

‘Mossad assassination squad used British passports’



Six suspects in the assassination of a senior Hamas official in Dubai entered the country using British passports, it emerged yesterday.

Police in the Gulf state announced that they were hunting for 11 suspects, including a woman, for the murder of Mahmoud al-Mabhouh, a top Hamas commander, who was found dead in his Dubai hotel room on January 20.

Six of these suspects were travelling on British passports and three were carrying Irish passports, including the woman. The other two entered Dubai with German and French passports.

“We have no doubts that it was 11 people holding these passports, and we regret that they used the travel documents of friendly countries,” said Lieutenant-General Dhafi Khalfan, Dubai’s chief of police.

Hamas has accused Mossad, the Israeli intelligence service, of responsibility for the killing. General Khalfan said that Israeli involvement could not be ruled out. “We do not rule out Mossad, but when we arrest those suspects we will know who masterminded it,” he said.

General Khalfan said that details of the 11 suspects had been passed to Interpol and that arrest warrants would be issued soon.

Ehud Olmert, the former Israeli Prime Minister, in a speech at the weekend, alluded to a report in The Times on Saturday that Mossad was waging a covert war of assassinations across the Middle East, targeting Hamas and Iranian officials.

“There are a huge range of options between a full military attack and accepting a nuclear Iran,” Mr Olmert said. “There are other means that, together with other things happening, and they are happening, can create a result that would not allow the Iranians to reach what they are trying to reach.”

One former Mossad agent confirmed that the organisation regularly used foreign passports for travel abroad on secret missions.

“Sometimes these were legitimate passports of people who held dual citizenship, other times they were acquired,” he said. “An Israeli passport raises red flags and is best avoided.”

He said that he did not know if Israel was involved in the Dubai murder or had used foreign passports there. Israeli agents have been responsible for numerous assassinations in Europe and across the Middle East over the past 40 years, often posing as foreigners. In 2004 the authorities in New Zealand disclosed that Mossad was securing their country’s passports through the Israeli Embassy in Australia. During a trial in Auckland, allegations also surfaced that Mossad was using Canadian passports.

Mr al-Mabhouh's body was discovered by staff at the luxury al-Bustan Rotana hotel on the afternoon of January 20. Based in Damascus, he too entered Dubai on a false passport the day before his murder. He was one of the founders of the Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, and is understood to have visited Dubai to arrange a shipment of weapons to Gaza.

Mr al-Mabhouh was born in northern Gaza. In a video aired more than two weeks after his death he confessed to his involvement in the kidnap and murder of two Israeli soldiers during the first Palestinian intifada in 1989. He is believed to have masterminded the attempted smuggling of weapons into Gaza through Sudan last year before the convoy involved was blown up by Israeli jets while still in Africa.

Details of the method of his murder remain unclear. In January Dubai police said that Mr al-Mabhouh appeared to have allowed his killers into his hotel room, where he was suffocated or strangled. One report suggested that the killer gained entry to his room because the woman member was dressed in a hotel uniform. He was reported to have been electrocuted and poisoned. Hamas has vowed to avenge the assassination.

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