

US and Israel use sabotage and assassinations to thwart Iran's nuclear program

Keith Jones

14 December 2010

Last week's talks between Teheran and the P5 + 1 (representatives of the UN Security Council's five permanent members, plus Germany and the European Union) began with the Iranian delegation condemning the recent assassination of a prominent Iranian nuclear scientist—part of a widening covert campaign targeting the country's nuclear program.

"A week ago on this day terrorists targeted two Iranian scientists and one of them was martyred," reportedly said Saeed Jalili, the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council and its chief negotiator at the Geneva talks.

Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and other top Iranian officials had previously charged the US, Israel and other Western powers with orchestrating the assassination of Dr. Majid Shahriari. "These wicked people," said Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of Iran's nuclear program, "wanted to show their hideous side, which demonstrates their carrot-and-stick policy in the run-up to the nuclear talks."

On the morning of November 29, Shahriari was killed while on his way to work. In what was a highly sophisticated operation, motorcycle-borne assailants affixed a magnetic bomb to Shahriari's car, then quickly detonated it.

At almost exactly the same time, a second Iranian scientist, Fereidoon Abbasi, narrowly averted assassination in a like manner. Aware that something had been placed on his car, Abbasi fled the driver's seat and was attempting to get his wife out of the car when the magnetic bomb exploded. The couple suffered only minor injuries.

Shahriari, a member of the nuclear engineering faculty at Shahid Beheshti University in Teheran, co-authored several reports and journal articles with Salehi, the head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation (AEOI). Following the assassination, Salehi was widely quoted as saying that Shahriari was in charge of "one of the biggest" AEOI projects. According to the *Manchester Guardian*, "Shahriari had no known links to banned nuclear work, but was highly regarded in his field"—theorizations of nuclear-chain reactions.

Abbasi is also employed at Shahid Beheshti University. Iranian authorities were quick to note, following the November 29 attempt on his life, that Abbasi had been publicly named as "involved in nuclear or ballistic missile activities" in a 2007 UN Security Council resolution targeting Iran.

In response to the statement from the Iranian delegation to the P5 + 1 condemning the coordinated attacks of November 29, the EU foreign policy and security representative, Catherine Ashton, reportedly made a pro forma statement on behalf of all the other delegations regretting the attack.

But all the participants in last week's talks are well aware that the US, Israel, Britain and allied Western powers are waging a campaign of sabotage against Iran's nuclear program. John Sawers, the head of Britain's MI6, called in late October for "intelligence-led operations" against Iran's nuclear program to be stepped up.

In what was billed as the first-ever public address by the head of Britain's overseas spy agency, Sawyer sought to justify such actions, saying, "The longer international efforts delay Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons technology, the more time we create for a political solution to be found."

Shahriari and Abbasi are far from the first Iranian nuclear scientists to be targeted for assassination. Last January, nuclear physicist Dr. Masoud Ali-Mohammadi was killed in a bomb attack on the streets of Teheran. And in 2007, another nuclear scientist, Ardeshtir Hosseinpour, died of what was reported to be gas poisoning. At the time, Stratfor, a strategic-intelligence research company with close connections to the US security establishment, said Hosseinpour's death had all the hallmarks of an Israeli security operation.

Teheran has also accused the US and Israel of kidnapping several of its scientists who have disappeared. Opponents of the Teheran regime have argued the missing scientists defected.

This sabotage campaign is in addition to US-led United Nations and Western sanctions, aimed at starving Iran's energy sector of vitally needed investment and undermining its banking system, as well as escalating military pressure. Not only does the US have massive military deployments in the Persian Gulf-Arabian Sea and in Afghanistan and Iraq, both of which border Iran, the US and Israel have repeatedly threatened to wage war in the name of thwarting Iran's nuclear ambitions.

Three days before the twin bombings in Teheran, the head of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, said the Pentagon has plans for military action aimed at preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and has been preparing for war with Teheran "for a significant period of time."

Britain's defence minister, Liam Fox, issued his own threat of military action in the run-up to last week's two-day negotiating session in Geneva. "We want a negotiated solution, not a military one," declared Fox. "But Iran needs to work with us to achieve that outcome. We will not look away or back down."

The London *Telegraph* has baldly asserted the November 29 attacks were organized by Israel's Institute for Intelligence and Special Operations, commonly known as Mossad.

On December 5, the *Telegraph* reported that personnel at the headquarters of Mossad celebrated news of the bomb attacks on the Iranian nuclear scientists by dubbing them "The Chief's Last Hit"—a reference to the fact that November 29 was Meir Dagan's last day as the head of Mossad.

Mossad is notorious for summarily executing perceived enemies of the Israeli state. One such assassination in Dubai last February—that of top Hamas commander Mahmoud al-Mahboubh—caused a diplomatic furor because the Mossad hit squad had left such an obvious trail, including its use of fake British passports to get in and out of the UAE.

But Washington is as likely an organizer of the current assassination campaign, whether working on it own or in collaboration with Mossad and other intelligence agencies.

Under Barack Obama, Washington has expanded drone attacks in Pakistan against alleged Al Qaeda, Taliban and Taliban-allied leaders and asserted the right of the president to order the execution of US citizens who have been labeled terrorists without any judicial process whatsoever.

In its report on the November 29 events, the *New York Times* signaled that the US national security establishment endorsed the twin bombings. After acknowledging that Israel and the US are "widely believed" to be using covert methods to sabotage Iran's nuclear program, the newspaper cited an unnamed US official declaring that the "targets of the attacks are bad people, and the work they do is exactly what you need to design a bomb."

Only a few days earlier, a *Times* article about reports from International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors that Iran had temporarily suspended operation of thousands of centrifuges at its main uranium enrichment plant said the suspension might have been the result of sabotage. American officials, the *Times* added, "say the Obama administration has stepped up a broad covert program, inherited from the Bush administration to undermine Iran's nuclear program."

Over the past year, unnamed US intelligence operatives have been quoted in the *Times* and *Washington Post* boasting that US-led covert operations have resulted in delays and disruptions of Iran's nuclear program. While no details have been provided, US officials claim that on several occasions covert operatives have ensured that equipment procured by Teheran for its nuclear program was defective.

In recent weeks there have been many reports claiming that Iran's nuclear program has been disrupted by a computer

worm, whose sophistication makes it all but certain that it was developed and deployed by one or more foreign intelligence agencies.

The Stuxnet worm is said to have contained two "warheads." The first was aimed at surreptitiously seizing control over the functioning of centrifuges at Iran's uranium enrichment center in Natanz. The second targeted control of the turbine at the Russian-built, soon to be fully functional nuclear power station at Bushehr.

On November 23, AEOI head Salehi told an Iranian news agency that the country's nuclear program had been the target of a cyber attack for the past year, although he claimed that "the country's young experts stopped the virus exactly at those points that enemies intended to infiltrate."

Speaking to reporters following the November 29 bombings, Iranian President Ahmadinejad said that saboteurs "had succeeded in creating problems for a limited number of our centrifuges with the software they installed in electronic parts. They did a bad thing. Fortunately, our experts discovered that and today they are not able [to make the centrifuges malfunction] anymore."

The US campaign against Iran is utterly hypocritical and reactionary and fraught with grave dangers for the people of the Middle East and the entire world.

While Washington denounces Iran as a "state sponsor" of terrorism for providing support to Hamas and Hezbollah, bourgeois nationalist-Islamicist movements that arose in response to Israeli aggression and expansionism, it practices state terrorism. The US government orchestrates assassinations, bombings and sabotage campaigns and arrogates the right to do so in all parts of the globe. Meanwhile, the corporate media acts as its accomplices, covering up for and excusing these crimes and demonizing their targets.

Last week, a bipartisan group of US senators, including John McCain, Joseph Lieberman, Jon Kyl, Bob Casey Jr. and Kirsten Gillibrand, sent a letter to Obama saluting him for "the cascade of measures" his administration has taken against Iran. The letter then implored him to remain steadfast in seeking to deny Iran rights to a full-cycle civilian nuclear energy program—rights accorded it and all other signatories of the NPT.

In its relations with Iran, as in so many other areas, the Obama administration has not just continued the reactionary policies of the Bush administration, it has intensified them.



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