

Imagine a Life Like This: The Relentless Persecution of Hassan Diab

What if you were accused of an awful crime that you did not commit?

What if you were shipped off to another country and locked away in prison for more than three years, while the investigation continued?

What if the investigation concluded that you are innocent and you were set free? But they still kept coming after you...

What if you faced the prospect of being shipped off to the same country *again*, to face trial for discredited charges?

What if the trial you're facing will rely on discredited evidence and will not be fair?

Dr. Hassan Diab is a Canadian citizen and sociology professor who lives in Ottawa. Up until October 2007, Hassan enjoyed an engaged and productive public life, including teaching, publishing research, and traveling internationally. But his life was turned upside down by unfounded allegations.

On November 13th, 2008, the RCMP arrested Hassan on behalf of France for alleged involvement in a bombing outside a synagogue on Rue Copernic in Paris on October 3rd, 1980, which killed four people and wounded more than 40.

In June 2011, following six years of legal proceedings in Canada, the Canadian extradition judge, Justice Robert Maranger, committed Hassan for extradition. Maranger noted that the handwriting evidence — and only this evidence — was grounds for committal. The judge described the handwriting evidence as “convoluted”, “very confusing”, and “with conclusions that are suspect”. He noted that “the prospects of conviction in the context of a fair trial seem unlikely”, but said Canada’s extradition law left him no choice but to commit Hassan for extradition.

On November 14th, 2014, Hassan was extradited from Canada to France where he was held for more than three years, mostly in solitary confinement, in a prison near Paris.

In January of 2018, two French investigative judges determined that there was no evidence linking Hassan to the bombing, and within days he was released and returned to Canada.

In June 2018, [Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stated](#) this should never have happened. Take a look...

[PM Justin Trudeau: “I think, for Hassan Diab, we have to recognize first of all that what happened to him never should have happened. This is something that obviously was an extremely difficult situation to go through for himself, for his family, and that’s why we’ve asked for an independent external review to look into exactly how this happened and make sure that it never happens again.”]

However, due to political pressure, French prosecutors appealed Hassan’s release, and despite a wealth of evidence exonerating him, he now faces the danger of being extradited yet again to France for trial. In a decision that shocks the conscience, the French judiciary set an April 2023 date for the trial of Hassan, more than five years after he was cleared of all accusations and freed without conditions by the French investigative judges.

Here are some things you need to know about the prosecution of Hassan Diab by the French justice system.

Evidence Hidden from the Court

The motorcycle which carried the bomb was sold on September 23rd, 1980, to a man going by the name of “Alexander Panadriyu”, who France claims was in fact Hassan Diab. Days before the attack, on September 27th, Panadriyu was arrested for shoplifting.

None of the fingerprints found on his signed statement to the police admitting to shoplifting matches Hassan’s prints.

This is also true of fingerprints on the Paris hotel registration card that Panadriyu completed a few days earlier.

During the Canadian extradition proceedings, French authorities did not disclose to the Canadian court exculpatory fingerprint and palm print evidence which they had in their possession. This evidence was only revealed in 2018 after the French investigative judges dismissed the case against Hassan.

Concocted Explanations

As for the absence of Hassan’s fingerprints, the French Court of Appeal proposed that the bomber was careful not to leave prints – despite having been careless enough to get caught for shoplifting.

In overturning the investigative judges’ ruling, the French Court of Appeal relied on speculation unsupported by any evidence. For example, the court imagined that fingerprints on the registration card may have belonged to hotel employees, and that prints on the police statement probably belonged to people employed by the police service.

Rather than recognizing evidence presented by the investigative judges, the Court of Appeal contrived explanations for which they furnished no proof whatsoever.

Handwriting Evidence

The Canadian extradition judge based his decision to extradite Hassan solely on a heavily disputed handwriting analysis of the Paris hotel registration card conducted by France – the so-called “Bisotti report”. That was the third French analysis after two previous assessments were discredited for having relied on writing samples falsely attributed to Hassan.

Five internationally recognized handwriting experts declared that the methodology used by Ms. Bisotti was fatally flawed, thus rendering her conclusions completely unreliable. Although the Canadian judge noted that Ms. Bisotti’s report was very problematic, he ruled in favour of surrendering Hassan to France, citing the extremely low evidence bar required for extradition.

As recently as 2021, the French again showed an inclination to manipulate or ignore their own handwriting evidence. When the French Court of Appeal ordered yet another handwriting analysis, the two French experts assigned by the court agreed completely with the five internationally recognized experts previously retained by Hassan’s Canadian lawyer. Yet, the French Court of Appeal simply disregarded this evidence and referred Hassan’s case to trial.

Unreliable Evidence Accepted

When Hassan goes on trial, evidence introduced by his lawyers contradicting French handwriting reports will not receive fair consideration because expert witnesses for the defence are viewed with suspicion by the court.

Moreover, the case relies upon secret information supplied to French intelligence services by counterparts in foreign agencies. Yet neither the French judges nor the intelligence services were told the sources of this information or how it was obtained, and so they cannot attest to its accuracy or guarantee that it was gathered without the use of torture.

As a result, Hassan will be tried on unreliable and untested evidence that he is not allowed to effectively challenge.

Where Was Hassan in 1980?

When interviewed by French investigative judges in 2016 and 2017, Hassan pointed out that in September and October of 1980 he was studying for and writing sociology exams in Beirut.

The Lebanese University where Hassan studied, confirmed in writing to the investigative judges that social science exams were held in October 1980. The university also confirmed that Hassan took and passed his exams during that time. Additionally, numerous individuals affirmed that Hassan was studying and writing exams with them in Beirut throughout the exam period.

Thus, the investigative judges concluded that Hassan was in Lebanon in September and October of 1980, and therefore could *not* be the alleged bomber “Alexander Panadriyu.”

More Speculation by the French Court of Appeal

Although the Lebanese University’s letter clearly stated that social science exams took place in October 1980 and not in the spring, the French Court of Appeal proposed that the exams “possibly” were held in the Spring. The court also speculated that Hassan might have flown to Paris for a few days early in October. Yet the court produced no evidence, whether in the form of passports, airline passenger lists, or witness statements, that Hassan flew to Paris.

This speculation also contradicts other information cited in the Record of the Case presented to Canada by France, that the bomber was in Paris at least a week before the attack, staying at a hotel, purchasing the motorcycle, and being arrested by the police for shoplifting. Crucially, in this same Record, the French also assert that the bomber and an accomplice travelled by train from Spain to France.

The Court of Appeal once again engaged in pure, unsupported speculation to justify rejection of the investigative judges’ informed decision.

What’s Going On?

Why has the French Court of Appeal ignored evidence which exonerates Hassan? Why did it misrepresent evidence gathered by the investigative judges? Why has it invented preposterous scenarios to justify a trial? Is the case against Hassan politically motivated?

Numerous parties in addition to the prosecutors appealed the release of Hassan Diab in 2018, including families of people killed or wounded in the bombing and victims’ rights groups. Forty-two (42) years after the bombing, Hassan is the only suspect that France has produced, and despite his demonstrable innocence there remains tremendous pressure to satisfy the victims’ and their families’ demands to put someone on trial.

But justice cannot be realized by turning Hassan and his family into victims as well, making him the scapegoat for a crime he did not commit. The bombing was a ghastly crime, but punishing an innocent man does not bring the real perpetrators to justice.

For more than fourteen years Hassan has endured the stigma of allegedly committing a horrific act of violence. His right to liberty has been continuously violated. During the extradition process he was incarcerated several times in Canada and forced to wear a monitoring bracelet when released on bail — a monitoring bracelet he had to pay for, at a cost of \$2,000 a month. He was separated from his wife and young children when held in a French prison for more than three years, and prevented from seeing his dying father. His occupation as a university professor has been disrupted.

Beyond all this, Hassan must live with the terrifying realization that, despite overwhelming evidence of his innocence, France still wants him to be punished for a crime he did not commit.

Imagine having to live your life like this!

Hassan Diab Support Committee

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Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, February 2023