



Department of Justice

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TWO MEN CHARGED IN ALLEGED PLOT TO ASSASSINATE SAUDI ARABIAN AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED STATES

WASHINGTON – Two individuals have been charged in New York for their alleged participation in a plot directed by elements of the Iranian government to murder the Saudi Ambassador to the United States with explosives while the Ambassador was in the United States.

The charges were announced by Attorney General Eric Holder; FBI Director Robert S. Mueller; Lisa Monaco, Assistant Attorney General for National Security; and Preet Bharara, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York;

A criminal complaint filed today in the Southern District of New York charges Manssor Arbabsiar, a 56-year-old naturalized U.S. citizen holding both Iranian and U.S. passports, and Gholam Shakuri, an Iran-based member of Iran's Qods Force, which is a special operations unit of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) that is said to sponsor and promote terrorist activities abroad.

Both defendants are charged with conspiracy to murder a foreign official; conspiracy to engage in foreign travel and use of interstate and foreign commerce facilities in the commission of murder-for-hire; conspiracy to use a weapon of mass destruction (explosives); and conspiracy to commit an act of international terrorism transcending national boundaries. Arbabsiar is further charged with an additional count of foreign travel and use of interstate and foreign commerce facilities in the commission of murder-for-hire.

Shakuri remains at large. Arbabsiar was arrested on Sept. 29, 2011, at New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport and will make his initial appearance today before in federal court in Manhattan. He faces a maximum potential sentence of life in prison if convicted of all the charges.

"The criminal complaint unsealed today exposes a deadly plot directed by factions of the Iranian government to assassinate a foreign Ambassador on U.S. soil with explosives," said Attorney General Holder. "Through the diligent and coordinated efforts of our law enforcement and intelligence agencies, we were able to disrupt this plot before anyone was harmed. We will continue to investigate this matter vigorously and bring those who have violated any laws to justice."

“The investigation leading to today’s charges illustrates both the challenges and complexities of the international threat environment, and our increased ability today to bring together the intelligence and law enforcement resources necessary to better identify and disrupt those threats, regardless of their origin,” said FBI Director Mueller.

“The disruption of this plot is a significant milestone that stems from months of hard work by our law enforcement and intelligence professionals,” said Assistant Attorney General Monaco. “I applaud the many agents, analysts and prosecutors who helped bring about today’s case.”

“As alleged, these defendants were part of a well-funded and pernicious plot that had, as its first priority, the assassination of the Saudi Ambassador to the United States, without care or concern for the mass casualties that would result from their planned attack,” said U.S. Attorney Bharara. “Today’s charges should make crystal clear that we will not let other countries use our soil as their battleground.”

The Alleged Plot

The criminal complaint alleges that, from the spring of 2011 to October 2011, Arbabsiar and his Iran-based co-conspirators, including Shakuri of the Qods Force, have been plotting the murder of the Saudi Ambassador to the United States. In furtherance of this conspiracy, Arbabsiar allegedly met on a number of occasions in Mexico with a DEA confidential source (CS-1) who has posed as an associate of a violent international drug trafficking cartel. According to the complaint, Arbabsiar arranged to hire CS-1 and CS-1’s purported accomplices to murder the Ambassador, and Shakuri and other Iran-based co-conspirators were aware of and approved the plan. With Shakuri’s approval, Arbabsiar has allegedly caused approximately \$100,000 to be wired into a bank account in the United States as a down payment to CS-1 for the anticipated killing of the Ambassador, which was to take place in the United States.

According to the criminal complaint, the IRCG is an arm of the Iranian military that is composed of a number of branches, one of which is the Qods Force. The Qods Force conducts sensitive covert operations abroad, including terrorist attacks, assassinations and kidnappings, and is believed to sponsor attacks against Coalition Forces in Iraq. In October 2007, the U.S. Treasury Department designated the Qods Force for providing material support to the Taliban and other terrorist organizations.

The complaint alleges that Arbabsiar met with CS-1 in Mexico on May 24, 2011, where Arbabsiar inquired as to CS-1’s knowledge with respect to explosives and explained that he was interested in, among other things, attacking an embassy of Saudi Arabia. In response, CS-1 allegedly indicated that he was knowledgeable with respect to C-4 explosives. In June and July 2011, the complaint alleges, Arbabsiar returned to Mexico and held additional meetings with CS-1, where Arbabsiar explained that his associates in Iran had discussed a number of violent missions for CS-1 and his associates to perform, including the murder of the Ambassador.

\$1.5 Million Fee for Alleged Assassination

In a July 14, 2011, meeting in Mexico, CS-1 allegedly told Arbabsiar that he would need to use four men to carry out the Ambassador's murder and that his price for carrying out the murder was \$1.5 million. Arbabsiar allegedly agreed and stated that the murder of the Ambassador should be handled first, before the execution of other attacks. Arbabsiar also allegedly indicated he and his associates had \$100,000 in Iran to pay CS-1 as a first payment toward the assassination and discussed the manner in which that payment would be made.

During the same meeting, Arbabsiar allegedly described to CS-1 his cousin in Iran, who he said had requested that Arbabsiar find someone to carry out the Ambassador's assassination. According to the complaint, Arbabsiar indicated that his cousin was a "big general" in the Iranian military; that he focuses on matters outside Iran and that he had taken certain unspecified actions related to a bombing in Iraq.

In a July 17, 2011, meeting in Mexico, CS-1 noted to Arbabsiar that one of his workers had already traveled to Washington, D.C., to surveil the Ambassador. CS-1 also raised the possibility of innocent bystander casualties. The complaint alleges that Arbabsiar made it clear that the assassination needed to go forward, despite mass casualties, telling CS-1, "They want that guy [the Ambassador] done [killed], if the hundred go with him f**k 'em." CS-1 and Arbabsiar allegedly discussed bombing a restaurant in the United States that the Ambassador frequented. When CS-1 noted that others could be killed in the attack, including U.S. senators who dine at the restaurant, Arbabsiar allegedly dismissed these concerns as "no big deal."

On Aug. 1, and Aug. 9, 2011, with Shakuri's approval, Arbabsiar allegedly caused two overseas wire transfers totaling approximately \$100,000 to be sent to an FBI undercover account as a down payment for CS-1 to carry out the assassination. Later, Arbabsiar allegedly explained to CS-1 that he would provide the remainder of the \$1.5 million after the assassination. On Sept. 20, 2011, CS-1 allegedly told Arbabsiar that the operation was ready and requested that Arbabsiar either pay one half of the agreed upon price (\$1.5 million) for the murder or that Arbabsiar personally travel to Mexico as collateral for the final payment of the fee. According to the complaint, Arbabsiar agreed to travel to Mexico to guarantee final payment for the murder.

Arrest and Alleged Confession

On or about Sept. 28, 2011, Arbabsiar flew to Mexico. Arbabsiar was refused entry into Mexico by Mexican authorities and, according to Mexican law and international agreements; he was placed on a return flight destined for his last point of departure. On Sept. 29, 2011, Arbabsiar was arrested by federal agents during a flight layover at JFK International Airport in New York. Several hours after his arrest, Arbabsiar was advised of his *Miranda* rights and he agreed to waive those rights and speak with law enforcement agents. During a series of *Mirandized* interviews, Arbabsiar allegedly confessed to his participation in the murder plot.

According to the complaint, Arbabsiar also admitted to agents that, in connection with this plot, he was recruited, funded and directed by men he understood to be senior officials in Iran's Qods Force. He allegedly said these Iranian officials were aware of and approved of the use of CS-1 in connection with the plot; as well as payments to CS-1; the means by which the Ambassador would be killed in the United States and the casualties that would likely result.

Arbabsiar allegedly told agents that his cousin, who he had long understood to be a senior member of the Qods Force, had approached him in the early spring of 2011 about recruiting narco-traffickers to kidnap the Ambassador. Arbabsiar told agents that he then met with the CS-1 in Mexico and discussed assassinating the Ambassador. According to the complaint, Arbabsiar said that, afterwards, he met several times in Iran with Shakuri and another senior Qods Force official, where he explained that the plan was to blow up a restaurant in the United States frequented by the Ambassador and that numerous bystanders could be killed, according to the complaint. The plan was allegedly approved by these officials.

In October 2011, according to the complaint, Arbabsiar made phone calls at the direction of law enforcement to Shakuri in Iran that were monitored. During these phone calls, Shakuri allegedly confirmed that Arbabsiar should move forward with the plot to murder the Ambassador and that he should accomplish the task as quickly as possible, stating on Oct. 5, 2011, “[j]ust do it quickly, it’s late . . .” The complaint alleges that Shakuri also told Arbabsiar that he would consult with his superiors about whether they would be willing to pay CS-1 additional money.

This investigation is being conducted by the FBI Houston Division and DEA Houston Division, with assistance from the FBI New York Joint Terrorism Task Force. The prosecution is being handled by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Glen Kopp and Edward Kim, of the Terrorism and International Narcotics Unit of the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of New York, with assistance from the Counterterrorism Section of the Justice Department’s National Security Division. The Office of International Affairs of the Justice Department’s Criminal Division and the U.S. State Department provided substantial assistance. We thank the government of Mexico for its close coordination and collaboration in this matter, and for its role in ensuring that the defendant was safely apprehended.

The charges contained in a criminal complaint are mere allegations and defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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