

More Details Emerge on Assassination of Hamas Leader in Dubai

By [Ann Talbot](#)

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More details are emerging on the murder of Hamas leader Mahmoud al-Mabhouh, who was killed in Dubai on January 20 in what is widely thought to be an Israeli security service operation.

Dubai Police Chief Dahi Khalfan Tamim claims to be “99 percent, if not 100 percent” certain that Mossad, the Israeli secret service organisation, was responsible for the assassination.

The authorities in Dubai have now identified 26 people whom they allege were involved in the assassination. They are said to have carried fake passports in the names of British, Irish, French, Australian and German citizens. It is reported that 12 British, six Irish, three French, one German and three Australian passports were used.

Closed circuit television cameras have allowed the assassins’ movements to be traced through the airport and hotel as they made their way to Mabhouh’s room. Phone calls to a number in Vienna have been tracked, and credit cards linked to what was clearly a highly organised team.

Robert Baer, a former CIA operative, commented in the *Wall Street Journal* on the number of people involved: “The truth is that Mr. Mabhouh’s assassination was conducted according to the book—a military operation in which the environment is completely controlled by the assassins. At least 25 people are needed to carry off something like this.”

Bruce Riedel, a former CIA agent who is now at the Brookings Institution in Washington DC, told the BBC:

“This most likely was a Mossad operation. All the signatures—European passports, the way the team moved quickly to leave the country—cumulatively paint a pretty convincing case.”

“What the Dubai authorities are uncovering now is not just the assassination team, but probably the entire Mossad station,” Riedel continued. “Dubai would be a perfect place to carry out not just a one-off operation, but a long-term one against Iran.”

A retired operative for Mossad’s undercover operations division known as Michael Ross told the BBC, “It would be disingenuous to say Israel wasn’t involved in some fashion.”

But he pointed to international aspects of the assassination, saying, “I think there are more aspects and international players involved in this case than are visible to the naked eye.”

One of the international aspects is the use of credit cards by many of the latest suspects from the same small Iowa-based Meta Bank. Ross regards the use of a US bank as “very odd.”

He suggests that Mossad may not have expected the Dubai authorities to investigate the murder of Mabhouh thoroughly because they would not wish to upset the Emirate’s close relations with the West.

Britain, France, Germany and Australia have protested at the use of their passports in the assassination of Mabhouh. But there are suggestions that foreign governments and security services may have known more about the plot than they are willing to admit.

Allegations that Mossad warned Britain in advance have surfaced in the UK-based *Daily Mail*. The paper claims to have been told that the British Foreign Office and MI6 were informed about the operation before it took place. What the newspaper describes as “a British security source” claims to have met a Mossad agent who spoke of a “courtesy call” prior to the assassination.

The *Daily Mail* continues: “This is a serving member of Israeli intelligence. He says the British Government was told very, very briefly before the operation what was going to happen. There was no British involvement and they didn’t know the name of the target. But they were told these people were travelling on UK passports.”

According to the *Daily Mail* report, Mossad understood that the Foreign Office would have to “slap them on the wrist,” and that “The British government has to be seen to be going through the motions.”

A Foreign Office spokeswoman denied the report and claimed that the British government was informed about the use of fake British passports only hours before the Dubai police announced it at a press conference. “Any suggestion that we knew anything about the murder in Dubai before it happened, including about the misuse of British passports, is completely untrue,” she said.

“Any interference with British passports is an outrage,” Foreign Secretary David Miliband declared. “We take this case extremely seriously—the integrity of our system is critical.”

He vowed to “get to the bottom” of the affair and has demanded that the Israeli authorities cooperate fully with the UK investigation.

Prime Minister Gordon Brown has announced an inquiry into the use of British passports, and police officers from the Serious Organised Crime Agency have been sent to Israel to interview the UK citizens whose documents were cloned.

Israel’s ambassador, Ron Prosor, was invited to attend a meeting at the Foreign Office. He emerged after a 20 minute session with Sir Peter Ricketts, head of the diplomatic service, in relaxed mood. Prosor said he was happy to cooperate with Sir Peter’s request for a meeting, but added, “I was unable to shed any further light on the events in question.”

He refused to say what was discussed, telling reporters that it was “not the usual way to talk about what happens in those meetings.”

Miliband also refused to reveal what was said. He told the BBC's Jeremy Vine, "It's very, very important that we don't make accusations until we know that they're well founded."

Miliband was one of a number of foreign ministers who met with Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman in Brussels. Irish Foreign Minister Micheál Martin was said to be "very angry" about the use of Irish passports. Martin spoke of his "deep concern."

Dr. Zion Evrony, the Israeli ambassador to Ireland, was called for talks at the foreign ministry, but said that he had "no information" about the affair.

The French foreign ministry was said to be "demanding explanations" from the Israeli embassy.

Andreas Michaelis, Germany's Middle East envoy, held a meeting with Emmanuel Nahshon, a counsellor at the Israeli embassy in Berlin. German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle said, "I believe it is imperative to explain the circumstances surrounding the death of Mahmoud al-Mabhouh."

Lieberman's response to the protests from EU countries was to claim that Israel was being made into a scapegoat. "There is no proof that Israel is involved in this affair, and if somebody had presented any proof, aside from press stories, we would have reacted," Lieberman said. "But since there are no concrete elements, there is no need to react."

Lieberman is fully aware that relations are continuing normally beneath the public protests. Miliband has happily accepted an invitation to attend a reception at the recently refurbished Israeli embassy in London.

Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has protested at the use of Australian passports. He said that he was not satisfied with the Israeli response. But he cautioned that Australia must "proceed very carefully" in the matter because of "very complex security and intelligence matters."

In reality, the use of Australian passports by the Israeli security services is not new. Ian Wilcocks, the former Australian ambassador to Israel, said that during the 1990s he twice warned Israeli foreign ministry officials not to forge Australian passports for intelligence operations.

Mossad agents have been caught using Canadian and New Zealand passports in the past.

The governments involved may express their shock and anger, but the practice is one of long standing. Their protests are strictly for the record.

Whether or not the countries whose passports were used in the Dubai operation were warned in advance, they are well aware of Mossad's record in these matters. The Israeli government has a well established practice of using assassination as a political weapon.

Israel has always operated in close association with the US. This latest assassination was an integral part of the US campaign in the Middle East and beyond. Robert Baer, who was himself once accused of trying to assassinate Saddam Hussein, put the assassination of Mabhouh in an international context.

He said, "The CIA has fired an untold number of Hellfire missiles at Al Qaeda and Taliban

operatives in the mountains between Pakistan and Afghanistan... In addition to the intended targets, thousands of other people have been killed.”

All those countries whose passports have been used in the murder of Mabhouh have been involved in the US-led “war on terror” and are therefore implicated in countless numbers of deaths.

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