Berlin Summons Iran Ambassador over IRGC Assassination Plots; Tehran Issues Summons in Return

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The Hamburg Higher Regional Court convicted two men this week, but Tehran denies any role

On 19 October, Germany summoned Iran's ambassador after a Hamburg court convicted a Danish national and an Afghan man of spying on president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany Josef Schuster, and head of the German-Israeli Society and former Green MP Volker Beck, plotting Beck's murder and preparing an arson attack on a Berlin kosher shop. They were sentenced to 8.5 and 4.5 years respectively. The court found the Danish national was tasked by the Quds Force of Iran's Revolutionary Guards.

Tehran has denied involvement and has summoned Germany's ambassador and the EU envoy in response.

The Hamburg verdict leaves little room for doubt: the IRGC organised terrorist plots on German soil against prominent figures of Jewish life and German-Israeli friendship. Berlin's response, however, demonstrates its hesitation to expel Iranian diplomats, mirroring the German response to the Bochum Synagogue attack in 2022.

Expelling the Iranian ambassador, as Volker Beck demands, could jeopardise one of Europe's last diplomatic channels with Tehran. Together with France and the UK, Berlin has tried to keep a European voice on Iran's nuclear programme, even after the 2025 snapback of UN sanctions and after Tehran dismissed the E3 as "irrelevant". With the Strait of Hormuz largely shut and Iran's enriched uranium unverified, Berlin is reluctant to cut one of the E3's remaining lines to Tehran. Yet the E3 is already sidelined, so a firmer response may cost Berlin less than it assumes. Tehran's swift counter-summons, issued during Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's visit to Tehran, suggests it is betting on German caution. Berlin's response will show whether Iranian state terrorism is a red line for Germany, or secondary to safeguarding diplomatic interests.

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