

US steps up sanctions and threats against Iran over alleged terror plot

Bill Van Auken
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The White House announced Wednesday that it is imposing a new round of economic sanctions against Iran, while Vice President Joseph Biden warned that “nothing has been taken off the table” in regard to Washington’s response to an alleged plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador in Washington, suggesting the possibility of military strikes.

Among the new targets of US sanctions is Mahan Air, Iran’s first privately owned airline, which flies to 12 countries. US officials claimed that the airline was involved in “secretly ferrying” members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps.

Washington has seized upon the alleged plot to attempt to terrorize the American people, issuing a global travel warning against unspecified threats supposedly emanating from Iran while cautioning that attacks within the US itself are also possible.

The supposed terrorist plot was announced to the public by US Attorney General Eric Holder on Tuesday in Washington. The Justice Department’s case involves a wildly unlikely scenario involving a failed Iranian-American used car dealer from Texas, Manssor Arbabsiar, traveling to Mexico and attempting to enlist the feared drug cartel Los Zetas in a plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador, Adel al-Jubeir, by blowing him up in an unnamed Washington restaurant. The other relevant plot twist is the fact that the supposed representative of Los Zetas contacted by Arbabsiar happened to be a confidential informant for the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA).

During Tuesday’s press conference, FBI Director Robert Mueller felt compelled to note that the government’s case “reads like the pages of a Hollywood script.”

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton commented to the Associated Press: “The idea that they would attempt to go to a Mexican drug cartel to solicit murder-for-hire to kill the Saudi ambassador, nobody could make that up, right?”

That is precisely the question raised by the entire affair. It has all the earmarks of the type of conspiracy that has been “made up” by the US government repeatedly in the course of its “global war on terrorism,” using covert agents to ensnare hapless individuals in terrorist plots that never existed before US agencies invented it.

In this case, however, the alleged plot has been fashioned to implicate not merely a few individuals, but a nation of 75 million people and its government, setting the stage for a potential war that would prove far more catastrophic than the US interventions in Iraq or Afghanistan.

The only other person named in this alleged plot is Gholam

Shakuri, described as a member of the Quds Brigade, the special operations division of the 150,000-member Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps.

What evidence the government claims to have, while wrapping the case in the mantle of national security secrecy, is of the flimsiest character and none of it indicates direct involvement in or even knowledge of the alleged plot by the Iranian government. Virtually all of it stems from a confession extracted from Arbabsiar, who was described by a former business partner as “sort of a hustler... albeit a bit lazy” and “no mastermind.”

Nonetheless, by Wednesday, US officials, “speaking on condition of anonymity,” were claiming that it was “more than likely” that Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, knew of the alleged plot to kill the Saudi ambassador.

Such involvement was taken for granted by the US corporate media, which has treated the Iranian government as already tried, convicted and waiting for its sentence to be imposed. Well trained CIA mouthpieces such as CNN’s Wolf Blitzer have jumped on the case, stressing the most lurid elements of the government’s charges, which are accepted as proven.

The media’s response only proves that it is organically incapable of learning anything from its reaction to the similarly unproven charges concerning “weapons of mass destruction” that played such a crucial role in paving the way for the war against Iraq. Once again, the establishment media serves as a jingoistic instrument of war propaganda.

One of the details played up in most media reports about the supposed plot to kill the Saudi envoy by planting a bomb in his favorite Washington restaurant is the indifference of the plotters to potentially killing scores of others. Few of the reports have bothered to accurately quote Justice Department officials, who referred to the bomb plot targeting a “fictional restaurant” because the scheme was invented by the government agents and referred to no real eatery frequented by Mr. al-Jubeir. US Attorney Preet Bharara clarified that no explosives were involved and “no one was actually ever in any danger.”

The announcement of the supposed assassination conspiracy has provoked a flurry of demands from US politicians for retaliation. Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, the Republican chairwoman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, claimed that the case proved that the “threat posed by Iran becomes more severe every day.” She said it had to be met with “crippling pressure on the Iranian regime and its enablers.”

Representative Peter King, the Republican chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security, called the alleged plot an “act of war” and called on the Obama administration to deport any Iranian officials present in the US.

Senator Dianne Feinstein, the Democratic chairwoman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, affirmed that the supposed conspiracy had to involve top levels of the Iranian government. “I just don’t see how this could be done any other way,” she said.

For his part, President Obama called the alleged plot a “flagrant violation of US and international law.” Vice President Biden called it “an outrageous act, where the Iranians will have to be held accountable.”

In expressing their moral outrage over a hypothetical assassination plot that was apparently concocted by US intelligence, they all express the utter hypocrisy of the American ruling elite and the US government, which routinely carries out real assassinations all over the world and has even created a secret committee of the National Security Council to draw up hit lists that include US citizens. Iran itself has seen a number of its leading scientists murdered in what is widely deemed a US-Israeli campaign to sabotage the country’s nuclear program.

Given that the “sting” operation dates back to May and President Obama was briefed on it in June, the question inevitably arises as to why the White House has picked this moment to spring the alleged plot on the American public.

The Iranian government itself provided a perceptive explanation. “The US government and the CIA have very good experience in making up film scripts,” said Iranian presidential spokesman Ali Akbar Javanfekr in Tehran. Referring to the nationwide spread of anti-Wall Street protests, he added: “It appears that this new scenario is for diverting the US public opinion from internal crises.”

There is no doubt that the US ruling elite and its political establishment are becoming increasingly concerned about the social and economic crisis in the US and the growing anger of working people and youth, which has found an expression in the demonstrations against Wall Street. Promoting fear of a terrorist attack and preparing once again for war serve a definite political purpose in shifting attention from the conditions of mass unemployment and social inequality that have given rise to the nationwide protests.

While uncritically embraced by the mass media, the US charges against Iran have been treated with extreme skepticism by experts on Iran all over the world. Many questioned what possible motive the Iranian government could have in supporting such a plot.

“I am not convinced that Iran would attempt to assassinate the Saudi ambassador in the US. There is no political use to it,” Mohammed Qadri Saeed, a strategic expert at Cairo’s Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, told Reuters.

Under conditions where the uprisings in the Arab world, particularly the upheavals in Bahrain that were suppressed by Saudi troops and the unrest in Saudi Arabia’s own eastern province, are isolating and undermining the Saudi monarchy, Iran’s chief regional rival, such a plot could serve only to bolster the Saudi regime’s rule and justify redoubled US support.

The *New York Times* was compelled to acknowledge that

Washington’s charges “provoked puzzlement from specialists on Iran, who said it seemed unlikely that the government would back a brazen murder and bombing plan on American soil.”

Among those questioning the US claims was Robert Baer, a 21-year veteran CIA case officer in the Middle East. He told ABC News that the US charges were not “credible.” The supposed plot, he said, “doesn’t fit their modus operandi at all.” He continued: “It’s completely out of character, they’re much better than this. They wouldn’t be sending money through an American bank, they wouldn’t be going to the cartels in Mexico to do this. It’s just not the way they work.”

Baer warned that the US administration could respond to the supposed conspiracy with “retaliatory attacks, you know, hit, bomb a Quds Force base in Tehran, any number of things, of course, which would lead to a huge escalation.”

The ex-CIA agent suggested that the plot could have been the work of someone “attempting to frame the government” in Tehran.

Why would Iran’s elite secret service choose a bankrupt former used car dealer with a criminal record to execute its first-ever plot on US soil? Why would this individual be sent to Mexico to seek out and hire Los Zetas, whose enterprise is drugs and the elimination of rival narco-traffickers, to kill an ambassador in Washington? The US Justice Department has provided no answers to these questions.

The most plausible explanation is that Arbabsiar was in Mexico not to carry out an assassination plan for the Quds force, but rather to conduct a drug deal. Caught by the DEA, he could have been “flipped,” becoming an instrument for the US government to concoct a phony terror case against Iran.

If this is indeed the case, it is another indication of the extreme recklessness of US foreign policy and Washington’s relentless search for provocations as a means of advancing its geo-strategic interests. The deepening economic crisis has only made US imperialism more desperate to assert its domination over the oil-producing regions of the Persian Gulf and Central Asia, for which it has fought over the past decade in Afghanistan and Iraq. Increasingly, it sees Iran as the regional power that stands in the way of these predatory aims.



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