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SHIITE MILITANTS IN EUROPE

Spy Case Casts Light on Hezbollah Recruitment in Germany

By *Ulrike Putz* in Beirut

A young Israeli man who studied in Germany has been arrested on espionage charges in Israel. Khaled K., of Palestinian descent, allegedly spied for the Hezbollah Shiite militia. His case is expected to highlight Hezbollah recruiting activities in Germany.

When Khaled K. stepped off the plane from Germany to start his summer vacation, it wasn't his family that awaited him at the gate. Instead Shin Bet agents and police greeted the 29-year-old Israeli man of Palestinian descent when he arrived on July 16 at Israel's Ben Gurion International Airport. He was arrested and disappeared into custody for two weeks until Israeli officials filed charges against him on Wednesday and lifted a gag order on coverage of his arrest.



AFP

Hezbollah might be more active in Germany than officials thought.

The charges filed by state prosecutors are serious. They allege the man, who comes from the Israeli-Arab town of Kalanswa, sought contact with an agent with connections to Hezbollah in an effort to pass on information.

The indictment alleges he also supplied names of potential recruits to the Shiite militia and that he had expressed his preparedness to take a job at the Rambam Hospital in the Israeli city of Haifa after completing his studies in Germany, where he is enrolled as a student at the University of Göttingen near Hanover. Israeli soldiers in the 2006 war against Hezbollah are still being treated at the Rambam Hospital, and K. was apparently supposed to sound them out in order to obtain information that could be useful to Hezbollah.

Prosecutors also allege that the Israeli-Arab was paid a total of €13,000 for his services. According to the Israeli Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem, he has confessed to the charges.



The Khaled K. case has attracted tremendous interest in Israel -- not least of which because he is the embodiment of the Israeli secret service's ultimate nightmare of the "enemy within." In recent months, Palestinians holding Israeli passports or residence permits perpetrated several attacks, and the problem ranks high on the agenda of the country's terrorism experts.



AP

Suspect Khaled K. is to be tried on espionage charges in Israel.

"This incident provides new proof that Israeli-Arabs are attractive recruiting targets for Hezbollah," an Israeli Foreign Ministry statement read. Close to 20 percent of all Israeli citizens are so-called Israeli Arabs -- mostly Palestinians and Druze.

But the case also comes as a surprise to German security officials. SPIEGEL ONLINE has learned that German authorities first learned from Israeli authorities that Khaled K. was under suspicion of espionage.

An acquaintance of K's, however, is well known to the Germans. According to files from the Israeli state prosecutor's office, K. met with a Lebanese surgeon named Hicham H. in Germany sometime in 2002 or earlier. H. is the head of the Orphans Project Lebanon (Waisenkindprojekt Libanon), which, according to the Israelis, is a cover organization for the Lebanese Martyr Institute. That group is suspected of collecting money for Hezbollah.

For three years, Hicham H. and Khaled K. are suspected of having met every two weeks -- before H. suggested that K. should meet one of his acquaintances. This contact person, also Lebanese, operated under the aliases Rami or Mazen and suggested during their first meeting in Erfurt in 2005 that K. should get himself an unregistered mobile phone. He also said that further contact should only take place via e-mail, according to Israeli investigators.

Security authorities say that K. thus slipped into the orbit of senior officer Mohammed H., a 50-year-old Lebanese man whose task was to recruit spies for Hezbollah in Europe.

The senior officer allegedly met with his recruits at least four times -- twice in the eastern German city of Erfurt and twice in Frankfurt. At the final meeting, the group is thought to have discussed the exact layout of Hicham H.'s village Kalanswa using Google Earth.

Just why Kalanswa, located near Israel's border with the West Bank, caught the attention of the Hezbollah man is unclear. But the officer asked his protégés to find other natives of the town living in Germany. If they were found to be in financial difficulties, it was thought they might be receptive to becoming well-paid Hezbollah informants.

If Israeli state prosecutors are correct, the case could indicate that Hezbollah is much more active in Germany than previously thought.

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