

Obama administration alleges Iranian terrorist plot

Peter Symonds
12 October 2011

Revelations by US Attorney General Eric Holder yesterday afternoon of an alleged Iranian plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador have prompted calls in the American media for retaliation against Iran.

Two men—Manssor Arbabsiar and Gholam Shakuri—have been charged with multiple offences, including conspiracy to murder a foreign official, conspiracy to commit an act of international terrorism, and conspiracy to use a weapon of mass destruction, namely explosives.

Arbabsiar, an American citizen, was arrested on September 29 with the assistance of Mexican authorities, after months of surveillance. He allegedly met several times with a confidential US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) source, believed by Arbabsiar to be connected to a Mexican drug cartel, to carry out the murder for \$1.5 million.

Shakuri, who US officials claim is a member of the elite Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps, is still at large. Arbabsiar only spoke to him over the phone or met with him during visits to Iran.

During yesterday's press conference, FBI head Robert Mueller warned: "Although it reads like the pages of a Hollywood script, the impact would have been very real and many lives would have been lost. We send a clear message that any attempts on American soil will not be tolerated."

Attorney General Holder also declared that the US was "committed to holding Iran accountable for its actions." As a first step, the Obama administration announced financial sanctions yesterday against five Iranians, including the two suspects charged.

In a lengthy interview with the Associated Press, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton went on the diplomatic offensive, explaining that the US was "actively engaged in a very concerted diplomatic outreach to many capitals" to pre-empt any Iranian denial. Making clear that Washington intended to exploit the alleged plot to the hilt, she said that it created "the potential for international reaction that will further isolate Iran."

The Iranian government has emphatically denied any involvement in the alleged plot. Presidential spokesman Ali Akbar Javanfekar commented in Tehran: "The US government and the CIA have very good experience in making up film scripts." Pointing obliquely to the eruption of anti-Wall Street protests, he added: "It appears that this new scenario is for diverting the US public opinion from internal crises."

Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast dismissed the US allegations as a "new propaganda campaign" involving a "prefabricated scenario."

Despite the Iranian denials, the American media has accepted the allegations uncritically, highlighting the more lurid aspects of the plot. At this stage it is not clear if all or any of the US claims are accurate. But some observations can be made based on the formal FBI criminal complaint that has been made public.

Firstly, the FBI case hinges completely on one man, Arbabsiar—his face-to-face and phone contacts with the DEA agent known as CS-1, his subsequent confession and several monitored phone calls to his Iranian contact—alleged to be the Quds Force officer Shakuri. The formal complaint only includes highly selective quotes

from reports and recordings and their interpretation by FBI agent Robert Woloszyn.

Secondly, as the FBI complaint makes clear, the plan to kill the Saudi Arabian ambassador at a restaurant in Washington D.C. was first proposed by CS-1, who also suggested that innocent bystanders could be killed. “[T]here’s going to be like American people there... in the restaurant. You want me to do it outside or in the restaurant?” Arbabsiar is quoted as saying that it would be better to kill just the ambassador, but “sometime, you know, you have no choice, is that right?”

Thirdly, all of the allegations of Iranian involvement are based on Arbabsiar’s confession and phone calls after his arrest to the man known as Shakuri. According to the FBI complaint, Arbabsiar was recruited by his cousin, a colonel in the Quds Force, while visiting Iran, and subsequently met Shakuri and another man, who he believed to be a senior Quds Force officer.

Despite the fact that none of the allegations has been tested in court, sections of the American media and political establishment are already demanding retaliation against Iran. An editorial comment in the *Wall Street Journal* described the assassination as “a wake-up call” to “those who have argued lately that the US should pull its efforts back from a waning international terrorist threat.”

Declaring that “acts of international terrorism... seem to occupy much of the Iranian government’s waking hours”, the *Journal* immediately linked the plot to Tehran’s supposed efforts to build a nuclear weapon. Dismissing current sanctions on Iran as ineffective, the newspaper declared: “It’s past time for US policy toward Iran to reflect the reality of what it is dealing with.”

James Carafino, foreign policy director at the right-wing Heritage Foundation, was more explicit. He criticised the Obama administration for failing to take a hard line on Iran, declaring that the alleged terrorist plan was “a belligerent act against the US” that “as such would call for a proportional military response.”

Some commentators have taken a more critical approach. Stratfor, a think tank with close links to the US military and intelligence establishment, remarked that “this plot seems far-fetched considering the Iranian intelligence services’ usual methods of operation and the

fact that its ramifications would involve substantial political risk.”

Stratfor also questioned the Iranian motive, stating: “It is unclear what the Iranians would have to gain by killing the Saudi ambassador to the United States, and the implications of the plot’s being linked back to Iran are huge. That makes the links back to Iran, which so far are only based on Arbabsiar’s alleged confession, seem exaggerated.”

The *Guardian* based in Britain also described the plot as “out of character for QF (Quds Force)”. The article, entitled “Alleged Iran plot could have been trigger for war in the Middle East,” also noted that the Quds Force had been allegedly involved in arming Iranian-linked militias, such as Hezbollah in the Middle East, and in the 1994 bombing of a Jewish community centre in Argentina.

The *Guardian* added: “However, to extend those operations to US territory would represent a significant leap in scope and ambitions. The way the plot was conducted would also suggest that the ruthlessly efficient QF had lost touch, being clumsy enough to transfer money from accounts under its control directly into US bank accounts.”

While details of the plot are unclear, its ramifications are all too evident. The revelations have already inflamed tensions between Iran and its regional rival and close US ally, Saudi Arabia. Moreover, while the immediate response of the Obama administration has been limited to financial sanctions, the claims could provide the pretext for a dramatic escalation of punitive US measures against Iran over a range of issues—from its nuclear program to its alleged support for anti-occupation forces inside Iraq and Afghanistan.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact