

The Hariri Assassination: The Role Of Israel?

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In the Middle East , the link between political machinations, espionage and assassination is either clear as day, or clear as mud.

As for the yet unsolved case of the February 2005 murder of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, the underpinnings of this covert operation including the role of Israel have now surfaced.

A crackdown on Israeli spy rings operating in Lebanon has resulted in more than 70 arrests over the past 18 months. Included among them are four high-ranking Lebanese Army and General Security officers—one having spied for the Mossad since 1984.

A significant breakthrough in the ongoing investigation occurred in late June and culminated in the arrest of Charbel Qazzi, head of transmission and broadcasting at Alfa, one of Lebanon's two state-owned mobile service providers.

According to the Lebanese daily *As-Safir*, Qazzi confessed to installing computer programs and planting electronic chips in Alfa transmitters. These could then be used by Israeli intelligence to monitor communications, locate and target individuals for assassination, and potentially deploy viruses capable of erasing recorded information in the contact lines. Qazzi's collaboration with Israel reportedly dates back 14 years.

On July 12, a second arrest at Alfa was made. Tarek al-Raba'a, an engineer and partner of Qazzi, was apprehended on charges of spying for Israel and compromising national security. A few days later, a third Alfa employee was similarly detained.

Israel has refused to comment on the arrests. Nevertheless, their apparent ability to have penetrated Lebanon's military and telecommunication sectors has rattled the country and urgently raised security concerns.

What does any of this have to do with the Hariri assassination?

Outside the obvious deleterious ramifications of high-ranking Lebanese military officers working for Israel, the very legitimacy of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) is now in question. The STL is the U.N.-sanctioned body tasked with prosecuting those responsible for

the assassination of the late prime minister. On Feb. 14, 2005, 1,000 kg of explosives detonated near Hariri's passing motorcade, killing him and 21 others.

It is believed the STL will issue indictments in the matter as early as September—relying heavily on phone recordings and mobile transmissions to do so.

According to the [AFP](#), “A preliminary report by the U.N. investigating team said it had collected data from mobile phone calls made the day of Hariri's murder as evidence.”

[The National](#) likewise reported, “The international inquiry, which could present indictments or findings as soon as September, according to unverified media reports, used extensive phone records to draw conclusions into a conspiracy to kill Hariri, widely blamed on Syria and its Lebanese allies ...”

In a July 16 televised speech, Hezbollah Secretary-General Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah speculated the STL would use information gleaned from Israeli-compromised communications to falsely implicate the group in the prime minister's murder:

“Some are counting in their analysis of the (STL) indictment on witnesses, some of whom turned out to be fake, and on the telecommunications networks which were infiltrated by spies who can change and manipulate data.

“Before the (2006) war, these spies gave important information to the Israeli enemy and based on this information, Israel bombed buildings, homes, factories and institutions. Many martyrs died and many others were wounded. These spies are partners in the killings, the crimes, the threats and the displacement.”

Nasrallah called the STL's manipulation an “Israeli project” meant to “create an uproar in Lebanon .”

Indeed, in May 2008 Lebanon experienced a taste of this. At the height of an 18-month stalemate over the formation of a national unity government under then Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, his cabinet's decision to unilaterally declare Hezbollah's fixed-line communication system illegal pushed the country to the [brink](#) of civil war.

Recognizing the value their secure lines of communication had in combating the July 2006 Israeli invasion *and suspecting that state-owned telecoms might be compromised*, Hezbollah resisted Siniora's plans to have its network dismantled. Their men swept through West Beirut and put a quick end to the government's plan. Two years later, their suspicions appear to have been vindicated.

Opposition MP and Free Patriotic Movement head Michel Aoun has already [warned](#) Nasrallah that the STL will likely indict “uncontrolled” Hezbollah members to be followed by “... Lebanese-Lebanese and Lebanese-Palestinian tension, and by an Israeli war on Lebanon .”

Giving credence to Nasrallah and Aoun's assertions, Commander in Chief of the Israel Defense Forces Gabi Ashkenazi, [predicted](#) “with lots of wishes” that the situation in Lebanon would deteriorate in September after the STL indicts Hezbollah for Hariri's assassination.

Ashkenazi's gleeful, prescient testimony to the Knesset's Foreign Affairs Committee betrays what Israel hopes the fallout from the STL's report will be: fomentation of civil strife and

discord among Lebanon 's sectarian groups, generally divided into pro- and anti-Syria factions. Ashkenazi anticipates this to happen, of course, because he knows Israel 's unfettered access to critical phone records will have framed Hezbollah for the crime.

Israel's agents and operatives in Lebanon and its infiltration of a telecom network have been exposed. At the very least, the STL must recognize that evidence of alleged Hezbollah involvement in Hariri's death (a group that historically enjoyed good ties with the late premier) is wholly tainted and likely doctored.

The arrest of Qazzi and al-Raba'a in the breakup of Israeli spy rings should prompt the STL to shift its focus to the only regional player that has benefited from Hariri's murder; one that will continue to do so if and when their designs to implicate Hezbollah are realized.

It is time to look at Tel Aviv.

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