

Argentina high court confirms convictions in AMIA bombing cover-up trial

One of the judges said in his presentation that Iran orchestrated the attack and Hezbollah carried it out



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An Argentine high court has confirmed convictions for a slew of former judiciary members and government officials involved in a cover-up of the 1994 AMIA bombing.

One of the three federal judges examining the case, Carlos Mahiques, stated in his presentation that Iran and Hezbollah were behind the bombings.

The ruling, issued on Thursday by the Federal Chamber of Criminal Cassation, was a result of its revision of a 2019 trial that investigated the cover-up. The case of the actual investigation into the attack was not under review.

The ruling was signed by Federal Judges Carlos Mahiques, Diego Barroetaveña, and Angela Ledesma. The three called the attack a “crime against humanity,” something former Federal Judge Rodolfo Canicoba Corra declared in 2006 while investigating the attack.

In his presentation in the ruling, Mahiques stated that Iran was behind the bombing and that “political and military organization” Hezbollah was the main perpetrator of the attack, which it alleged was carried out in part because Argentina had unilaterally rescinded three contracts to provide Iran with nuclear materials and technology. He was the only one who talked about the commission of the attack.

The main building of the AMIA, a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, was destroyed by a bomb on July 18, 1994, killing 85 people and injuring over 300. It was the deadliest terrorist attack in the Western Hemisphere until the September 11 attack. Two years earlier, the Israel Embassy in Buenos Aires also suffered a bombing attack that killed 22 people.

The investigation into the attack was hampered by corruption and cover-up attempts, and the case has become a divisive political issue in Argentina. Thursday’s ruling is considered the definitive sentence in the cover-up case.

Although the Criminal Cassation chamber, the highest criminal court in the country, confirmed a series of previous convictions against former judges and officials, it reduced prison sentences.

Among them are former judge Juan José Galeano, who initially investigated the attack; Hugo Anzorreguy, who was in charge of the Intelligence Secretariat at the time of the bombing; as well as two former prosecutors. Galeano and company were prosecuted in 2009 after being accused of diverting the investigation to incriminate former police and disregarding evidence of Iran and Syria’s possible responsibility.

Carlos Telleldín, who was accused of providing the vehicle for the alleged car bomb and later testified that he was paid US\$400,000 by Galeano to accuse former officers of being behind the attack, had one acquittal and one conviction confirmed. Telleldín had been acquitted in the case investigating his involvement in providing the alleged vehicle for the bombing, but was convicted in the bribery case.

The Argentine judiciary has previously investigated allegations that the Iranian government orchestrated the AMIA attack and that the Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah, which Argentina declared a terrorist organization in 2019, was in charge of carrying it out. However, this has never been conclusively proven.

In 2013, the Cristina Fernández de Kirchner administration proposed a preliminary agreement with the Iranian government to jointly investigate the attack. This memorandum with Iran was never enacted because Iran’s parliament did not approve it. However, it became a lightning rod in Argentina, as judiciary members and the opposition considered it undue interference in the investigation by the Executive Branch.

President Milei, who is currently in the United States, celebrated the ruling, saying it laid bare what he called “Kirchnerism’s repeated attempts to cover up Iran’s responsibility” through the memorandum of understanding with Tehran.

The president of the Argentine Delegation of Israeli Associations (DAIA, by its Spanish initials), Jorge Knoblovits, said that these judges should be “applauded for their bravery.” He added that the ruling opens the door for Argentina to file a case in the International Criminal Court.

Editor’s note: an earlier version of this story stated that the Federal Chamber of Criminal Cassation had ruled that Iran and Hezbollah were behind the AMIA bombing. However, on closer examination of the ruling, it was established that only one of the three judges on the case, Mahiques, had blamed Iran and Hezbollah. The story has been updated to avoid misinformation.

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