

Blaming the Beirut Blast on Israel

by Hugh Fitzgerald



While there is near-universal agreement in Lebanon that the blast in Beirut was the result of a fire that caused 2,750 tones of ammonium nitrate – that had been carelessly stored in Hanger 12 at the Port of Beirut for six years – to explode, there are still those brazenly promoting the story that Israel must have somehow been responsible, that it must have been an Israeli rocket that started the fire that caused the blast. The Lebanese Defense Officials have quashed that story; they have determined that the cause of the blast was a fire started by welders in the same hangar.

One example, from Australia, of the indefatigable blame-Israel-brigade, is [here](#).

A leading Australian broadcaster is refusing to apologize for a segment on its Wednesday night programming this week in which Israel was blamed for the devastating explosion in the port area of Beirut.

Interviewed by host Waleed Aly of Channel 10's "The Project," Beirut-based photographer João Sousa was asked if explanations from Lebanese officials that the explosion was caused by ammonium nitrate were "widely accepted by people there."

Sousa replied, "No. I would say 99 per cent of the people I've spoken with ... they all feel that that's not necessarily the correct explanation."

Sousa then invoked the conspiracy theory that Israel was

behind the tragedy.

“People are more likely to believe that this was an attack, a military attack, possibly by Israel than an accident,” he said.

Sousa is simply a liar. “99 percent of the people” in Lebanon do not reject the explanation that the blast was caused by the careless storing of the ammonium nitrate, which was then set off by a nearby fire. Almost everyone recognizes – save for Hassan Nasrallah and his goose-stepping fighters – that 2,750 tones of ammonium nitrate, carelessly stored, exploded when workers welding a door accidentally set off a fire on Tuesday, and it was that fire that ignited the chemicals, Lebanese broadcaster LBCI said, citing people who attended a Supreme Council of Defense briefing after the blast. Israel had nothing to do with the blast. And João Sousa, and his host Waleed Aly, both know this.

All the reports from Lebanon convey the near-universal belief that Israel had nothing to do with the blast. It has now been determined that the ammonium nitrate’s owner was a louche Russian businessman, Igor Grechushkin, who in 2014 had simply abandoned the ship that brought the chemicals to Beirut; the ammonium nitrate was then off-loaded and stored carelessly in Hanger 12 for six years. The customs officials at the Port had tried more than a dozen times to warn people higher up of the danger of an explosion, but nothing was done by a government riddled with corruption, beset by mismanagement, and unable, or unwilling, to respond.

There are those who claim that Grechushkin may have not “abandoned” the ship’s cargo, but sold the ammonium nitrate to Hezbollah, which would hardly surprise anyone. Hezbollah’s Hassan Nasrallah could have left it stored In Hangar 12 for a future rainy day, when it could be used against the Zionist enemy. Nasrallah was well aware of the devastating impact

ammonium nitrate could have; four years ago he threatened to blow up, with a rocket, the ammonium nitrate stored at the Port of Haifa, leading to what Hezbollah's leader described would be akin to a "nuclear blast."

He [Sousa] added that "Lebanon and Israel are never on good terms, so there's always this tension going on, and people are always expecting something like this to happen."

Israel has no quarrel with Lebanon. It is at war with Hezbollah, the terror group that holds Lebanon in its grip. There was no reason for Israel to want to level Beirut; Israelis are horrified by the devastation, and been quick to offer every conceivable sort of aid, including opening wide Israel hospitals to Lebanese patients, or to send medical equipment, or to open nursing facilities on its frontier with Lebanon – offers the government of Lebanon has yet to even acknowledge, so frightened is it of Hezbollah's possible reaction. Despite Sousa's claim, the Lebanese were never expecting "something like this to happen" – that is, anything like the complete devastation of Beirut on August 4. Hezbollah now lobbs an occasional rocket at Israel, or attempts infiltration of a terror squad to plant explosives. Israel responds with attacks, as it did in July, intended to minimize casualties so as to deescalate tensions and avoid all-out war. Among its methods, Israel deliberately shoots missiles that land just beside a Hezbollah military vehicle, warning its occupants and giving them time to escape, or employs its "knock-on-the-roof" technique for warning civilians that the building they are in is about to be hit. Israel does everything it can to keep civilian casualties low, and would never have set off the devastating explosion in Hangar 12 at the Port of Beirut.

The Beirut blast was not an act of war by Israel, but rather, testimony to the incompetence of Lebanese officials in not heeding the warnings of their own customs officials. The Port

of Beirut is known to be a hothouse of crime and corruption, staffed by relatives and friends of the powerful; the result of their malfeasance, in ignoring warnings for six years about the dangers of the carelessly-stored ammonium nitrate, has been 145 dead, 5,000 wounded, 300,000 homeless, and property damage of \$10 to \$15 billion.

On Thursday morning, "The Project" deleted the segment [in which Sousa claimed that 99% of Lebanese suspect Israel of being responsible for the explosion] from its social media channels, but stopped short of an apology.

If Sousa's claim on "The Project" that 99 percent of Lebanese believed Israel had been behind the blast was false, and it was, and if that led the LBCI network to remove his appearance on "The Project" from its social media channels, and it did, then why didn't Waleed Aly, host of "The Project," apologize for his broadcast of scurrilous falsehoods about Israel? He may think it is enough to have deleted the segment from social media. He's wrong. That is insufficient. It won't do.

In a statement to The Australian Jewish News, the program said that it rejected "the suggestion there is any evidence the explosion in Beirut was a military attack."...

Ideally, there would be an investigation into how a conspiracy theorist like João Sousa was ever invited onto "The Project" in the first place. What led Waleed Aly to invite this photographer onto his program to calumniate, without a shred of evidence, the Jewish state, as the instigator of the Beirut blast? And perhaps Waleed Aly himself, who removed the segment with Sousa from his program's social media platforms, should be asked to explain why he still refuses to apologize for providing an antisemitic conspiracy theorist with a platform? Better yet, why not discharge Waleed Aly altogether? He'll do just fine. He can always get a job at Al-Jazeera, or Al-Manar, or Al-Arabiya, among people who think just the way he does.

First published in