

Israelis Deny Hearing Kurd On Phone and Telling Turkey

By Lee Hockstader

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JERUSALEM — When Abdullah Ocalan arrived in Moscow last fall after fleeing from Syria, his worst mistake was to use a satellite phone to reach his scattered allies and aides, he said.

Within days, he was forced to flee to Italy.

"I made a false step," the Kurdish guerrilla leader told the Russian newspaper *Kommersant Daily* in November. "My conversations were monitored, not by the Turks but by the Mossad, who transferred this information to Turkey."

It remains uncertain whether the Mossad, the Israeli intelligence service, was involved in eavesdropping on Mr. Ocalan in Moscow or his subsequent surveillance and capture in Kenya.

Israeli officials deny it, and analysts specializing in intelligence matters said they doubted that Turkey needed Israeli help in the operation to seize Mr. Ocalan, or that the Mossad would be involved in an episode so far afield and peripheral to Israel's interests.

Most noted that Israel has enough adversaries in the Middle East without adding the Kurds to the list.

But the very fact that Mr. Ocalan and many Kurds believe there was Israeli involvement provided the spark Wednesday for the violence at the Israeli Consulate in Berlin that left three Kurdish protesters dead. And officials in Israel are worried it could inspire further attempts against Israeli interests at home and abroad.

Mindful of the volatility of Kurdish nationalism, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other officials have issued blanket denials that Israel played any role in Mr. Ocalan's apprehension Tuesday in Kenya.

They said the violence in Berlin was a question of self-defense for the Israeli Consulate's guards, who opened fire.

"Our people have standing orders to prevent, with force if necessary — including by opening fire — any attempt to take hostages and to defend themselves," Prime Minister Netanyahu said.

"They tried to take a weapon from one of our security men," Mr. Netanyahu said in an account that was disputed by some Kurdish witnesses. "That was when firing broke out and the first casualties occurred."

The Israeli denials of involvement are unlikely to calm Kurdish suspicions that the Mossad played a part in the guerrilla leader's arrest.

Israel and Turkey are partners in a deepening strategic alliance, forged in earnest three years ago and frightening to some of its neighbors.

Bound by common enemies — in particular Syria, Iraq and Iran — the two countries have turned a friendship of convenience into one of the more durable-looking alliances in a traditionally fractious region.

Israel offers the Turks high-grade weapon systems and technical know-how in return for training rights for its air force pilots over Turkey's abundant air space. Trade between the two is soaring, and Israeli tourists are packing Turkish resorts.

■ Revenge Attacks Are Feared

Many in Israel praised security agents for protecting the mission in Berlin, but others raised concerns that the confrontation would prompt revenge attacks. The Associated Press reported from Tel Aviv.

In Rome, a Kurdish spokesman was quoted as saying Israel would now be the chief target of Kurdish retaliation.

Several analysts said Israel's security agents had handled the situation well. Israel has much experience with attacks and threats against its diplomatic missions.

"It is precisely their job to defend Israelis working there," said Ephraim Inbar, a political science professor at Bar Ilan University. On the other hand, "it was quite clear that the German police failed in defending the Israeli consulate," he said.

Asked how the protesters managed to get inside the embassy compound, Mr. Netanyahu said they "charged past the German police who are responsible for the outer defense of the embassy."

For some, the incident brought back painful memories of a German rescue operation at the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich. Eleven Israeli athletes died in the incident.