

The Death Of Fakhrizadeh, and What's to Come

by Hugh Fitzgerald



The head of Iran's nuclear program, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, was assassinated in Iran, almost certainly by members of the Mossad, on November 27. The Iranians have threatened to come down "like lightning" on the perpetrators. A report on the killing, and Iranian threats of revenge, is here: "Iran vows to avenge nuclear mastermind assassinated near Tehran," by Dean Shmuel Elmas and Daniel Siryoti, [Israel Hayom](#), November 27, 2020:

Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, the head of the Islamic republic's nuclear program, was assassinated Friday in a drive-by shooting in the city of Damavand, east of Tehran.

According to Iranian media reports, Fakhrizadeh, 59, was accompanied by his bodyguard when they were ambushed on a

highway. The assailants reportedly used explosives to force his car to stop, then shot him. He died in a nearby hospital shortly thereafter. The bodyguard was wounded in the attack but no details were given on his condition.

The nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh was assassinated today [Friday] by terrorists," the Iranian Defense Ministry said in a statement. "Unfortunately, the medical team did not succeed in reviving him and ... this scientist achieved the high status of martyrdom."

Hossein Dehghan, the military adviser to Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei blamed Israel for the assassination of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh and vowed to retaliate for the killing.

"In the last days of their gambling ally's political life [the Trump administration], the Zionists seek to intensify and increase pressure on Iran to wage a full-blown war," Dehghan wrote, appearing to refer to Trump's last days in office. "We will descend like lightning on the killers of this oppressed martyr and we will make them regret their actions!"

Iran will "descend like lightning" on Fakhrizadeh's killers? Not likely. Rather, the response, if there is one, is going to be like what happened after the Americans killed Qasem Soleimani, head of the Quds Force from 1998 to 2020, at the Baghdad Airport this past January. Iran made threats about a terrific retaliation that would be forthcoming. President Rouhani mentioned in a speech that "The Americans cut off the hand of our dear Soleimani," and as revenge they, the Iranians, would cut off the legs of the Americans and toss them out of neighboring countries.

The result, however, was far from being what Rouhani had threatened. The Iranians shot a few missiles at two Iraqi airbases at Ain al-Asad and Erbil, which the Americans were

known to use; though there were many wounded, no Americans were killed as a result of the strikes, and there was very little damage to the sites. And that was the end of it: no cutting off the legs of the Americans, no vast retaliation for the death of Qassem Soleimani.

On August 7, the #2 leader of Al-Qaeda, Abu Abdullah al-Masri, who had been living, and plotting, in Iran, was assassinated by what everyone believes were agents of Mossad. The Israelis were said to have been asked by the Americans to carry out the killing. The Iranians again promised a harsh revenge, as they had after the killing of Soleimani, this time against not America but Israel. Yet no such attacks by Iran on Israel were forthcoming. Iran no doubt realized that any attack would be met with a crushing response by Israel, and it was not prepared to take that risk.

After the killing of Iran's nuclear mastermind, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, on November 27, Iran pointed again at Israel:

Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif alleged the killing of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh bore "serious indications" of an Israeli role, but did not elaborate.

Terrorists murdered an eminent Iranian scientist today. This cowardice – with serious indications of Israeli role – shows desperate warmongering of perpetrators....

Iranian Chief of Staff for the Armed Forces Maj. Gen. Mohammad Bagheri said his country will "exact a devastating revenge" over the incident, Channel 12 News reported.

The New York Times claimed that three officials had confirmed that Israel – long suspected of killing several Iranian nuclear scientists a decade ago – was behind Fakhrizadeh's elimination as well....

Everyone knows that Mossad in the past has assassinated four

of Iran's top nuclear scientists, as well as unnamed others involved in some aspect of the country's nuclear program.

Certainly Iran does not want to give President Trump any excuse to attack Iran's underground nuclear facilities at Natanz. A response by Iran to the Fakhrizadeh assassination, targeting Israel, would likely lead to a massive response by Israel and possibly an attack by the Trump administration on Iran's nuclear facilities, including those underground at Natanz that can be reached only by American bunker busters (MOPs, or Massive Ordnance Penetrators). For now, it makes more sense for Iran to wait out the end of the Trump administration, on the assumption that Biden is so eager to return to the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran that his administration will not attack Iran itself, and will try to persuade Israel to mitigate its response to any Iranian attack launched as revenge for Fakhrizadeh's killing – that Iran might unleash after January 20, 2021, when Trump is gone.

He [Amos Yadlin] further advised Israeli officials to remain mum on the issue. "When Iran is roused but faces [a retaliation] dilemma and the Pentagon opts to keep quiet, Israeli officials should remember – silence is golden," Yadlin said.

Fakhrizadeh has been described by Western and Israeli intelligence services as the leader of Iran's nuclear weapons program, which was halted in 2003 – the same program Israel and the United States have accused Iran of trying to restore in secret...

While Iran had always described Fakhrizadeh as a university physics professor, he was a member of the Revolutionary Guards and had been seen in pictures in meetings attended by Khamenei – a sign of his political power.

Fakhrizadeh had been sanctioned by the UN Security Council and the US for his work on Iran's nuclear weapons program,

known as AMAD.

In recent years, US sanctions lists name him as heading Iran's Organization for Defensive Innovation and Research. The State Department described that organization last year as working on "dual-use research and development activities, of which aspects are potentially useful for nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons delivery systems."

Clearly Fakhrizadeh was continuing work on Iran's nuclear program, right up until his killing on November 27. He did not stop work in 2003 on AMAD, the nuclear-weapons program that Iran had claimed it had ended in that year. Iran continued to work on its nuclear program right through until his death, both during the period of the nuclear deal, when it supposedly had stopped such work, and since 2018, when the U.S. pulled out of that deal. Iran continued to insist that its nuclear program had always been entirely for peaceful purposes. The Israelis offered mountains of evidence that showed otherwise, from the more than 100,000 documents – Iran's entire nuclear archive – that their agents managed to locate and smuggle out of Iran in 2018.

Wishing to win over the Biden Administration, it is possible that Iran will after January 20 announce that while it has all the evidence it needs to prove that Israel was behind the killing of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, and would be well justified in retaliating for the "murder of our esteemed Professor Fakhrizadeh," Iran instead "has chosen not to do so as a sign of our moderation and desire to fashion a durable peace with the new administration in Washington." Iran may well be given credit by the Biden administration for this "peace overture," given some of those who are now back in the saddle in Washington, including former Secretary of State John Kerry, our Cabinet-level climate czar, who has his personal ties – they got along swimmingly – to Iran's Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, the man who snookered John Forbes Kerry over the Iran

deal.

First published in