

Yossi Melman: Mossad, MI6, the CIA and the case of the assassinated scientist

Tuesday, 30 November 2010

Three events – not seemingly related – took place yesterday. The leaking of State Department documents, many of which deal with the world's concerns about Iran's nuclear programme; the mysterious assassination in Tehran of a top Iranian nuclear scientist and the wounding of another, and the appointment of Tamir Pardo as the new head of Mossad, Israel's foreign espionage agency.

But there's a link between them. They are part of the endless efforts by the Israeli intelligence community, together with its Western counterparts including Britain's MI6 and America's CIA, to sabotage, delay and if possible, to stop Iran from reaching its goal of having its first nuclear bomb.

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The attack on the two scientists, one of them mentioned as a top nuclear scientist working with Iran's Ministry of Defence, was part of these efforts. No organisation claimed responsibility but it is obvious, not just because of accusations by Iranian officials and Iran's media, that Israel was behind it. Most experts who follow Middle East politics and Mossad history would agree.

It is at least the fourth attempt to assassinate Iranian scientists linked with the country's nuclear programme in four years. There were probably other attempts which did not hit the headlines. The attribution to Mossad is not because of the use of motorcycles, though in the past Mossad has been involved in similar operations. The best known one was in 1995 in Valletta, Malta, when a Mossad hit-team liquidated Dr Fathi Shkaki, the leader of the Islamic Jihad.

It has more to do with the policy of Mossad to deal a blow to Iran's nuclear programme. On top of assassinating nuclear scientists to terrorise others and force some to quit, it is believed that Mossad was also behind penetrating Iranian purchasing networks and selling them flawed equipment of its nuclear enrichment centrifuges and most recently by planting a virus which has damaged the nuclear computers at Natanz.

Yet despite these daring ploys, it is obvious to Israeli decision-makers as well as to western leaders that if a country is determined enough to develop nuclear weapons nothing would stop it.

Yossi Melman is a senior commentator for the Israeli daily 'Haaretz' who specialises in strategic issues, terrorism and intelligence

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