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An Eye for an Eye

The Anatomy of Mossad's Dubai Operation

In the spring of 1989, a Palestinian terrorist murdered an Israeli soldier. Twenty years later in Dubai, the Israeli secret service agency Mossad avenged the killing. The operation succeeded, but nevertheless has become a fiasco. SPIEGEL has reconstructed the attack. By SPIEGEL Staff

He knew that he was a dead man. From the moment he shot the Israeli soldier sitting on the car seat behind him in the face, he knew that they would get him sooner or later.

For Mahmoud al-Mabhouh, it would take 20 years for that day to come. At about noon on Jan. 20, 2010, employees at the Al Bustan Rotana airport hotel in Dubai opened the door of room 230 to find the body of a man on the bed. According to the death certificate, the cause of death was "brain hemorrhage."

At the time, no one knew who exactly the dead man was. Mabhouh was considered to be the chief weapons negotiator for Hamas, the Palestinian organization's main contact to Tehran and the logistician behind rocket attacks on Israel coming from the Gaza Strip.

A man with a pedigree like that doesn't die of a brain hemorrhage. In fact, al-Mabhouh became a marked man long ago.

MONDAY, JAN. 18, 2010

More than 100,000 passengers arrive at Dubai International Airport every day. The emirate has become a popular vacation spot for those seeking a respite from winter in the northern hemisphere. The temperatures are summery, the hotels first-class and the shopping malls legendary. But the 27 passengers who arrived in the space of several hours on flights from various European cities had not come to Dubai to go shopping or for a winter break. Instead, they had a mission to fulfill.

Twelve of them had British passports, six had Irish passports, four each had French and Australian passports, and one had a German passport, issued to a Michael Bodenheimer by a registration office in Cologne.

Most of these 27 people were members of an elite unit of the Mossad, the Israeli intelligence agency, assigned to the riskiest missions, and to do work involving sabotage, espionage and assassinations. This elite unit is called "Caesarea," named after the ancient city in Palestine where a few leaders of the second Jewish insurrection against Rome were martyred.

The 27 people were waiting for another man, someone they knew was a dead man.

A few members of the Caesarea team had already been in Dubai earlier, in February, March and June of 2009, to observe "Plasma Screen," their code name for Mabhouh. They wanted to be sure that they were targeting the right man. During their previous visits, they also familiarized themselves with the door locks used in various hotels.

Key Storylines

In July 1973, a Mossad commando unit had murdered a Moroccan waiter in the Norwegian city of Lillehammer, acting on the erroneous assumption that he was a terrorist with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). Several agents were sent to prison, and Israel paid compensation to the man's surviving dependents. The agency's reputation suffered as a result of the incident, and Mossad leaders were determined not to allow anything like it to happen again.

Perhaps the choice of the code name for Mabhouh was likewise a mistake. After all, images of the "Plasma Screen" operation were soon flickering across thousands of flat-screen TVs around the world. At first, many questions remained unanswered and many details unresolved. One year later, after investigations in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Israel, the United States and Europe, and after interviews were conducted with several participants, police officers and intelligence agencies, SPIEGEL is now able to reconstruct the key storylines that intersected in Dubai between Jan. 18 and 20, 2010.

One of these storylines is the German one. Michael Bodenheimer, who landed in Dubai at 12:14 a.m. on Jan. 19, had planned his arrival long before. The story of how he got his passport can be reconstructed with great precision. It's an important story, because it demonstrates that the Mossad was in fact behind what happened in the ensuing few hours.

On Sunday, March 29, 2009, two men arrived in Cologne on a Lufthansa flight from Tel Aviv. The men sought to avoid all contact with each other. They sat in different rows and waited in different lines at passport control. The men, according to their papers, were Alexander Varin and Michael Bodenheimer.

False Names, False Addresses

Varin and Bodenheimer had an appointment with a Cologne attorney the next morning. Varin, who referred to himself as a "crisis consultant," already knew the attorney, who had petitioned for German citizenship on behalf Michael's father, Hans Bodenheimer, allegedly a victim of the Nazi regime. Under the German constitution, those persecuted by the Nazis, as well as their children and grandchildren, can petition for repatriation.

The Israelis told the German attorney that Bodenheimer was born on July 14, 1967, in the Israeli village of Liman on the Lebanese border. The information was apparently false. No one in Liman knows a man named Bodenheimer. He also told the attorney that his last address prior to his move to Germany was in the Israeli city of Herzliya, in a four-story building at Yad Harutzim Street 7. There is an upscale kitchen design store on the ground floor of the building.

But the address also proved to be false. The name "Michael Bodenheimer" appears among 19 names on a blue panel in the lobby. The name "Top Office" appears at the top of the panel.

According to its website, Top Office provides "virtual offices," among other services. "Have your company name displayed on the entrance sign," the site promises. When a SPIEGEL representative called Top Office, the woman answering the phone said her name was Iris, but she was unwilling to provide a surname. When the name Bodenheimer was mentioned, she ended the conversation. Two days later, the names "Michael Bodenheimer" and "Top Office" had been removed from the panel in the lobby of the office building in Herzliya.

In Cologne, the German attorney filed the necessary documents in March 2009. When Bodenheimer and Varin returned three months later and checked into a Cologne hotel, the next mistake was made: Alexander Varin checked in under a different name, "Uri Brodsky." But he continued to use his old name, Alexander Varin, with the attorney. Confusing two different identities was an inexcusable mistake, and investigators with the German federal criminal police agency, the BKA, would quickly discover later that it was one and the same man using both names.

On June 17, 2009, Bodenheimer, in an effort to bolster his German identity, rented a small apartment at Eigelstein 85, in a rundown neighborhood near the main train station in Cologne. He told the landlord that he was a coach for a triathlon team, and he paid his rent in cash.

On June 18, 2009, Bodenheimer picked up his new German passport. He was now a citizen.

Seven months later, on Jan. 19, 2010, Bodenheimer was standing at the airport in Dubai. He and his fellow team members had been told a week earlier that their victim would arrive in Dubai the next day. Although they didn't know which hotel the man would check into, they did know that he would not be checking out again.

Everything was in place. All they had to do now was wait for their victim.

Tuesday, Jan. 19, 2010, Early Morning

Mabhouh was on his way to the international airport in Damascus. As a VIP, he had his driver take him to a back entrance of the terminal, and he was able to wait in the lounge while his luggage was being checked and his passport stamped. Mabhouh was traveling alone.

The previous spring, he had given an interview to Al-Jazeera, the Arab-language news network, about the murder of two Israeli soldiers in 1989. The station had disguised Mabhouh's face, but the Mossad had no trouble identifying his voice.

The Hamas agent described, in great detail, how he and an accomplice had dressed as Orthodox Jews and how, in the spring of 1989, they had kidnapped, killed and buried the two soldiers Avi Sasportas and Ilan Saadon. They had trampled on the bodies and photographed themselves in the process. When asked whether he regretted the killings, Mabhouh said that he only regretted not having shot the second Israeli in the face. But unfortunately, he added, he had been sitting at the wheel of the car.

"Red Page" is the Mossad's code name for an order to kill someone. Each of these orders is jointly authorized by the Israeli prime minister and defense minister. "Red Pages" do not have to be executed right away. In fact, they have no expiration date, and the orders remain valid until they are expressly cancelled.

As reported in a recent article on the Dubai attack in the US lifestyle magazine *GQ*, Mabhouh received his "Red Page" back in 1989. The Israelis don't take kindly to the kidnapping or murder of one of their soldiers in uniform.

Mabhouh Planned Murders

Mabhouh was born in the Jabaliya refugee camp in the Gaza Strip in 1960. His name means "the hoarse one." He joined the Muslim Brotherhood as a young man, and he was there when the Islamist mob began laying waste to the Palestinian coffeehouses that maintained gambling operations.

In the late 1980s, the Israeli occupying forces caught him with a Kalashnikov in his luggage and he was sentenced to a year in prison. He said that he was tortured in prison.

After his release, Mabhouh joined the military wing of the recently established Islamist movement Hamas. It was the period of the first Intifada, when most Palestinians were fighting the Israeli occupiers with slingshots and Molotov cocktails. Mabhouh planned murders.

In 1988, he was placed in command of Hamas's "Unit 101." The kidnapping and murder of the two Israeli soldiers in the Negev Desert was enough proof for Hamas that Mabhouh was the right man for the job.

Mabhouh hid in the Gaza Strip for the first few months after the killings, and then he fled to Egypt. The government in Cairo initially contemplated putting him on trial or extraditing him to Israel, but fearing that this could trigger an uprising by the Muslim Brotherhood, it decided to deport the Hamas agent to Libya instead.

Escaping Death

Later on, Mabhouh went to Jordan, where he developed a Hamas base from which he smuggled weapons into the Palestinian West Bank and planned attacks against Israeli tourists. He was expelled from the country in 1995, just as the entire Hamas leadership would later be expelled. Mabhouh moved to Damascus, where he established contact with the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.

He obtained money and rockets in Iran, and he collected donations in the Gulf States to fund terrorist attacks during the second Intifada. Until then, Hamas had waged its war against Israel with unguided

short-range rockets, but under Mabhouh's leadership Hamas was able to fire longer-range missiles into the Gaza Strip.

In February 2009, Mabhouh narrowly escaped death when an Israeli drone attacked a convoy he was traveling with in Sudan. The trucks were presumably loaded with Iranian Fajr rockets.

Hamas and Iran -- hardly anyone embodied Israel's two enemies to the degree that Mahmoud al-Mabhouh did. It was time to turn the "Red Page."

Mabhouh was constantly traveling between China, Iran, Syria, Sudan and the UAE. The Mossad agents decided that Dubai was the best place for an assassination. The city is open to tourists and businesspeople, and gaining entry with a Western passport is unproblematic.

A first assassination attempt failed in November 2009. A Caesarea commando unit had tried to kill Mabhouh, possibly with poison that had been smeared onto light switches and fixtures in his hotel room. The victim fell ill, but he survived. The agents vowed that the next time they would not leave Dubai until they could verify Mabhouh's death with their own eyes.

At 1:10 a.m. on Jan. 19, 2010, the last two Caesarea agents, Gail Folliard and Kevin Daveron, landed in Dubai on a flight from Paris. Together with Peter Elvinger, who had flown in from Zurich, they formed the operations unit.

Tuesday, Jan. 19, 2010, Late Morning

Unlike other intelligence agencies, the Mossad cannot provide its agents with real passports corresponding to a false identity. The primary countries in which it operates have no diplomatic relations with Israel. Even the most harmless-seeming tourists would be detained upon arrival if they were traveling on an Israeli passport. Instead, the Mossad usually uses the passports of Israelis with dual citizenship or forged passports from other countries.

Peter Elvinger and the members of his team checked into various hotels. All of their passports, with the exception of the German passport, were forged. They were operating like avatars, using stolen identities. The real people whose names were being used would later testify that they had been completely unaware of the operation.

The first part of the operation had succeeded. The Caesarea commando unit had put itself into position, safely and unnoticed. Elvinger and his team members paid their hotel expenses in cash or with prepaid money cards issued by Payoneer, a US company. This would prove to be a mistake in the "Plasma Screen" operation.

Because the Payoneer cards used by most of the 27 members of the commando unit are relatively rare in Dubai, investigators later managed to narrow down their list of suspects relatively quickly. The CEO of Payoneer, Yuval Tal, is a former member of an elite unit in the Israeli army.

The Same Contact Numbers

The commando unit made a second mistake when its members used intermediaries in Austria to communicate with one another. Under the system an agent would call a number in Vienna to be connected to another agent's mobile phone.

Although this was done to conceal calls, the system had a drawback. As soon as investigators had obtained the call list of one suspect, they could easily determine who else was using the same contact numbers in Austria.

Both the use of the prepaid cards and the telephone server in Vienna were not mistakes that would jeopardize the entire operation. But they would make it more difficult for the team members to cover their tracks. Furthermore, the UAE is not one of the so-called "base countries," where Mossad agents in trouble can take refuge in an Israeli embassy or get help from the intelligence agencies of Israel's allies.

The Emirates are referred to as a "target country" in intelligence jargon. If an agent's cover is blown there, he or she could face torture or even the death penalty. Given the risk, why were the Caesarea team members so careless?

Underestimating Dubai

They underestimated Dubai, and they underestimated a man whose office is on the sixth floor of the headquarters of the Dubai Police, about three kilometers (1.9 miles) from room 230 at the Al Bustan.

Lieutenant General Dahi Khalfan Tamim is not a man who cares much for diplomacy. He is a gruff cop with a biting sense of humor and possessing the kind of self-confidence government officials have who enjoy the full support of their superiors. Tamim has only one superior: the ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum.

At 19, Tamim graduated from the Royal Police Academy in Amman, Jordan, the most respected police academy in the Arab world. Ten years later, in 1980, he was appointed police chief of Dubai. Since then, the emirate has boomed more than almost any other part of the world. Lieutenant General Tamim's job has been to ensure that Dubai's boom could move forward without significant crime problems.

Planes take off and land by the minute in front of the plate-glass window in Tamim's office. Dubai is in a central location, roughly equidistant from Iran, Iraq, Yemen and Afghanistan. There are more Iranians and Pakistanis living there than natives of Dubai; the city has attracted hundreds of thousands of migrants from some of the world's most explosive regions. People are constantly coming and going, large amounts of money are at stake, and the Islamic banking system is a nightmare for any police detective. Tamim knows that Dubai has everything it takes to become the region's crime hub -- and he has made it his mission to prevent that from happening.

He has purchased the best available hardware and software in the United States. Government funding for surveillance systems is unlimited in the UAE, and to make things even easier for the police, no one worries about data privacy.

Not Even a Proxy War

"We know," he says, "that many Israelis come here with non-Israeli passports, and we treat them the way we treat anyone else. We protect their lives just as we protect the lives of others, and we don't concern ourselves with their religion. But we also don't want Dubai to become a third-party country where Israelis kill Palestinians."

Tamim sees police work as a craft. Ideologues of all stripes -- Arabs, Marxists, Islamists -- disgust him. "If I were a Palestinian," he says, "I wouldn't support Fatah or Hamas."

There is no topic Tamim finds more interesting than Israel. The country that dealt such a devastating blow to the Arabs in 1967. That year, Tamim's 16th, is a benchmark for him. "The Jews resemble us much more closely, in terms of religion, language and many other respects, than the Europeans or the Americans," he says.

He says he even understands that the Jews must defend themselves, says Tamim, pointing out that millions of them were murdered in Europe. "(Former Egyptian President Gamal Abdel) Nasser said that he intended to drive them into the sea," he says. "Okay, then they had a right to fight back. But today? We don't want war."

Not even a proxy war, and certainly not one outside his office door.

Tuesday, Jan. 19, 2010, Afternoon

Mabhouth arrived in Dubai on Emirates flight EK 912 from Damascus. He handed the immigration control officer a Palestinian passport in the name of Mahmoud Abd al-Rauf Mohammed Hassan, which stated his profession as "merchant." At least that was correct.

A Mossad team had expected Mabhouh at the terminal and notified the others, who then followed him to the hotel. The Al Bustan, part of a group called "The Leading Hotels of the World," is especially popular among transit passengers who need a place to stay after a late-night arrival.

Travelers are constantly pulling their trolley cases across the polished marble floors in the lobby, where noise is drowned out by the sound of water in the fountains or muted by thick carpeting. The rooms on the second floor are off a narrow hallway with only one access point, making the area easy to secure and the perfect place to commit a crime.

Two agents carrying tennis rackets and with towels thrown over their shoulders had been waiting in the lobby since 2:12 p.m.

Tamim would later explain that this was their most glaring mistake, because, as he says, no real tennis player walks around with his tennis racket out of its case.

He Knew He Was a Target

Mohammed Haroun, a Palestinian businessman with a German passport, installed the security cameras at the Al Bustan Rotana. "It's funny that the suspects believed that they could hide under a cap," says Haroun, the head of Security Advice Services. "But I know where and at what angle to install the cameras."

The security camera images show Mabhouh looking around as he checks in at the front desk. He looked over his shoulder as he walked out of the elevator onto the second floor. He knew that he was a target of one of the world's most effective intelligence agencies. He didn't seem overly concerned about the two tennis players sharing the elevator with him.

When Mabhouh, an unobtrusive, rotund man with a moustache, stepped out of the elevator, he had five hours left to live.

The two tennis players noted Mabhouh's room number, 230, a non-smoking room, and sent it to Elvinger in a text message. They also sent him the number of the room across the hall, 237, and Elvinger promptly called the hotel to reserve the room. Then he booked his return flight, to Zürich via Doha.

One of the cameras in front of the hotel recorded the mirror image of a white delivery van with tinted windows. A few of the agents walked to the vehicle but then turned around abruptly. They had apparently mistaken it for a vehicle being driven by an accomplice.

A Borrowed Name

This would put the investigators on the trail of a 62-year-old British citizen named Christopher Lockwood. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, Lockwood had his name changed in 1994 from the name he was using at the time, Yehuda Lustig. But that name, the *Journal* discovered, also proved to be false, a name borrowed from a young soldier killed in the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

At 4:23 p.m., Mabhouh left the Al Bustan. Coincidentally, a Mossad agent was going the same way.

Despite their subsequent eagerness to show off their achievements, the Dubai police have had little to say about what Mabhouh was doing in the four hours before returning to the hotel. "As far as I know," Tamim said at the time, "he had a ticket to China and then on to Sudan -- or the other way around. He may have made a stopover here to unwind."

For a man like Mabhouh, unwinding might include discussing an arms deal for the Gaza Strip, one of the world's most explosive pieces of real estate. According to Israeli sources, Mabhouh met with a banker who had already helped him with a number of international arms deals in the past, as well as with his usual contact with the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, who had flown to Dubai to coordinate two major shipments of weapons for Hamas in the coming months. It is understandable that the police chief in Dubai prefers not to discuss the issue. Although the UAE has pledged to strictly comply

with international sanctions against Iran, implementation is another story. Iran is nearby, and there is a powerful Iranian community in Dubai.

Tuesday, Jan. 19, 2010, Evening

The actual kill-team entered the hotel at 6:34 p.m. There were two pairs of agents, all four of them broad-shouldered men wearing baseball caps and carrying backpacks and shopping bags. The two reconnaissance teams already in the Al Bustan were withdrawn, to avoid attracting attention, and replaced with two others. One of the teams was disguised as British tourists wearing sun hats.

At 8 p.m., the six agents took up their positions in the hallway outside Mabhouh's room. A specialist manipulated the electronic lock to the door of room 230 so that the key card from the room across the hall would also work.

Gail Folliard and Kevin Daveron were assigned to secure the hallway. Both had already changed into new disguises at other hotels in the area, and both were wearing wigs. Daveron was wearing a false moustache and the uniform worn by Al Bustan employees. Just as the agents were working with the door lock, a man walked into the hallway, unable to find his room. Daveron, posing as a hotel employee, managed to divert the man away from the hallway.

At 8:24 p.m., Mabhouh returned to the hotel through the revolving door in the lobby. Carrying a plastic bag with new shoes, he took the elevator to the second floor. He didn't notice the man with the moustache, wearing a hotel uniform, or the woman in the dark wig who had been pacing back and forth across the patterned brown carpeting for half an hour.

Under the Mattress

Mabhouh went into his room. It is unlikely that his encounter with the four killers waiting behind the door lasted very long. The only signs of a struggle were the few broken slats of the bed frame that were later found under the mattress.

While preparing for the operation, the team had agreed that they wanted Mabhouh's death to look as natural as possible. Anything else would have resulted in a massive police effort. The airport would have been closed, making it impossible for the commando unit to safely leave the country.

The investigative report states that the victim was injected with succinylcholine, a drug that causes muscle paralysis in less than a minute. Mabhouh was then suffocated with a pillow, according to the investigators.

The truth is that it is still unclear how exactly the Hamas officer was killed. Succinylcholine is easily detected in the body of a dead person, and the injection site should also be visible. And as anyone familiar with TV crime dramas knows, violent suffocation produces clear marks in the face, including areas of compression, tiny burst blood vessels in the pupils and cracked lips.

It is hard to imagine that a technically sophisticated intelligence agency like the Mossad would resort to such simple methods -- and certainly not in an operation on hostile territory.

By 8:46 p.m., the first two perpetrators were standing in front of the elevator that would take them down to the lobby. In the videos taken with the security cameras, it seems obvious that the men are pumped up with adrenaline, as they shift their weight back and forth, from one foot to the other, like boxers. One is still wearing a rubber glove, unusual for a hotel guest.

On a Plane to Paris

The members of the team left the Al Bustan in groups of two and took taxis to the airport. Folliard left the hotel holding the arm of another agent and with a plastic bag in her left hand.

Daveron secured the elevator. He was the last to leave room 237, talking on his mobile phone and pulling his trolley case behind him.

A short time later, Daveron and Folliard were sitting on a plane to Paris, while two others were on a flight to South Africa. The body of "Plasma Screen" had not yet been discovered and was still lying in room 230.

Everything had gone according to plan, at least up to that point. It would take almost a week before Tamim learned of the death of the senior Hamas weapons negotiators, who was killed practically within view of police headquarters.

JAN. 24 or 25, 2010

The Hamas leadership in Damascus noticed that something was wrong when it didn't hear from Mabhouh. A man who had worked for Mabhouh was sent to the morgue in Dubai. After that, Hamas officials put in a call to Dubai police headquarters from Damascus. Yes, they admitted, they had allowed one of their senior members to travel to Dubai under a false passport, and they had neglected to notify Tamim, the super cop, in advance, and now something had gone wrong, very wrong.

According to eyewitnesses, Tamim then flew into a rage and shouted into the phone: "You can pack up yourselves and your bank accounts and your weapons and your fake passports and get out of my country."

Tamim had a problem. Despite being equipped with the most sophisticated surveillance system in the Arab world, he had no idea that an Israeli commando operation had been executed successfully in Dubai, under his very eyes. He had been blind.

This explains his fit of rage. And it also explains the massive investigation he was now ordering his troops to undertake. He may have been unable to prevent the killing, but now, at least, he would get his revenge, in the form of the investigation. And he would ensure that the investigation itself would become a personal triumph -- Lieutenant General Tamim, the supercop of Dubai.

Tamim had his team compile a list of everyone who had entered the country shortly before the killing and left soon afterwards. The names were compared with those of people who had traveled to Dubai in February, March, June and November 2009, the months in which Mabhouh was also there.

Some Hollywood Film

The names on this list, in turn, were compared with the hotel guest lists and the videos taken by well over 1,000 surveillance cameras. Tamim had the surveillance systems of hotels, malls and the airport analyzed. The process soon yielded an image corresponding to every name on his passenger and hotel guest lists, so that he was now able to compare the images with the Al Bustan security camera videos.

The other members of the commando unit were identified once Tamim's agents had analyzed the Payoneer payments and the conspicuous calls to the numbers in Austria.

All of this took much longer than the "24 hours" Tamim mentioned in his first press conference. Nevertheless, it did enable him to portray the Mossad operation like some Hollywood film.

Two Palestinians were also arrested in Jordan and extradited to Dubai. Anwar Shaibar and Ahmed Hassanain, men believed to be associated with the Palestinian Fatah movement, had allegedly helped the team book hotel rooms and reserve rental cars. Investigators later changed their assessment of the Palestinians, concluding that Hamas had fabricated the story to implicate its political rivals in the case.

At first, Tamim had refused to believe that the Mossad had conducted an operation on his doorstep. "We thought, until the very last minute, that another Palestinian group had killed him," says Tamim. "We never thought of the Mossad. Only after we had gathered together all the faces and all the disguises on the surveillance images did we realize that they weren't Palestinians -- that they couldn't be."

Friday, Jan. 29, 2010

Mahmoud Mabhouh was buried in Yarmuk, a Palestinian neighborhood in Damascus.

Tamim had assembled most of the parts in his puzzle. He notified his superior, the emir. And in an interview with Al Jazeera, he said that he could not rule out the possibility of the Mossad being involved in the murder. The Reuters news agency also reported Mabhouh's death as a murder, but the news attracted little attention. Only a few people recognized the story's potential.

SUNDAY, JAN. 30, 2010, EVENING

At a reception, US Ambassador Richard Olson asked UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah Bin Zayed about the murder at the Al Bustan. After making a few phone calls, Zayed decided that the matter was important enough to be brought to the attention of his superiors.

The two de facto rulers of the United Arab Emirates, Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Zayed of Abu Dhabi and Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the prime minister and ruler of Dubai, debated on how to proceed in the case. They concluded that they could do nothing or they could "disclose more or less everything the investigations had uncovered."

The two sheikhs chose the second option.

MONDAY, FEB. 15, 2010

It was time for Tamim to take his revenge. The police chief appeared before the press, holding up a piece of paper with the photos and names, against a red background, of 11 murder suspects. But that wasn't all. A triumph has to be placed in context, and timing is critical.

Tamim presented the international press with the video footage documenting the crime.

He had already solved a spectacular jewelry heist at the Wafi Mall in 2007, secured the conviction of Egyptian real estate tycoon Hisham Talaat Moustafa, a friend of President Hosni Mubarak, for the murder of a Lebanese singer in 2008 and, in 2009, had solved the murder of Chechen warlord Sulim Yamadayev. But his film about the Mossad assassination of Mahmoud Al Mabhouh was the highpoint of his career. Dahi Khalfan Tamim had made the Israelis look like fools.

In the ensuing days, Tamim paid close attention to the impact of his appearances. He was ultimately praised and even celebrated, not only in the Emirates, but also in Iraq, Iran and the West -- and, in the end, in Israel. Tamim doesn't remember the name of the Israeli journalist who interviewed him via email, but he does know that he responded right away. "She was young," he says, "and very professional. The entire Israeli press, they all treated me very fairly." Tamim was pleased with the way things had turned out.

WEDNESDAY, FEB. 24, 2010

The lieutenant general sent a document to the central bank and the foreign ministry in Abu Dhabi, together with the request that the minister of state forward it to the US Embassy. The document read:

"Excellency Sultan Al Suwadi, UAE Central Bank Governor. Subject: Credit Cards MC 5115-2600-1600-6190, MC 5115-2600-1600-5317, MC 5301-3800-3201-7106. General Management of the State Security offers greetings, and asks your Excellency to direct the money laundry and suspicious transactions unit at the Central Bank to urgently obtain details of the above credit cards, in addition to details for purchases, accounts, and payments on those cards, as the users of those cards were involved in the murder of Mahmoud Mabhouh. Those cards were issued by META BANK in the state of Iowa, USA. Thank you for your kind cooperation."

On the same day, State Minister Mohammed Anwar Gargash delivered the letter from Dubai to the legal attaché at the US Embassy in Abu Dhabi. Ambassador Olson forwarded the letter to Washington and requested that the matter be addressed promptly, noting that the issue had already been raised in a meeting between the foreign minister and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on the previous day. The Americans knew who had used the credit cards in question.

All they had to do was ask the government in Tel Aviv.

On June 4, 2010, almost exactly a year after the Mossad agent had been issued a German passport, Alexander Varin traveled to Warsaw. Coming from Tel Aviv and on his way to the Lithuanian capital Vilnius, he was merely changing planes in Warsaw. He showed the Polish border control agents his passport, which identified him as Uri Brodsky. An arrest warrant had been issued for a person by that name, following a request by the German federal prosecutor's office. Varin, aka Brodsky, was arrested.

Investigators with Germany's BKA had painstakingly reconstructed Varin's flight routes. In the previous months, his travels had taken him to Austria, Lithuania, Latvia, Turkey and the Czech Republic, as well as several other places. Varin, a tall, heavy-set man, pulled a hood over his head when he was led into the Warsaw courtroom. He appeared to be a logistics expert of sorts for the Mossad in Europe, and he was outfitted with several identities. The Mossad had not known that the name Brodsky had already been used since the hotel stay in Cologne a year earlier. It was yet another mistake.

The matter of his extradition, which the German courts were requesting, turned into a tough battle. The Israelis applied a great deal of pressure to the Polish government in order to prevent extradition. The Poles eventually found a Solomonic solution: Brodsky, aka Varin, would be extradited to Germany, but once there he could only be charged with a passport violation.

Mossad Under Pressure

When the Israeli was extradited on Aug. 12, 2010, the embassy hired two of the best and most expensive German attorneys. They paid the bail money of €100,000, and when Varin was released from detention on Aug. 13, he left Germany for Tel Aviv the same day. At the end of last year, a court in Cologne suspended the case in return for a €60,000 fine. It was a solution that all sides could live with, that is, if it weren't for the German arrest warrant against Varin, who was suspected of engaging in espionage. If Varin tried to enter Germany tomorrow, he would be taken into custody at the border.

The operation in Dubai has put the Mossad under great pressure (even though the Israelis have yet to officially confirm that they had anything to do with the matter). The head of the Caesarea special unit offered his resignation, but it was not accepted. This was not the case with Meir Dagan, the head of the Mossad. Even though he had hoped for an extension of his term prior to the operation, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appointed a successor in the wake of the botched operation. Dagan left his office on Jan. 6, 2011.

In a press conference, Tamim called for the resignation of Prime Minister Netanyahu and promised to pursue the culprits "until the end of time." That seems to be about the amount of time he will need.

Nevertheless, most Israelis see the attack on Mabhouh as a success. "It is difficult to call the Dubai operation a failure," says Avi Issacharoff, an expert on the Arab world with the Israeli daily newspaper *Ha'aretz*. Although Israel's reputation has been harmed internationally, says Issacharoff, "the operational goal was achieved. Hamas has seen that it is vulnerable, and the attackers made it home unharmed." The Israelis will simply have to be more careful.

Next time, that is.

By Ronen Bergman, Christoph Schult, Alexander Smoltczyk, Holger Stark and Bernhard Zand

Translated from the German by Christopher Sultan

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