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Gazan Snatched in Ukraine Resurfaces in Israel

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Maria, 3, pausing by a portrait of her father, Dirar Abu Sisi, at a rally calling for his release Tuesday in Gaza City. **Adel Hana**

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip - A Palestinian human rights group has released new details about a Gazan man who vanished on a Ukrainian train and resurfaced in an Israeli prison, saying he was dragged out of his sleeper car, hooded and handcuffed by Israeli agents, forced onto a plane and taken to Israel.

It was the most detailed account of how Dirar Abu Sisi, a top engineer at Gaza's power plant, made his way to Israel after disappearing Feb. 19 en route from Kharkiv to Kiev. Israeli authorities have said little about the case because of a gag order.

The Gaza-based Palestinian Center for Human Rights said this week that it was permitted to send a lawyer to visit Abu Sisi on Sunday. It said the 42-year-old father of six described a harrowing ordeal.

Abu Sisi, who is married to a Ukrainian, was in the country while applying for residency there.

The rights group quoted him as saying he was traveling to meet his brother when three people forcibly removed him from the train and drove him — handcuffed and hooded — to a Kiev apartment. He said at least six people who identified themselves as Mossad, or Israeli intelligence, interrogated him before flying him to Israel, according to the rights group.

The group also said Abu Sisi's health is deteriorating and that he suffers from gallstones and requires blood-thinning medication. "He is experiencing serious psychological problems after going into long and continued investigation sessions," it said.

The Associated Press reported on his disappearance on March 10. But most details — including why Israel would want him so badly — have remained elusive.

His Ukrainian wife, Veronika, accused Mossad of abducting him to sabotage the power plant but denied speculation that he was tied to Hamas militants. Abu Sisi is a top official at Gaza's electric plant — meaning that he would need to have good relations with the Hamas government.

The UN and rights groups said he was in Israeli prison, but Israeli officials refused to comment, citing a gag order.

A court partially lifted the gag order Sunday, allowing Israel's security service to confirm that Abu Sisi is in Israeli custody.

The Israeli attorney representing Abu Sisi, Smadar Ben-Natan, said Abu Sisi had planned to settle in Ukraine.

Ben-Natan said speculation that Abu Sisi landed his job for being a Hamas loyalist was nonsensical because his appointment came in 2006 — a year before the militant group seized control of Gaza.

"He is not a political person, he is not a military person," Ben-Natan said Monday. "He serves in a civil position in the Gaza Strip and he was in touch with Hamas due to his position, and not more than that."

No charges have yet been filed against Abu Sisi, Ben-Natan said.

The remaining gag order, which bars the release of details regarding Abu Sisi's arrest and interrogation, is set to expire in one month.

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