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# Israeli court convicts bombmaker accused of killing 66

June 3 2003

An Israeli military court has convicted a Kuwaiti-born master bombmaker of killing dozens of Israelis and at least five Americans.

The case involved some of the bloodiest bombing attacks in 32 months of Palestinian-Israeli violence.

Abdullah Barghouti was brought before the Beit El military court, where he was charged with making the bombs that killed 66 people and wounded more than 500.

He pleaded guilty and was convicted of building the bombs, said Captain Raed Shanan, the military prosecutor.

The defendant, his lawyer and the prosecutor had a short meeting, at which Barghouti agreed to plead guilty, eliminating the need for a long trial.

"It was one of the quickest procedures we have ever had," said Captain Shanan. Sentencing is set for July 13. The prosecution will not ask for the death penalty.

While sharing the same name, Abdullah Barghouti is not related to jailed Palestinian uprising leader Marwan Barghouti, who is on trial in an Israeli civilian court for allegedly ordering militants in his Fatah faction to carry out attacks that killed 26 Israelis. The prosecution is to present final arguments in the Marwan Barghouti trial today.

Abdullah Barghouti was convicted of making the bombs used in a number of high-profile attacks in Jerusalem over the past two years: the bombing at the Hebrew University in which five Americans and four Israelis were killed, a suicide bombing at a branch of the Sbarro pizzeria that killed 15 people, the suicide bombing at the Moment Cafe that left 11 people dead and a triple bombing on Jerusalem's Ben Yehuda pedestrian mall that killed 10 people.

Barghouti's defence attorney, Taufiq Basul, said Barghouti felt "his actions were legal as part of the game Israel is playing in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, where there is a killing of Palestinians every day".

Barghouti told the court he "did this to kill as many Israelis as possible", Captain Shanan said.

Barghouti was born in Kuwait to a Palestinian family. He lived

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there until the early 1990s, was a member of the Arab Liberation Front, a small Iraqi-backed group and fought against the Americans in the first Gulf War.

He then travelled to North Korea to study engineering before coming to the Palestinian territories in 1999, where he quickly rose in the ranks of the militant Islamic Hamas group, serving as the head of the military wing of Hamas in the West Bank from June 2001 until last December.

Palestinian security sources confirmed he was a senior figure in Hamas and said he had been detained briefly by the Palestinian Preventive Security forces after the Sbarro bombing.

He was arrested by Israeli troops in March while driving his car in the West Bank town of Ramallah.

**AP**



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