

Britain expels Israeli diplomat over suspected passport forgeries

The UK is going to expel an Israeli diplomat because of 12 fake British passports used to help assassinate Hamas leader Mahmoud al-Mabhouh in Dubai in January.

David Miliband, the UK's foreign secretary, said that there were "compelling reasons" to support the supposition that Israeli government was **behind the scenes**. Furthermore, he described the abuse of British passports as "intolerable." The expulsion reflects how seriously the British government regards the matter. Expelling a diplomat is considered one of the most serious sanctions that can be taken against another country.

Reacting to the UK government's actions, Israeli ambassador Ron Prosor said he was disappointed; the Israeli government will not **respond in kind**, although they have said that there is no evidence to suggest that Israel was responsible for the killing in Dubai. The Palestinian group Hamas has welcomed the UK's decision to expel the diplomat, but has called for greater international efforts to find the people behind the assassination.

Using CCTV footage, police in Dubai have identified 27 alleged members of the team that is believed to have tracked and killed Mr Mabhouh. Doctors who examined the body found that he had died from a colossal electric shock to the head. Furthermore, there was evidence that he had been strangled as well. Dubai officials are almost completely certain that agents from the Israel secret service, Mossad, were responsible for the killing of the man who was the founder of Hamas' military wing.

It is thought that 12 forged British passports, as well as Australian, French, German and Irish passports, were used in the plan to murder Mr Mabhouh. Eight of the 12 passports belonged to British-Israeli citizens living in Israel. They have all denied being part of the plot to murder Mr Mabhouh. The passports had been copied and new photographs were inserted, and all the evidence points to the conclusion that all of the passports holders were victims of identity theft. Understandably, the incident has caused widespread consternation amongst the governments whose citizens **got** unwittingly **caught up** in the murder. One of the British citizens whose passport was stolen, Melvyn Mildiner, said that he "went to bed with pneumonia and woke up a murderer." There has even been criticism from within Israel, with many people saying that this is an **"own goal"**.

The forgery of British passports and their use in such a crime has been of much cause for concern to the government. Police officers from Britain's Serious

Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) have been investigating the incident and have concluded that the passports were copied from real British passports. It is believed that they were forged when individuals gave in their passports for inspection to people linked to Israel, either in Israel itself or other countries. The British Government has issued warnings to British citizens, saying Britons travelling in Israel should "only hand their passports over to third parties including Israeli officials when absolutely necessary".

It is the quality of the forgeries that has led the British government to believe that the Israeli government is involved in the crime. "Given that this was a very sophisticated operation, in which high-quality forgeries were made, the government judges it is highly likely that the forgeries were made by a state intelligence service," David Miliband said. "We have concluded that there are compelling reasons to believe Israel was responsible for the misuse of the British passports... [The forgery] represents a profound disregard for the sovereignty of the United Kingdom."

The foreign secretary said he had met Israeli foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman in Brussels on Monday. In the meeting, he made clear the UK's "determination to see that this affair should never be repeated," as well as handing Mr Lieberman a letter "seeking a formal assurance... that in the future the State of Israel would never **be party to** the misuse of British passports in such a way". It is not the first incident of this kind; in 1987 Israel was caught forging British passports for an intelligence operation, when eight British passports thought to be intended for Mossad agents were found in a West German telephone booth. At the time the country promised not to do it again. Evidently, the murder of Mr Mahboub has damaged the relationship between the two countries, and it is maybe the increasing international disapproval of Israel's tactics that has led to the decidedly muted Israeli response of regret to the expulsion.

Exercises

Mark the following sentences as either **true**, **false** or **doesn't say**.

1. The UK has proof that Israel was behind the assassination.
2. Israel is not going to expel any of Britain's diplomats to the country.
3. There 27 people who were part of the team that murdered Mr Mahboub.
4. Australia, Ireland, France and Germany have also taken action against Israel.
5. Eight of the 12 people whose passports were stolen are believed to have played some active part in the murder.
6. The British government has warned any of its citizens who are in Israel to be particularly vigilant of the passports.
7. David Miliband has asked Israel to promise never to use British passports again.
8. Israel might respond more strongly to Britain if there is a lot of criticism abroad.

Read through the article again. Match the phrases highlighted in the text with the correct definition.

- **respond in kind**
- **get caught up**
- **be party to something**
- **an own goal**
- **behind the scenes**

_____ : something that you do which gives you a disadvantage and helps someone else, even though this is the opposite of what you intended

_____ : to be involved in something, especially something bad

_____ : to happen without most people knowing about it, especially when something else is happening publicly

_____ : to do the same thing to someone that they have just done to you

_____ : to become involved in something, often without wanting to

Answers

Mark the following sentences as either **true**, **false** or **doesn't say**.

1. The UK has proof that Israel was behind the assassination. **False**
2. Israel is not going to expel any of Britain's diplomats to the country. **True**
3. There 27 people who were part of the team that murdered Mr Mahboub.
Doesn't say
4. Australia, Ireland, France and Germany have also taken action against Israel. **Doesn't say**
5. Eight of the 12 people whose passports were stolen are believed to have played some active part in the murder. **False**
6. The British government has warned any of its citizens who are in Israel to be particularly vigilant of the passports. **True**
7. David Miliband has asked Israel to promise never to use British passports again. **True**
8. Israel might respond more strongly to Britain if there is a lot of criticism abroad. **False**

Read through the article again. Match the phrases highlighted in the text with the correct definition.

an own goal: something that you do which gives you a disadvantage and helps someone else, even though this is the opposite of what you intended

be party to something: to be involved in something, especially something bad

behind the scenes: to happen without most people knowing about it, especially when something else is happening publicly

respond in kind: to do the same thing to someone that they have just done to you

get caught up: to become involved in something, often without wanting to