

Clerics critical of Hezbollah face conspiracy charges

Shane Farrell · January 6, 2012

In late January, two Shia clerics will face a military tribunal over charges of conspiring with Israel. Sayyed Mohammad Ali al-Hussein, whose trial is to take place on 24th, is accused of treason for having contacted authorities in Israel, while Sheikh Hassan Mchaymech, whose trial is set for two days later, is alleged to have been in contact with several individuals with [links to Mossad](#).

Those close to the Shia clerics say these accusations are unfounded, however, and say that the men are being targeted because they represent a challenge to Hezbollah's authority, and the party's dominance in the Shia community. *Al Balad* journalist, Ali al-Amin, believes that it "is a message directed toward clerics that they too can be accused of treason if they were to defy Hezbollah, or take clear and strong position against the party." He also told NOW Lebanon that this is the first time clerics have been accused of conspiring with Israel.



Lebanese Shia cleric Sheikh Hassan Mushaymesh, a critic of Syrian-backed Hezbollah, has been detained in Syria on suspicion of spying for Israel. (AFP photo/Mahmoud Zayat)

Mchaymech left Hezbollah in 1997 and has since become an outspoken critic, largely through his monthly publication *Difaf*. He was arrested in Syria in July 2010, imprisoned, and later transferred to the Lebanese authorities when the case was deemed to be outside the prosecutor's jurisdiction. According to his son Rida, during this time in prison, Mchaymech [was reportedly beaten](#) and his legs and shoulder broken.

In a recent statement, Mchaymech's family listed a number of incidents that they say point towards Hezbollah as being behind his arrest. According to the document, during a trip to Germany in 2005, Mchaymech met with "individuals he considered suspicious and was concerned that they belonged to an intelligence apparatus seeking to collect information about Hezbollah." Upon his return to Lebanon, the sheikh brought the matter to the attention of several authorities in the party, providing the party's head of external relations with "a complete itinerary of the trip, including the apparently questionable contacts."

According to a family statement, Hezbollah was likely monitoring Mchaymech's movements closely following his return and was involved with the sheikh's arrest in Syria. It goes on to say that interrogations during his incarceration were coordinated between Syrian intelligence and Hezbollah and that in late April 2011, the party organized a secretive gathering attended by members of the sheikh's family and during which they were shown Mchaymech's "alleged confessions."

The family says the video was "inaudible... [and] heavily edited," with the alleged confessions appearing as subtitles. They also said that Mchaymech looked like he had been subjected to "Baathist-Syrian torture."

In October 2011, Mchaymech was transferred to Lebanese authorities and [charged](#) with having collaborated with Israel.

Both his son, Rida Mchaymech, as well as Lokman Slim, an activist and member of a group campaigning for Mchaymech's release, say that the timing of the military tribunal is also suspicious. According to both men, legal experts they contacted said the speed with which the trial was set following Mchaymech's charge was unprecedented and therefore suspicious. Mchaymech's lawyer when contacted by NOW Lebanon refused to comment on any aspect relating to the trial.

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Mchaymech's family statement is also critical of former interior and justice ministers, Elias Baroud and Ibrahim Najjar, respectively, who they say "deliberately detached [themselves] from the operation." According to Slim, Baroud did not come through on promises to meet with Mchaymech's family, while Najjar never responded to numerous similar requests.

As for Sayyed Mohammad Ali al-Husseini, he is alleged to have been in contact with Israelis, through phone calls and meetings. The cleric was acquitted by a military court three months ago but is facing a retrial following an appeal by the prosecutor's office.

Husseini is the founder the Arab Islamic Resistance, a small militia which, while anti-Israeli, has a radically different position on Iran from that of Hezbollah and, according to Amin, is the reason why charges have been filed against him.

"I believe the main reason for his arrest is that he initiated talks with Moujahidi Khalq, an Iranian opposition group," Amin told NOW Lebanon, adding that Housseini received a delegation two days before his arrest in the Hezbollah stronghold of Dahiyeh and posted pictures of the meeting, moves Amin believes "crossed the red line" for the party.

Hezbollah's press office could not be reached for comment.

Nadine Elali contributed to the reporting of this story.



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