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Israel Convicts Israeli-American Hacker Who Terrorized U.S. Jews With Bomb Threats

The 19-year-old was convicted of threatening 2,000 institutions, including U.S. senator, Israeli embassy in the U.S., and JCCs; the fake bomb threats forced widespread evacuations and stirred fear of a resurgence in anti-Semitism

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The hacker at the Rishon Letzion Magistrate's Court, June 15, 2017

The hacker at the Rishon Letzion Magistrate's Court, June 15, 2017 Credit: Tomer Appelbaum

- **Israel's bomb threat arrest leads to varied Jewish verdicts**
- **Bomb threat suspect's identity embarrassing for Jews, but ultimately a relief**
- **Father of JCC bomb hoax suspect to U.S. Jewry: 'We apologize from the bottom of our hearts'**

An Israeli court convicted a 19-year old Israeli-American man Thursday of making thousands of bomb threats, including to a United States senator, as well as to airports, schools and Jewish centers in the U.S. in 2016 and early 2017.

The hoax threats forced widespread evacuations and stirred fear of resurgence of anti-Semitism.

The judge, Zvi Gurfinkel, dismissed the defense's argument that the defendant was unfit for trial due to a brain tumor that caused autism and other mental problems, and held him responsible for his actions.

>> **Bomb threat suspect's identity embarrassing for Jews, but ultimately a relief** >>

The hacker, whose name was withheld from publication, was arrested in March 2017 with the help of the FBI. He was convicted of all counts committed when he was no longer a minor, from 2016 onwards.

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Among other counts, he was convicted of extortion, conspiracy to

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commit a crime, money laundering and assaulting a police officer. According to the conviction, he made around 2,000 false terrorism threats from 2015 until his arrest in March 2017.

Among his targets was the Israeli embassy in Washington, the Israeli consulate in Miami, Jewish institutions, schools, malls, police stations, hospitals and airlines.

The hacker, a resident of the coastal Israeli city of Ashkelon, used advanced technology to disguise his voice and conceal the origin of his calls, including by achieving control over remote computers. Among other things he would pay for the calls using bitcoin, a virtual currency that requires no identification to use.

The hacker also sold "intimidation" and extortion services to clients, charging \$40 to make a call warning of a massacre in a private home; \$80 to threaten a massacre at a school; and \$500 to phone in a threat of a bomb on a plane. Sending a threat of a school massacre through email would set his clients back by \$30, with an additional charge of \$15 if they wanted to frame somebody else for the threat.

He also offered training videos on how to make threatening phone calls without getting caught; and offered drugs and manuals on making explosives, poisons, drugs, and how to pull off sophisticated fraud; how to disseminate malware (computer viruses); and how to break into bank accounts, Facebook and Whatsapp accounts. His clientele often paid him using bitcoin.

In addition, his hard disk contained child pornography for sale, including nude photos of underage girls, videos of underage girls being raped and sexual relations between minors.

One of the hacker's victims was a former senior official at the U.S. Department of Defense, George E. Little. In July 2015, the hacker called him to ask him if he tortured his children and told him he knew Little intended to murder children and that he kept bombs and weapons at his home. That same day, the hacker called the Washington police impersonating Little's wife and claiming that Little kept multiple weapons at home in order to murder children. The hacker gave the police Little's home address.

When Delaware State Senator Ernesto Lopez (Republican) condemned the hacker's calls, the hacker attempted to extort Lopez. The suspect called Lopez and demanded that he retract his comments, saying that if Lopez failed to, he would fine him in Bitcoin every 72 hours and if he didn't pay, he would incriminate him on the internet. When the politician did not respond, the suspect ordered drugs online and sent them to his house in order to incriminate him. When the envelopes arrived the suspect threatened to publish pictures attesting to the fact that he had drugs in his house.

At trial, the hacker did not deny his misdeeds but claimed he could not be held responsible and was not fit to stand trial due to his autism. He told Prison Service officials that boredom was responsible for his actions, which to him had been like a game, and expressed regret.

Psychological and psychiatric opinions were consulted at trial to determine whether the defendant was fit for trial. The judge rules he could distinguish between right and wrong, adding that "even if he presented himself as merely playing a game, the fact that he used new, smart technologies shows he was afraid of being caught, so he understood he was doing bad things and did everything he could to avoid getting caught."

 **Makeshift encampments housing Syrians fleeing from Daraa, as seen from the Israeli side of the Golan Heights. June 29, 2018**

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 **People react as US President Donald Trump arrives for a rally for Rep. Kevin Cramer (R-ND) at Scheels Arena on June 27, 2018 in Fargo, North Dakota. / AFP PHOTO / Brendan Smialowski**

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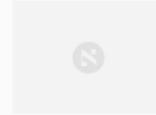
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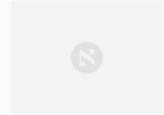
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