



PERSPECTIVES

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Iran Might Purge Its Intelligence and Counterintelligence Community

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Mohsen Rezaee, a high-ranking official of the Islamic Republic in Iran, has admitted that top-secret Iranian nuclear documents were stolen in a raid of a Tehran warehouse by Israeli operatives in 2018—a raid the regime had denied ever occurred. Rezaee is calling for a purge of the Iranian intelligence and counterintelligence community, which could result in Iranian intelligence operatives fleeing the country or dying in “accidents.”

The history of intelligence and counterintelligence (I&C) is riddled with [failures](#), some of which have had horrendous consequences. There is, however, a major difference between an I&C failure and a compromised I&C community. In the past year alone, the Islamic Republic in Iran has suffered multiple serious I&C failures: the July 2020 [attack](#) on the Natanz nuclear facility, the [assassination](#) on Iranian soil in August 2020 of al-Qaeda number two Abu Muhammad al-Masri, the November 2020 [assassination](#) near Tehran of Brig. Gen. Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, and, most recently, the April 2021 [attack](#) (once again) on the Natanz facility.

One of the most damaging I&C failures to have ever occurred in Iran was connected to the country’s clandestine pursuit of nuclear weapons. In 2018, Israeli operatives managed to raid a closely protected [warehouse in Tehran](#), stealing more than 100,000 documents, images, and videos related to Iranian nuclear plans. As I noted in an earlier [Perspective](#), “This was a fiasco for Iranian counterintelligence. Because of their access to those documents, Israel and (most likely) US intelligence were able first to identify sensitive locations related to Iran’s nuclear program and the IRGC’s missile program and then

attack those locations through [several mysterious explosions](#) that occurred in Iran in 2020.”

Up to this point, the Islamic regime has consistently [denied](#) that the warehouse had been targeted and that any documents related to the Iranian nuclear program had been stolen. In support of the regime’s claim, the former head of the National Iranian American Council, Trita Parsi, tweeted, “Netanyahu’s claims of a Mossad raid in Iran is being questioned by Israeli journalists... As others have suggested, seems like Mossad raided the IAEA and not Tehran.” According to [Commentary](#), Tommy Vietor, spokesman for then-President Barack Obama’s National Security Council, “accused the US and Israel of ‘cooking up intel’ to justify the abrogation of the JCPOA.”

The regime has apparently decided to come clean, to an extent. In an interview with the [Mehr News Agency](#) on April 14, 2021, Maj. Gen. Mohsen Rezaee of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, who is secretary of the powerful Expediency Discernment Council, is quoted as having said: “The country is experiencing a widespread security pollution, as exemplified by the fact that three security incidents have occurred in less than a year: two explosions and one assassination. Prior to that, they attempted to steal some of our top-secret nuclear documents [...]”

Rezaee’s actual statement was different from the version published by the Mehr News Agency. During the interview, which was [conducted on camera](#), Rezaee says not that Israel “attempted” to steal the top-secret nuclear documents but that “they stole” the documents. He also said the operatives “conducted these operations successfully and then left,” a line that does not appear in the version published by Mehr.

The Mehr News Agency is owned by the [Islamic Development Organization](#), which has the objective of promoting the ideology of the regime. Thus it is no surprise that it would censor Rezaee’s admission that the Israeli raid had been successful. Had Mehr revealed the truth, it would have constituted an admission that the regime had not managed to arrest the culprits, a claim Tehran makes after every attack.

Rezaee’s statement is notable, as it marks the first time in the regime’s history that a high-ranking official of the Islamic Republic has admitted that the country was the victim of an act of sabotage that had been previously denied by both the regime and its apologists in the West. His statement is also significant because it suggests that recent sabotage and assassinations inside Iran were not purely intelligence failures but signs that the Iranian intelligence community has been seriously compromised.

The assassination of Brig. Gen. Fakhrizadeh, the architect of the Islamic regime's nuclear program, seemed to indicate that individuals inside Iran's intelligence organizations were feeding information to opponents of the regime. Mohsen Rezaee confirmed this suspicion and is recommending a "purge" of the intelligence community of the Islamic Republic. This could mean there will be a flight of Iranian intelligence officers from Iran, or possibly even a spate of "accidents" claiming the lives of some of those officers.

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