series of stories from 2012 to 2019 claiming Hezbollah sought out ammonium nitrate as the explosive of choice for terrorist operations. According to the narrative, Hezbollah purportedly planned to covertly store the explosive substance in locations from Southeast Asia to Europe and the United States — only to be foiled repeatedly by Mossad.

In each one of those cases, however, the factual record either contradicted the Israeli claims or revealed a complete dearth of evidence.

The narrative first debuted in the Israeli press after a June 2019 story in the British pro-Israel daily The Telegraph on alleged Hezbollah storage of the explosive around London. The Times of Israel introduced for the first time the [much broader theme](#) that Hezbollah planned to use the explosive for “huge, game-changing attacks on Israeli targets globally.”

Next, “new details” appeared in the Hebrew daily Yedioth Ahronoth from “unnamed Israeli intelligence officials,” disclosing how Israel had supposedly stymied ammonium nitrate-based terror plots by Hezbollah in London, Cyprus, and Thailand.

Following the calamity of the Beirut explosion, the narrative story was opportunistically revived in the Israeli media, with the [Times of Israel](#) summarizing an Israeli Channel 13 report citing an “unsourced assessment” that Hezbollah “apparently planned to use the ammonium nitrate stockpile that caused a massive blast at Beirut’s port this week against Israel in a ‘Third Lebanon War’.”

A review of the supposedly open-and-shut cases in both Thailand and Cyprus, however, reveals serious questions about the evidence used to accuse Hezbollah suspects and the role of the Mossad in those cases. It also shows that an alleged Hezbollah plot involving ammonium nitrate in New York City was contrived by the FBI and Justice Department

without any real evidence.

Thailand: Muddling the issue, bending the law

The arrest of Hussein Atris, a dual Swedish-Lebanese citizen, in Bangkok on January 13, 2012 occurred after the Mossad received a report that a terrorist attack was due to occur in the middle of that month. The Israeli intelligence agency had given the Thai police a list of 14 or 15 suspects — all Iranian or Lebanese — to be placed under surveillance, including Atris.

But it was Atris who received the bulk of attention. Atris told police about goods he had stored in a commercial building in Bangkok. Shortly after his arrest, he was taken out of his cell to a house where he was interrogated by three Mossad agents, as was typical of Mossad operations in countries where Israel cultivated close relations with law enforcement.

On January 17, Thai police visited the commercial building near Bangkok and reportedly found 4.8 tons of urea fertilizer and 40 liters (100 pounds) of ammonium nitrate. Atris was immediately charged by the police with “possession of prohibited substances.”

But the ammonium nitrate that Atris had stored in the building was not illegal; it was merely a component of frozen gel packs for sore muscles commonly bought and sold wholesale and retail all over the world.

The boxes of gel packs were stored along with electric fans, slippers, and copy paper on the second floor of the building. And as Atris explained to his interrogators and to a reporter from the [Swedish daily Aftonbladet](#) who interviewed him in jail, he had been purchasing various goods in Asia and exporting them to other countries like Liberia.

Atris had already arranged for a freighter to ship the goods he had stored there, as the chief of Bangkok metropolitan police [confirmed in an interview](#) with the New York Times.

The Mossad interrogators refused to accept the explanation by Atris and [accused him of lying](#) about his business. Further clouding the picture, police found two tons of urea fertilizer [in bags labeled as cat litter](#) on the same floor as the cold packs.

But Atris [told an interviewer](#) he had never dealt with fertilizer in his business, and that he believed “it must have been placed in our storage facility by someone, probably Mossad.”

Mossad and its Thai allies were committed to the idea that Atris was a Hezbollah operative from the beginning, even though they apparently had no actual hard evidence to back it up. The claim of Hezbollah membership was nevertheless sold successfully to cooperative local and national news media.

[Reuters published a story](#) with the headline “Thailand: Hezbollah man arrested in terror scare.” When he was brought to trial in 2013, Atris firmly [denied any links to Hezbollah](#), and the court ultimately found that there was [no evidence](#) to support the contention by the police and the Mossad that he was in any way involved with the Lebanese movement.

International press coverage of the case blurred details in a way that incorrectly suggested terrorist intent. When Atris’s case went to trial in July 2013, Agence-France Presse falsely [reported](#) that he and “unidentified accomplices” had “packed more than six tons of

ammonium nitrate into bags,” thus confusing the already commercially packaged cold packs with the urea fertilizer, which was [not an illegal substance](#) under Thai law and which he specifically denied owning.

Time magazine distorted the case more seriously by [referring](#) to the bags of urea fertilizer as “chemicals being assembled into explosives ... in bags labeled as kitty litter.”

In the end, Atris was [convicted of “illegal possession”](#) of ammonium nitrate, which was a banned substance under Thai law. However, the country had not intended for the provision to apply to frozen gel packs for pain relief, which are commonly traded in bulk internationally.

Despite the absence of any evidence that Atris was either a Hezbollah agent or a terrorist, the US State Department joined with its Israeli allies in [declaring him](#) to be “a member of Hezbollah’s overseas terrorist unit.”

Cyprus: The mysterious appearance of ammonium nitrate

In 2015, the Cypriot government prosecuted Canadian-Lebanese **Hussein Bassam Abdallah** for allegedly being part of a Hezbollah ammonium nitrate terrorist plot, after police found [420 boxes of the fertilizer](#) in the house where he was staying. Yet virtually no details about the case were ever released, because the entire legal process took place behind closed doors. What’s more, Abdallah’s defense was never made public.

Information from the Kuwaiti daily Al-Jarida, which Israelis have often [used to disseminate propaganda](#) into the Arab Middle East, raises serious questions about the origin of the ammonium nitrate found in the house where Abdallah was staying. The newspaper [published a story](#) citing a “private source” who said that Mossad agents had been tracking Abdallah, following his every movement and intercepting all his phone calls from Cyprus.

The Mossad surveillance continued, according to the story, “until he obtained the materials and fertilizer, after which Cypriot authorities were informed [and] raided his place of residence and arrested him and seized two tons of [ammonium nitrate]....”

By reporting an apparent Mossad account that the ammonium nitrate was not at the house until just before Mossad tipped off the police, the Al-Jarida report obviously suggested that the timing of its appearance was not merely coincidental.

This was not the first time that Mossad-related evidence against one of its targets turned out to be highly suspect. Two Iranian men who were visiting Mombasa, Kenya in 2012 were charged with having buried 15 kilograms of the explosive RDX on a golf course. However, they had been interrogated — and one of them allegedly drugged — by three Mossad agents.

Though Kenyan police had supposedly been carrying out constant surveillance on them for the entire length of their stay, no direct evidence of the Iranians ever possessing RDX came to light. That anomaly resulted in the case against the Iranians being [thrown out by Kenya’s Court of Appeal](#), and suggested that Mossad itself had planted the explosive on the golf course.

In Abdallah’s case, the evidence also indicated the use of a classical prosecution tactic was

employed to force him to admit to a Hezbollah ammonium nitrate terrorism plot: forcing a plea bargain on him by the threat of a much longer sentence if he refused to plead guilty.

After the first week of interrogation, a Cypriot security official told a journalist that Abdallah [denied all charges](#) against him and was not “cooperating” — meaning he was not admitting what both Israel and Cyprus wanted him to. Weeks later, however, following a trial closed to the public, Abdallah [admitted to all eight charges](#) against him.

The semi-official Cyprus News Agency [reported](#) Abdallah had given the police a statement that the ammonium nitrate was to have been used for terrorist attacks against Jewish or Israeli interests in Cyprus. In return he was given a six-year sentence instead of the 14 years he would have received without the deal.

Abdallah’s defense lawyer, [Savvas A. Angelides](#), pressed his client to accept the plea bargain, advancing the political interests of Cyprus as a close ally of Israel. For his part, Angelides had his eyes on a high-level national security posting in his country’s government. Sure enough, in early 2018, the lawyer was appointed [defense minister of Cyprus](#).

The idea that Hezbollah obtained ammonium nitrate for use in New York City – another Israeli contention – was not supported by any evidence whatsoever. In this case, a Lebanese-American named Ali Kourani stood accused of hatching a Hezbollah terror plot.

But the closest the US Justice Department could come to linking to ammonium nitrate was a statement in its [criminal complaint](#) against him.

This claimed that, in May 2009, Kourani “entered China at an airport in Guangzhou, the location of Guangzhou Company-1, i.e., the manufacturer of the ammonium nitrate-based First Aid ice packs sized in connection with thwarted IJO attacks in Thailand and Cyprus.” The suggestion that a trip to Quangzhou somehow counted as evidence of an effort to procure ammonium nitrate for Hezbollah terrorism was patently absurd.

London and Germany: Mossad’s phantom Hezbollah explosives

The next apparent Israeli intel dump arrived in the form of a [June 2019 story](#) in The Telegraph UK, a right-wing Rupert Murdoch-owned daily which loyally follows Israeli government lines.

According to the report, in 2015, the UK MI5 intelligence service and London’s Metropolitan Police were tipped off by the Mossad about thousands of ice packs containing three tons of ammonium nitrate in warehouses in Northwest London.

The Telegraph revealed that London police had arrested one man “on suspicion of plotting terrorism” but had eventually released him without charges. That detail was the giveaway that the British had come to realize that they had no evidence linking cold packs or their owner to any Hezbollah terrorist plot — contrary to the Israel narrative.

The Telegraph’s suggestion that MI5 decided not to prosecute to disrupt the threat isn’t credible, because no one was ever prosecuted. And its implication that the British government kept quiet about the episode because it was protecting the Iran nuclear deal did not apply once Trump tore up the agreement in 2018.

The British government, which [banned Hezbollah in February 2020](#), has never suggested

that the Lebanese militia had been plotting to use ammonium nitrate from warehouses in the UK to carry out terrorist attacks.

According to a [report this May by Israel's Channel 12](#), days before Germany announced its banning of Hezbollah from the country, the Mossad had gathered information on alleged Hezbollah terrorism-related activities in Germany. The supposed plotting consisted of the identification of warehouses in southern Germany where the Mossad claimed Hezbollah was storing hundreds of kilograms of ammonium nitrate.

After the information was presented to German intelligence and law enforcement agencies, according to the report, the German Interior Ministry announced in April 2020 that it was banning Hezbollah. It simultaneously [raided four mosque associations](#) accused of being close to Hezbollah.

But German law enforcement never announced any action regarding warehouses supposedly holding ammonium nitrate, indicating that the German government found nothing that backed up the claims by the Mossad.

Hoping to seize the Beirut explosion as a historic propaganda opportunity, the Israeli government clearly believes that it can fashion a new and more powerful narrative by knitting together false claims related to these episodes.

Israel's objective is to [force Hezbollah out of the Lebanese government by implicating it in the calamitous blast](#).

So far, Western corporate media appears inclined to accept the baseless Israeli claims on face value. The day after the blast in Beirut, the [Washington Post](#) reported that Hezbollah "has long shown an interest in acquiring [ammonium nitrate] for use in a variety of terrorist plots."

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