


# Turkey detains 11 over abduction of Iranian dissident - police

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By Reuters Staff

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ISTANBUL (Reuters) - Turkey has detained 11 people involved in the abduction and smuggling to Iran of an Iranian dissident wanted by Tehran in connection with a deadly 2018 attack in southwestern Iran, Turkish authorities said on Monday.

Habib Chaab, an Iranian ethnic Arab separatist leader, was drugged and kidnapped by a network working “on behalf of Iran’s intelligence service” after being lured into flying to Turkey by an Iranian intelligence operative, a senior official said.

Iran’s state media said in November that Iranian intelligence ministry officers arrested Chaab over suspected involvement in a 2018 attack on a military parade that killed dozens of people, without saying when or how he was detained.

Chaab, who was based in Sweden, was persuaded to fly to Turkey to meet a woman who, unknown to him, worked for Iranian intelligence, the Turkish official said.

When he arrived in Istanbul he went to a rendezvous point, where he was drugged and tied down, the official said. Istanbul police said Chaab was spirited from the city to Turkey’s eastern province of Van, and from there across the border into Iran.

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The 11 people were arrested two weeks ago, police said.

The account of Chaab’s abduction was first reported by the Washington Post. There was no immediate public comment from Iran.

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Chaab’s detention comes one year after another Iranian dissident, Masoud Molavi Vardanjani, was shot dead on an Istanbul street. Two senior officials told Reuters that the killing was instigated by intelligence officers at Iran’s consulate in Turkey.

Turkish broadcaster CNN Turk said the operation to detain the 11 suspected of abducting Chaab was also prompted by the seizure of other Iranian opposition figures.

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On Saturday, Iran executed dissident journalist Ruhollah Zam, who was convicted of fomenting violence during anti-government protests in 2017, Iranian state television reported. Zam was captured in 2019 after living in exile in France. Zam's execution has stirred outrage in Europe.

CNN Turk said Turkey's intelligence agency had determined that there had been abductions, including that of Chaab, by people who formed Iran's intelligence network in Turkey and who were linked to a convicted Iranian drug smuggler, Naji Sharifi Zindashti.

Hurriyet newspaper said Chaab had been lured to Istanbul using his ex-wife, who asked to see him and promised to pay back debts to him. There he was put in a minibus and taken back to Iran by people linked to Zindashti, the paper said.

An Iranian ethnic Arab opposition movement called the Ahvaz National Resistance, which seeks a separate state in Iran's oil-rich southwestern province of Khuzestan, claimed responsibility for the 2018 attack that killed 25 people, almost half of them members of Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards.

Islamic State militants also claimed responsibility. Neither claim provided evidence.

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