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Israel's weird abduction of a Lebanese sea captain

Israeli forces recently abducted a Lebanese maritime captain for links to Hezbollah – a claim denied by both his family and the Lebanese resistance movement. Is the kidnapping of Imad Amhaz just another in a series of Israeli flop ops?



Photo

Credit: The Cradle

The details surrounding Israel's [abduction](#) of Lebanese maritime captain Imad Fadel Amhaz from Batroun, a coastal city in northern Lebanon, remain incomplete and unclear. Tel Aviv [claims](#) Amhaz was a Hezbollah operative, but the Lebanese resistance movement has firmly denied any connection. The question remains: who exactly is Imad Amhaz, and why was he taken?

Earlier this month, a 25-member commando team from Israel's elite 'Shayetet 13' unit carried out a maritime raid, abducting Amhaz from an apartment in Batroun. His captors

believe Amhaz to be highly skilled in his field, possibly involved in information warfare against Israel's forces, studying the enemy's capabilities on land, sea, and air. Yet, Lebanese officials remain unconvinced by these assertions, with no concrete evidence linking him to such activities.

Hezbollah's Political Council Deputy Head Mahmoud Qamati dismissed any claims of Amhaz's affiliation with the Lebanese resistance movement. Similarly, Amhaz's father, Fadel Amhaz, insists that his son is a civilian maritime captain who was in Batroun taking part in routine courses at the Mersati Institute for Marine Sciences.

A life under threat

Since 2013, Amhaz has attended several training sessions there, working aboard civilian ships that typically transport livestock or cars, far removed from any political involvement. "He spends most of his time at sea, has no affiliations with any political parties, and avoids politics altogether. He is married, a father of three, and supports his parents," the father stated.

The investigation conducted by Lebanese security forces revealed that Israel's military had bombed the building where Amhaz lived in [Qmatiyeh](#), in Mount Lebanon. But Amhaz did not consider himself a target and swiftly moved his family (his wife and three children) to an apartment in the Jnah area, genuinely believing that the targeted apartment was home to a Hezbollah official – hence the bombing.

It also emerged that calls from foreign numbers, including Israeli numbers, were made to Amhaz's phone, but he did not answer them, dismissing them as spam calls. None of these incidents prompted Amhaz to view himself as a potential target or take any security measures, so he continued living in a rented apartment only a few dozen meters from the sea.

Conspiracy theories abound

The reasons behind Israel's abduction operation are still a mystery, as is Amhaz's role – if any – in the murky game of espionage. The kidnapping, however, sparked outrage in Lebanon, with many blaming the UN peacekeeping forces' ([UNIFIL](#)) [German contingent](#) for failing to monitor the country's maritime borders against the foreign commando infiltration – or worse yet, the more serious accusation of coordinating directly with Israeli forces.

A UN spokesperson was quoted by Saudi channel Asharq News as nixing that possibility: "UNIFIL has no involvement in facilitating any kidnapping or any other violation of Lebanese sovereignty."

Amhaz's father, however, holds the Lebanese government and German forces responsible for enabling his son's abduction, urging the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and UNIFIL to intervene and ensure his son's safe return.

In the absence of any definitive information from Hezbollah or Lebanese authorities, various theories are swirling. One, hinted at by the [Telegraph](#), a pro-Israel British daily notable for past false reporting on Lebanon, suggests Amhaz might be a “double agent” whose abduction was a dramatic Israeli attempt to protect him.

Capturing ‘Hassan Nasrallah’ and other blunders

Tel Aviv's use of such covert raids is nothing new. In April this year, an Israeli death squad infiltrated Lebanon to target a currency exchanger, [Hussein Srour](#), who they accused of transferring funds from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) into Gaza. The squad lured Srour to a villa in Beit Mery, Mount Lebanon, where they kidnapped, tortured, interrogated, and ultimately executed him – all while recording the gruesome act for their superiors in Israel.

In 2006, during Israel's month-long July war on Lebanon, occupation forces raided Baalbek and thought they had captured the late Hezbollah secretary general Hassan Nasrallah, only to discover it was a case of [mistaken identity](#). Instead, the Israelis discovered they had apprehended a plasterer sharing the same name in a failed operation that quickly became the subject of ridicule. They released him soon after.

In September 1997, 17 Israeli soldiers from the aforementioned Shayetet 13 unit infiltrated the town of Ansariya in southern Lebanon to kidnap senior Hezbollah intelligence officer Hussein Ali Hazimeh, also known as ‘Hajj Murtada.’

But Hezbollah, tipped off by intercepted drone footage, laid an [elaborate ambush](#). As the Israeli commandos walked into the trap, the Lebanese resistance fighters opened fire, killing 11, while the remaining six barely managed to escape.

The Israeli Mossad has also carried out kidnappings beyond Lebanon's borders. In October 2021, they abducted a retired IRGC officer in Damascus, seizing him while he was strolling near the Iranian embassy in the Syrian capital. He was transported to Tel Aviv for interrogation and later released in South Africa.

At the time, Mossad was actively seeking information on missing Israeli pilot Ron Arad, whose plane was shot down over Lebanon in 1986. Then-Israeli prime minister Naftali Bennett later admitted that the Syrian abduction operation had yielded no new information, though the Iranian general was suspected of holding crucial knowledge.

In yet another shadowy episode, Israeli intelligence operatives kidnapped a Lebanese agricultural engineer in Cambodia, suspecting him of having ties to Hezbollah. Again, after intense and clearly fruitless interrogations, he was eventually released in Thailand.

Hezbollah's naval strategy under scrutiny

As for Imad Ahmaz, Israeli newspaper *Maariv* reports that the kidnapped captain holds "high intelligence value," and claims his capture could disrupt Hezbollah's naval unit – a strategic military arm that potentially threatens Israel's [offshore gas fields](#).

According to *Maariv*, Hezbollah has identified the platforms as legitimate targets and developed advanced offensive capabilities – including coastal missiles and drones – to attack Israel's key energy assets. But even if these claims are true, Amhaz's role would not be unique or critical – merely part of a larger, ongoing struggle in Lebanon's defense.

Given its long history of abduction missteps, how will Israel justify abducting Amhaz if it turns out he is not, in fact, connected to Hezbollah? Will the Mossad drop Amhaz off in Seychelles or in Costa Rica when they realize he is nought but a sea captain?

More importantly for Lebanon, what will a complicit UNIFIL and passive Lebanese army do to confront illicit foreign commando operations in the future once the truth of this kidnapping is uncovered and accountability is established?

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