OPEN PEER REVIEW

The Role of Foreign Intelligence Organizations in Military and Paramilitary Incidents of the Islamic Republic of Iran

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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

The introduction begins with a very general historical discussion: “Today, intelligence is recognized as one of the most important components of power.” This paragraph is too broad and does not move quickly enough toward the article’s specific research problem. The authors should shorten the historical background and introduce the precise analytical gap: why the Iranian case, why military and paramilitary incidents, and why foreign intelligence organizations require a dedicated study.

The introduction states that “Historical evidence has shown that the victims of military and paramilitary incidents … have belonged to different social groups.” This sentence needs clarification because it shifts from intelligence activity to victim typology without explaining its relevance to the research question. The authors should either connect this claim to the article’s analytical framework or remove it to maintain conceptual coherence.

The “Significance of the Study” paragraph claims that the study can help “the country’s intelligence community” and “the legislature,” but it does not explain the practical mechanism through which the findings can inform policy. The authors should specify whether the study contributes to intelligence reform, counterintelligence doctrine, legislative deterrence, crisis management, or national security education.

The paragraph on the “twelve-day war of the Zionist regime against the Islamic Republic of Iran” is highly consequential but underdeveloped and dependent on a 2025 monitoring source. The authors should provide clearer chronology, identify the incident, define the actors involved, and support claims about Palantir, Anduril, Elon Musk’s companies, artificial intelligence, missile tracking, and sixth-generation warfare with multiple credible and verifiable sources.

The coup section states that “more than 100” and then “more than 300” successful and unsuccessful coups occurred from 1945 to 1986. These two figures appear inconsistent unless they are based on different definitions or datasets. The authors should reconcile this discrepancy and clarify whether they are referring to coup attempts, successful coups, military interventions, or intelligence-supported regime-change operations.

In the assassination section, the manuscript states that most post-revolutionary assassinations in Iran were carried out by the Mojahedin-e Khalq “with the support and backing of Western intelligence organizations.” This is a serious allegation and requires a stronger evidentiary basis. The authors should distinguish between direct evidence, indirect support, political asylum, intelligence cooperation, and retrospective interpretation.

The insurrection section includes several historical claims about Kurdish parties, Soviet involvement, and post-revolutionary unrest. However, the paragraph would benefit from a clearer distinction between pre-1979 historical roots and post-1979 military-paramilitary incidents. The authors should specify which evidence directly supports foreign intelligence involvement after the Islamic Revolution and which evidence belongs to longer historical background.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the document.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

The “Research Hypothesis” states: “It seems that the role of espionage organizations … is to attempt to collect intelligence with the aim of violating the country’s national security.” This hypothesis is too obvious and too narrow compared with the article’s later claims about planning, financing, psychological warfare, assassination, coup, insurrection, and war. The hypothesis should be reformulated into a more analytically testable proposition aligned with the actual content of the paper.

The theoretical foundations section defines “espionage,” “spy,” “intelligence,” and “national security,” but these concepts are presented as dictionary/legal definitions rather than as an integrated analytical framework. The authors should explain how these concepts interact in the study: for example, how espionage differs from covert action, counterintelligence, psychological operations, military assistance, political interference, and proxy warfare.

In the definition of espionage, the manuscript cites several sources but does not resolve differences among legal, intelligence, and criminological definitions. The sentence “Espionage refers to a directed activity whose purpose is to acquire information of intelligence value secretly and covertly” should be compared with the later use of espionage to describe funding, arming, directing, and destabilizing groups. The authors should either broaden the key concept beyond espionage or use separate concepts for intelligence collection and covert operations.

The research background section states: “No domestic study has so far been found on the role of foreign intelligence organizations in military and paramilitary incidents involving the Islamic Republic of Iran.” This is a very strong literature-review claim. The authors should explain the search strategy, databases, keywords, time frame, and inclusion criteria used to reach this conclusion; otherwise, the claim appears unsupported and potentially incomplete.

The literature review is mostly descriptive and source-by-source. For example, the paragraph summarizing Herman, Adams, Turner, and Eftekhari and Naderi Asl does not synthesize their theoretical contributions or limitations. The authors should reorganize the background around themes such as intelligence failure, covert action, proxy conflict, political violence, and crisis escalation instead of merely reporting what each source discussed.

The theoretical framework relies on the “law of criminal saturation and supersaturation,” but the manuscript does not sufficiently justify why a criminological theory of crime fluctuation is appropriate for analyzing foreign intelligence activity. The authors should explain whether espionage is treated as a crime, a political-security behavior, a wartime activity, or a state practice, and how Ferri’s framework can validly be extended to international intelligence operations.

The paragraph beginning “War: Sun Tzu, the Chinese philosopher and warrior…” contains extensive historical and theoretical material on espionage in war, but it becomes overly lengthy and distracts from the Iranian case. The authors should condense the general discussion and use it only to establish specific analytical criteria for evaluating the role of intelligence in wartime contexts.

The section on the Iran–Iraq War includes the sentence “The role of the American intelligence organization in Iraq’s imposed war against the Islamic Republic of Iran became clear…” This claim needs more precise documentation and careful wording. The authors should separate evidence of intelligence sharing, military support, financial channels, diplomatic positioning, and operational direction, because these are analytically different forms of involvement.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the document.

2. Revised

Editor’s decision: Accepted.
Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.