



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on July 19, 2010

Iranian Scientist Shahram Amiri: Un-Defector or Kidnapping Victim?

The return of Iranian scientist Shahram Amiri to Iran from CIA custody has news agencies wondering whether he defected or was kidnapped by the CIA during a June 2009 hajj (Islamic religious pilgrimage) to Mecca. "Americans wanted me to say that I defected to America of my own will, to use me for revealing some false information about Iran's nuclear work," Amiri said from Tehran airport last week, claiming, "I was under intensive psychological pressure by [the] CIA.... The main aim of this abduction was to stage a new political and psychological game against Iran."



Amiri left a wife and seven-year-old son in Iran, but he escaped CIA custody sometime in June and ended up at the Pakistani embassy in metropolitan Washington, D.C., looking for transportation back to Iran.

U.S. officials have officially denied Amiri's "defection" was anything but voluntary, and have willingly (and uncharacteristically) offered plenty of details to the press about Amiri's supposed cooperation with U.S. intelligence for years, including a \$5 million payment made in exchange for defection. "It might look as if the CIA is taking revenge on Amiri for returning to Iran and that by telling the US media about his cooperation and long record as an agent they are simply signing his death warrant and ensuring that the Iranian authorities would eventually execute him," an unnamed U.S. intelligence official [told](#) the London *Daily Telegraph* July 17. "But in reality, whatever the CIA says at this point will have little impact on Amiri's fate." According to the CIA official story, Amiri was a source who was lured out with the promise of a big paycheck as part of the CIA "brain-drain" program to deprive Iran of nuclear scientists for its alleged nuclear program.

Amiri himself claimed that he had been promised some \$50 million in exchange for making "false" nuclear program accusations against Iran. [According to](#) the London *Independent*, Amiri "said that he was on the hajj pilgrimage when he was seized at gunpoint in the city of Medina, drugged and taken to the US, where he says Israel was involved in his interrogation. In the US, officials were reported to have admitted that Mr Amiri was paid more than \$5m (£3.2m) by the CIA for information about Iran's nuclear ambitions."

"I was under the harshest mental and physical torture," Amiri [said](#) from Tehran airport in Iran, where he is being hailed as a national hero.

Is Amiri telling the truth? The evidence is not now available to know one way or the other. However, his story of abduction and brutal treatment does match CIA tactics used against many innocent detainees in the war on terror, such as [Khalid el-Masri](#), [Binyam Mohamed](#) and [Murat Kurnaz](#).

Moreover, the United States is not above funding and supporting terrorist organizations against the



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Iranian government. The CIA has [allegedly been involved in assisting](#) the terrorist organization [Jundallah](#), a Sunni group opposing the Shiite Iranian government. Jundallah [claimed responsibility](#) for the July 15 bombing of a Mosque in the Iranian provincial capital of Zahedan that [killed 27 civilians](#). A Senior Iranian Revolutionary Guard Massoud Jazayeri [vaguely warned](#) that there would be “fallout” for the U.S. for supporting Jundallah.

Israeli sources, who were [reportedly part of Amiri’s interrogation](#), seem to have [concluded that the Iranian was a double agent all along](#). “At his press conference at Tehran airport,” the London *Independent* [reported](#) July 16, “Mr Amiri stressed that he had acted under compulsion.” The *Independent* went on to quote Amiri claiming: “Israeli agents were present at some of my interrogation sessions and I was threatened to be handed over to Israel if I refused to cooperate with Americans.”

Photo of Shahram Amiri: AP Images



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