



## Israel dismisses Dubai's calls for arrest of Mossad chief

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Israel on Friday dismissed calls by Dubai's police chief for the head of Mossad to be arrested if the spy agency is implicated in the murder of a Hamas commander last month, saying the threat was "absurd".

Dubai police chief Dahi Khalfan Tamim said on Thursday that Meir Dagan, the head of the Israeli intelligence agency Mossad, should be arrested if Mossad is implicated in the murder of Hamas military commander Mahmud al-Mabhuh, who was found dead in his Dubai hotel room on Jan. 20. Tamim has said that he is "99 percent" certain that Israeli intelligence was behind the assassination.

"The threats against Meir Dagan are absurd," a senior Israeli official told AFP, asking not to be identified. "The Dubai police have provided no incriminating proof," he added.

The murder is suspected as being the work of a hit squad targeting the Hamas leader who used fake Western passports to travel to Dubai. The *modus operandi* of Mabhuh's assassination has led to widespread speculation that Israeli intelligence may have been behind the killing as Mossad is known to have used Western passports in past operations. Canada vehemently protested after Canadian passports were used in the organisation's botched 1997 attempt to poison Hamas political leader Khaled Meshal in Amman, Jordan.

But Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman has said that there was no evidence pointing to Israel's involvement. "There is no reason to think that it was the Israeli Mossad, and not some other intelligence service or country up to some mischief," Lieberman told Israel's Army Radio on Wednesday.

Israel usually neither confirms nor denies speculation about Mossad activities.

Security cameras installed throughout the Al Bustan Rotana hotel in Dubai caught the alleged suspects on videotape in scenes replayed by television stations around the world. Some scenes show Mabhuh leaving an elevator and making his way toward his room, apparently trailed by two men in sports clothes and carrying tennis rackets who Dubai says are two of the suspected killers.

Mabhuh, who helped found Hamas' military wing, had admitted to involvement in the 1989 kidnapping and killing of two Israeli soldiers, Ilan Saadon and Avi Sasportas, in separate incidents. Israel also suspects him of smuggling Iranian arms into Gaza.

### **Pressure on Israel grows**

Pressure has been mounting on the Israel government to provide answers since Dubai's police chief released the names and photos on Monday of 11 European passport holders – six from Britain, three from Ireland, one from Germany and one from France – who he alleged were members of a hit squad targeting Mabhuh.

Interpol issued an arrest warrant on Thursday for the 10 men and one woman suspected in the assassination.

France, Germany, British and Irish are now calling for Israel to answer questions on the suspects' use of European passports and have called their top Israeli envoys in for talks on the matter. European officials expressed concern that the potential misuse of travel documents placed their nationals in danger.

"[The] government takes grave exception to the forgery and misuse of Irish passports, which could devalue the standing of the passports and potentially put at risk the safety of Irish citizens," the Irish Foreign Ministry said in a statement after officials met with Israeli Ambassador Zion Evrony.

A statement on Thursday from the French Foreign Ministry, meanwhile, read: "We are asking the Israeli embassy in France for an explanation regarding the use of a false French passport in connection with the assassination".

Shortly after Israeli Ambassador Ron Prosor met with the head of the British diplomatic service, Peter Ricketts, Foreign Secretary David Miliband said he expected Israel to "cooperate fully" with the separate investigation that Britain has launched into the incident.

"We want to get to the bottom of the issue of the fraudulent passports," Miliband said, adding: "That is the most important thing for us."

### **Advance notice?**

Complicating the diplomatic quandary on Friday, however, were media reports that Britain had been informed that an Israeli intelligence operation would be using British passports. Britain's Daily Mail newspaper quoted an unnamed Mossad operative as saying that the tip-off was not a request from permission but merely a "courtesy call" allowing British officials to be prepared in case a "situation" resulted.

The source said that the British government was not given any details and was not involved in the operation. But he indicated that Britain's protestations at the misuse of its nationals' passports may not be as candid as they appear.

"The British government has to be seen as going through the motions," he told the Daily Mail.

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