
Investigator to Probe If Argentine Prosecutor Was Forced to Commit Suicide

20/01/2015



BUENOS AIRES – The lead investigator in the death of Argentine prosecutor Alberto Nisman confirmed Monday that he shot himself in the head with a gun found next to his body in his Buenos Aires apartment.

Nisman, who died on Sunday, had accused the government of shielding Iranian suspects in a 1994 terror attack that killed 85 people, and he was due to appear before Congress Monday to present his reasons for seeking to indict President Cristina Fernandez, Foreign Minister Hector Timerman and five other people in connection with the crime.

Viviana Fein, the lead investigator, also said Monday she will investigate whether the prosecutor was forced to commit suicide.

“I’m not ruling it out by any means,” she said when asked whether Nisman could have been forced to kill himself under some type of threat.

Fein confirmed that the gun the 51-year-old Nisman fired belonged to one of his associates, saying “it was a weapon that he had had for a long time, a small-caliber weapon, a .22. He didn’t use it, he had borrowed it,” she told TN television.

She said Nisman held the gun to his temple “at a maximum distance of one centimeter” and she ruled out the possibility of the shot being fired by another person.

“We can assume” that the time of death was “approximately 3:00 local time on Sunday,”

although the body was not found until several hours later, Fein said.

The bullet that lodged in Nisman's head has been turned over to ballistics, and investigators also are waiting for the results of an electronic scan, although "it's very unlikely that such a small weapon would leave gunpowder residue on the hands."

Nisman was found Sunday night by his mother in the bathroom of his 13th-floor apartment in Buenos Aires' exclusive Puerto Madero neighborhood.

After eight years of investigations, Nisman last Wednesday filed charges against Fernandez for concealing the involvement of Iran in the 1994 terrorist attack on a Jewish cultural center in Buenos Aires that claimed 85 lives.

The prosecutor accused the president, Timerman – himself a member of Argentina's Jewish community – and five others of obstructing the investigation of the car-bomb blast outside the headquarters of the AMIA organization.

He said Fernandez had stymied the probe in exchange for strong trade relations with Iran and a need to access the Islamic country's oil amid an energy crisis.

The Argentine government said a day later that the charges are based on a "tall tale" spun by disgruntled spies.

Many in the Argentine Jewish community believe the AMIA bombing was ordered by Iran and carried out by Tehran's Hezbollah allies.

Both the Iranian government and the Lebanese militia group deny any involvement and some have pointed out that the accusation relies heavily on information provided by the CIA and Israel's Mossad spy agency, both with an interest in blackening the reputation of Tehran.

To the indignation of many, both in Argentina and abroad, prosecutors have yet to secure a single conviction in the case.

In September 2004, 22 people accused in the bombing were acquitted after a process plagued with delays, irregularities and tales of witnesses' being paid for their testimony.

The attack against the AMIA building was the second terrorist strike against Jewish targets in Argentina. In March 1992, a car bomb was detonated in front of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires, killing 29 people and wounding more than 100 others.
