

Iran's Disappeared Nuclear Scientist: Video Points to Unlawful US Abduction

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Global Research, June 09, 2010

9 June 2010

Region: [Asia](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Law and Justice](#)

The mysterious disappearance of an Iranian nuclear scientist took another twist with the broadcast of a video message in which he claims that he was abducted by American and Saudi intelligence agents and taken to the US where is being held against his will.

Reuters said that the identity of Shahram Amiri was not independently verified, but the Iranian foreign ministry seemed convinced of the video's authenticity and said that it was now following up legal measures with the US over the case.

The video was first broadcast on Iranian state television news on 7 June. It apparently shows Amiri speaking in his native Farsi into a computer wearing head phones. He claims that he was kidnapped by the CIA and the Saudi spy agency and that during his detention he was tortured in order to coerce him to make statements that were subsequently reported by ABC. [2] In his alleged confession, Amiri says that he willingly defected to the US and that Iran is conducting a secret nuclear weapons programme.

CIA sources told ABC then that they considered Amiri's purported defection an "intelligence coup".

Amiri, who according to Iran worked as a scientist at Malek Ashfar University in Tehran researching radioactive isotopes for medical treatment, went missing in early June 2009 during a religious pilgrimage he was making in Saudi Arabia. He was travelling to the holy city of Mecca, but is believed to have been detained by Saudi police in Medina.

From there, he claims that he was handed over to the CIA and flown to the US. In the video, Amiri claims that he is being held against his will in an undisclosed place in Tuscon, Arizona. He appealed for international humanitarian organisations to take up his plight so that he can be returned to his "dear Iran".

Questions remain, however. Who helped Amiri make this video and how was it obtained by Iranian state broadcasters? If the scientist is being held against his will, as he claims, how could such a video have been made? Was his alleged custody somehow breached by a sympathetic person? Certainly, it seems highly unlikely that US intelligence agents would have released the video as part of a tortuous psychological war game with Iran, given that the accusations Amiri makes are so damning.

One thing is clear. The Iranian version of events is more consistent than that of the US or Saudis.

From the time of Amiri's disappearance, Iran has charged the US and Saudi authorities with the same offences that the nuclear scientist is now claiming, that is, false detention and abduction. His family also claim that he was kidnapped by these agents.

When Iran first protested the disappearance of Amiri, both the US and the Saudis denied any knowledge of the case. Yet nine months later, CIA sources were cock-a-hoop about their "coup" in winning over Amiri as a defector and intelligence asset.

As with the wider nuclear controversy, Iran's claims that it is not pursuing a weapons programme and that its uranium enrichment is for peaceful civilian purposes are distinguished from the US position which is riddled with contradictions and based on unsubstantiated conjecture.

And just as the state of Israel is coming under growing scrutiny for its wanton disregard for international law, the case of Shahram Amiri shows that the US government also views itself as above the law and international obligations.

Furthermore, the case cannot be compared with the detention of three young US citizens in Iran, as some media commentators suggest. In the latter case, Shane Bauer, Sarah Shourd and Josh Fattal are accused of entering Iranian territory illegally, they are being processed by Iran's legal system and they have received consular access through the Swiss embassy. Their families were also afforded contact when they visited the three in Tehran recently. None of these rights have been reciprocated by the US to Shahram Amiri, whose whereabouts and conditions remain shrouded in mystery due to American government gaming.

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Notes

[1] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3y_lvRbSCQ

[2]

<http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/exclusive-iran-nuclear-scientist-defects-us-cia-intelligence/story?id=10245234>

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Finian Cunningham has written extensively on international affairs, with articles published in several

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