

Iran Calls for Investigation into Missing Diplomats

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OE Watch Commentary

In June 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon after an uptick in Palestine Liberation Organization attacks on Israel and Israeli interests abroad. These culminated in the attempted assassination of Israel’s ambassador to the United Kingdom. After Israeli forces entered Lebanon, revolutionary Iran’s leaders debated how to respond—opposition to Israel was a central pillar of the Islamic Republic’s ideology. Supreme Leader Ruhollah Khomeini rejected proposals to deploy Iranian military units to Lebanon, however, because the Islamic Republic needed all available forces to counter the Iraqi invasion of Iran. Instead, he proposed deploying trainers to Lebanon in order to mobilize southern Lebanon’s Shi’ites against Israel and Lebanese Christians.

On 4 July 1982, Iranian Military Attaché Ahmad Motovasselian, Chargé d’affaires Mohsen Mousavi, embassy employee Taqi Rastegar Moqaddam, and Kazem Akhavan, a photographer for the Islamic Republic News Agency, disappeared in Lebanon. Iranian officials have long accused the right-wing Christians Phalangists (today often called the Kataeb Party) as responsible for the attack. The Islamic

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Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) recently issued a statement that the Christian militiamen summarily executed the four, whose bodies were never recovered. In recent years, however, the Iranian Foreign Ministry has said—without any apparent evidence—that Israel had captured or quickly acquired the four Iranian diplomats and transferred them into Israel proper.

The accompanying excerpted statement from the website of Iran’s



Iran’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tehran.

Source: Tasnim News Agency, <https://newsmedia.tasnimnews.com/Tasnim/Uploaded/Image/1395/03/13/139503131150264097830784.jpg>

Foreign Ministry repeats the claim and suggests, however unlikely, that the four may be alive 39 years after their disappearance. The diplomatic purpose for such a claim, however, appears rooted less in new information that the missing Iranians are alive or that the Israelis were directly responsible, and more in an effort to contextualize and deflect responsibility from both Iran’s and Hezbollah’s early hostage-taking. At the same time, keeping the case of the missing Iranian officials alive, even after the IRGC acknowledged their deaths, can be a useful diplomatic tool for Iran by providing a mechanism to officially reintegrate Iran into Lebanese affairs, put Israel on the diplomatic defensive, and delegitimize Israeli concerns about Iranian Jews who disappeared in the 1980s and the subsequent taking of Israeli hostages by Iranian proxies.

Source: “Biyanieh Vizarat-e Amur-e Kharijeh-e Jomhuri Islami Iran be Monisabat-e Si va Nehmin Salruz Rebayesh 4 Diplomat-e Irani (Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the Occasion of the 39th anniversary of the Abduction of Four Iranian Diplomats),” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs* website, 4 July 2021. <https://mfa.ir/portal/NewsView/644019>

On July 4, 1982, a vehicle carrying four Iranian diplomats, namely Seyyed Mohsen Mousavi, Haj Ahmad Motavasselian, Taghi Rastegar Moghaddam and Kazem Akhavan, who were under the immunity of diplomatic police, were kidnapped by armed mercenaries of the Israeli regime in Lebanon’s al-Barbareh area in contravention of international regulations and conventions. Now, on the 39th anniversary of this crime committed by terrorist elements affiliated with the Tel Aviv regime, the families of those diplomats, who have gone through extreme suffering and pain, still hope their loved ones will be freed and return home.... The foreign ministry urgently calls on the incumbent UN chief as well as other international and human rights organizations and institutions, including the Red Cross Society, to pay due regard to this humanitarian and rights issue which pertain to international conventions recognized by the international community, and heed the rightful demand of Iran and the diplomats’ families and children. Accordingly... the Iranian foreign ministry also calls on Lebanese authorities to make serious decisions on Iran’s proposals to set up a cooperation committed to coordinate and regulate the existing data and shed light on the hidden dimensions of the incident....