

Quite Literally, Muslim Brothers

by Hugh Fitzgerald



“Amer Khayat freed from Lebanese prison but says daughters still think he is guilty,” by Adam Harvey and Cherine Yazbeck, ABC.net.au, September 21, 2019:

An Australian man freed from a Lebanese prison after two years in custody over a terror plot has said his first priority is convincing his own daughters that he is innocent.

Amer Khayat said he needs to repair a fractured relationship with the girls, aged 16 and 13, who live in Sydney.

“They think I’m guilty,” he said.

“They don’t know about the system here in Lebanon – why I was here, why I was in prison.

“They think that in Lebanon I did something wrong.”

Authorities in Australia and Lebanon say Mr Khayat was an intended victim of his own brothers, who plotted to blow up an Etihad flight from Sydney to Abu Dhabi by planting a bomb in his luggage.

Why would Mahmoud and Khaled Khayat want to blow up an Etihad flight? There are several possible reasons. Etihad is the second largest airline in the United Arab Emirates. The brothers might have wanted to deal a blow to the U.A.E. for its policy of improving ties to Israel, or for its strong anti-Iran stance, or for its continuing alliance with the United States. They may have been sympathizers with, or even long-distance members of, Hezbollah.

Amer Khayat had been estranged from two of his other brothers, Mahmoud and Khaled, in Sydney before they sought him out in mid-2017 and urged him to visit relatives in Beirut.

Courts in two countries have heard that Mahmoud and Khaled Khayat asked their brother to bring across gifts for family members.

Mahmoud and Khaled had been estranged from Amer for a long time. Yet when they 1) suddenly sought him out and 2) urged him to visit relatives in Lebanon and 3) asked if he would take certain “gifts” to those relatives, none of this apparently caused Amer to be at all suspicious. Yet we have had well-publicized cases of attempts by Muslim terrorists to persuade their relatives and friends to take “gifts” that were intended to explode in flight. The most famous example is the Hindawi affair. In 1986, the Palestinian Nezar Hindawi persuaded his Irish girlfriend, Anne-Marie Murphy, who was then five months pregnant, to fly to Israel to meet his parents before they married. The plane was an El Al jumbo jet,

with nearly 400 passengers. El Al security men, sensing Murphy's unease, subjected her luggage to a meticulous search and found that Hindawi had put 1.5 kg. of the explosive Semtex in her luggage. Murphy, of course, had been completely unaware of her fiance's love-token.

Two juries in Australia have now determined that two of the gifts in Amer's luggage included bombs hidden in a meat grinder and a doll.

The brothers panicked and removed the explosives at check in.

This was not a sudden fit of conscience on the part of Khaled and Mahmoud Khayat at the mass murder they were about to commit, but simply fear that the explosives might be found at airport security. When Amer checked in, his suitcase was judged overweight; he would either have to remove something from his suitcase, or pay a stiff extra amount. His brother Khaled removed – that is, had Amer remove – the meat grinder and the doll, which were the “gifts” containing the explosives. (Initial reports claim that the explosives were only in a meat grinder, later reports claim that the explosives were in both a meat grinder and a doll; I have relied on the latter accounts.)

Perhaps it was the sight of the intrusive inspections by security personnel, or of the sniffer dogs, that suddenly scared Khaled Khayat. Apparently he made up some story for Amer, about having decided to save on the cost of the extra weight, so he and Mahmoud would mail the meat-grinder rather than have Amer bring it with him on the plane. It was a plausible story.

The tribunal in Beirut held that Amer Khayat knew nothing of this and flew on an Etihad flight to Abu Dhabi and then on to Beirut.

The bomb plot was uncovered two weeks later, thanks in part

to a tip-off from Israel, and the Sydney brothers were arrested.

Many lives were saved, and not only this time, “thanks in part to a tip-off from Israel,” that provides the best intelligence on Islamic terrorism in the world. Almost all of this intelligence remains unknown to the public, but tens of thousands of Europeans are alive today because of plots foiled by Israeli intelligence. This is one more example of the debt the West, and some in the Muslim world too, owe to Israel.

Amer Khayat was detained shortly afterwards in Lebanon and even though the Australian Federal Police (AFP) said he had been duped by his brothers, who were Islamic State (IS) supporters, he was held in Roumieh prison until his release this week.

Another brother, Tarek Khayat, a 46-year-old builder from Tripoli, in Lebanon, fought for Islamic State (ISIS) in Syria before he was eventually captured by US forces.

Three Khayat brothers – Khaled, Mahmoud and Tarek – have now been convicted of terrorism offences.

Amer Khayat maintains they are innocent of the plot.

He said all the items in his luggage were his own.

They didn't take anything out and they didn't put anything in,” he said.

Why is Amer Khayat defending his brothers? All three – Khaled, Mahmoud, and Tarek – were known to sympathize with ISIS. This was not a secret in Muslim neighborhoods of Sydney. Tarek was known to have gone to fight on the side of ISIS in Iraq.

Why does Amer “maintain that they [Khaled and Mahmoud] are innocent of the plot”? Can he really maintain that they

“didn’t take anything out and they didn’t put anything in” his luggage? Or does he mean only that they first handed him the “gifts” to put in his luggage himself, and at the airport, when his luggage was found to be over the maximum allowable weight, it was he, not his brothers, who removed the meat grinder and the doll from the suitcase and handed those “gifts” to them? That is why he could claim that “they didn’t [themselves] take anything out and they didn’t put anything in.”

He said he was beaten by police in Lebanon and forced to sign blank papers.

“They hit me. They told me that after four hours I would be able to go home. It was 26 months before I got to go home,” he said.

Given how police are known to behave in Arab countries, Amer’s charge of brutality by the Lebanese police (he was “beaten”) is perfectly plausible. So, too, is his charge that he was forced to sign blank pages, which could later be filled in with any statement the police might wish to ascribe to him. So much easier to have the signature first, the detailed confession after. Another common practice is raising a false hope, and then dashing it, as with the Lebanese police’s mendacious promise to free Amer Khayat after four hours, but then holding him prisoner for 26 months.

A signed confession was used against him in the military tribunal, but there were so many inconsistencies and errors in the documents that the judges found it was unreliable.

“The police just looked up the news on the phone and wrote it down and got me to sign it,” Mr Khayat said.

He said he did not believe his brothers in Australia were extremists, and said he did not know that a brother who fought in Syria for ISIS had been sentenced to death.

Why did Amer claim that he did not believe that Khaled and Mahmoud were “extremists”? What else should we call those who plot, over many months, to blow up a passenger plane by placing a bomb inside a meat grinder in their brother’s luggage? They only removed the bomb at the last minute, once they were told that the luggage was over the permissible weight and something would have to be removed. Khaled now claims that he saw small children at the airport, which caused him to reconsider and to remove the explosive. This is a convenient narrative to show he has a conscience, but it is more likely that, as other accounts have it, he simply panicked that the bomb would be found by the security men and their sniffer dogs. Brothers who plan for months to blow up another brother in order to bring down a plane with 400 men, women, and children aboard are unlikely to have a sudden prick of conscience, remorse or agenbite of inwit, causing them to call the whole thing off. Panic at the thought that airport security would find the bomb before the plane took off, then interview Amer, and discover his brothers’ roles in supplying those “gifts,” is much more plausible an explanation for Khaled’s removing the meat grinder. What would it take for Amer to believe his brothers Khaled and Mahmoud are “extremists”? Shouldn’t that bomb intended to blow him up along with 399 other passengers be sufficient evidence?

“I haven’t spoken to him [Tarek Khayat, who fought with ISIS in Syria] since 2014,” Amer said.

How convenient that Amer remembers not having talked to Tarek since 2014, that is just before that brother had joined ISIS. That explains his extraordinary ignorance of that brother’s “extremism.”

Mr Khayat said he had a troubled relationship with the Sydney brothers because of his own use of the drug ice.

“Ice” is the drug crystal methamphetamine, which would

certainly have clouded Amer Khayat's thinking.

He said he had sometimes not seen them for two years at a stretch.

So his alienation from his brothers was not over their jihadist views, which they made no effort to hide. It was, rather, their disapproval of Amer's being an "ice" addict for five full years, from 2011 to 2016, when he was in a mental daze. Of course, it could be argued in his defense that when he was a crystal meth addict, it was most unlikely that he would have paid attention to, or grasped, that Khaled and Mahmoud were drawn ever closer to the "extremism" of ISIS. Could he at that point even have had a minimally coherent conversation with them about the texts and teachings of Islam?

"I was using since 2011 to 2016," he said.

"It's nearly four years [since I last] used. Ice makes me crazy sometimes."

"Ice" certainly does make people "crazy."

The military tribunal in Beirut heard Amer's drug use might have been one reason why Mahmoud and Khaled may have decided his brother was expendable.

The ABC asked him if this might be a reason why his brothers had targeted him.

"They don't need drug people to come to their house," he said.

"[They said] You shouldn't be with us."

Notice that Amer admits to his brothers' hostility to drug addicts ("[They said] 'You shouldn't be with us'"), but doesn't quite answer the question. To wit: might his addiction

to crystal meth have made him not just a pitiable specimen, but also expendable in the eyes of his brothers, who would regard him as hopelessly un-Islamic in his addiction?

Muslims such as his brothers oppose the use of drugs by other Muslims, though they are quite happy to earn money from the drug trade when Infidel addicts are the victims. Hezbollah makes much of its money from its involvement in cocaine and heroin trafficking, with both producers in South America and addicts in Europe.

Mr. Khayat said he was a religious person who had kept clear of ISIS prisoners in Beirut's Roumieh jail.

"There's lots of them there," he said.

"They're really bad to people, and to me too."

Perhaps Amer Khayat is telling the truth about his prison experience in Beirut, but who knows? It may be that he supported ISIS before going to prison for two years, or became an ISIS supporter during his prison stay, in order to protect himself from possible attack. Certainly three of his brothers had clearly jihadist views; it would be unsurprising if he did too. And in Roumieh jail, police informants might be able to testify as to whether Amer Khayat "kept clear" – as he now claims – of ISIS members, or whether he supported them, whether out of conviction or out of fear.

Mr Khayat said he wanted to return to Australia as soon as he could get enough money to pay for his flights home.

"Do you think the Australian embassy will help me?" he asked.

"It's a good country to live there. Even if you can't find a job. Australia is the best country in the world. I love Australia."

How true. The Lebanese Muslims who have flooded into Lakemba would certainly agree. "Even if you can't find a job," the Australian taxpayers will take care of those Muslim economic migrants who arrive and settle, having learned of the largesse the government lavishes upon them: free or highly subsidized housing, free medical care, free education, unemployment benefits (even if you haven't previously been employed), family allowances. No wonder Mr. Khayat says "I love Australia." Because "even if you can't find a job," the Australians will take very, very good care of you. And you can continue to despise the Infidels to your heart's content. Three of Amer's brothers certainly do. For hundreds of thousands of Muslim migrants to Australia, what's not to like?

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