

WebMemo



Published by The Heritage Foundation

No. 3392
October 12, 2011

Forty-Second Plot Highlights State-Sponsored Terrorism Threat

James Jay Carafano, Ph.D.

On October 11 in New York, the Justice Department charged Manssor Arbabsiar, an Iranian-born naturalized U.S. citizen, and Gholam Shakuri with an array of charges related to a plot to assassinate the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the U.S., Adel al-Jubeir, by bombing a public venue in Washington, D.C. The plotters stated that they were unconcerned if innocent civilians died in the attack. This threat was uncovered when the plotters contacted an informant for the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency in Mexico who claimed he could hire a transnational criminal cartel to undertake the attack.

This represents at least the 42nd foiled terrorist plot aimed at the U.S. since the September 11, 2001, attacks on New York City and Washington. It also highlights the lack of attention the Obama Administration has paid to the threat of state-sponsored terrorism.

A Harbinger of Things to Come? The unique distinguishing feature of this plot is that the indictment links the conspiracy to the Qods Force, a special unit of the Iran Revolutionary Guards Corps, which falls under the supervision of the Iranian government in Tehran. According to the State Department's 2010 report on terrorism:

Designated as a State Sponsor of Terrorism in 1984, Iran remained the most active state sponsor of terrorism in 2010. Iran's financial, material, and logistic support for terrorist and militant groups throughout the Middle East and Central Asia had a direct impact on international efforts to promote peace, threatened

economic stability in the Gulf, and undermined the growth of democracy.

In 2010, Iran remained the principal supporter of groups implacably opposed to the Middle East Peace Process. The Qods Force, the external operations branch of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), is the regime's primary mechanism for cultivating and supporting terrorists abroad. Iran provided weapons, training, and funding to Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist groups, including the Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC).

This is the first publicly known post-9/11 Islamist-inspired terror plot aimed at the United States specifically linked to state-sponsored terrorism.

Wake-Up Call for the White House. The Administration has not given sufficient attention to the threat of state-sponsored terrorism. On June 28, the White House released its "new" National Strategy for Counterterrorism. The 19-page document makes exactly one reference to Iran. The subject of state-sponsored terrorism is virtually ignored.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
<http://report.heritage.org/wm3392>

Produced by the Douglas and Sarah Allison
Center for Foreign Policy Studies

Published by The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4999
(202) 546-4400 • heritage.org

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

On August 24, The Heritage Foundation Counterterrorism Task Force published “A Counterterrorism Strategy for the Next Wave.”¹ The Heritage report criticized the Administration for neglecting to address state-sponsored terrorism:

The President’s strategy pays insufficient attention to state-sponsored terrorism, which will increasingly be a major force to be reckoned with. Iran is one of the most prominent and aggressive state sponsors of terror and its protégés—both Hamas and Hezbollah—represent potentially grave threats. In addition, transnational criminal cartels in Mexico are increasingly taking on the character of terrorist networks.

The report concluded that it was past time for the U.S. to take proactive measures to deal with these threats. In particular regarding Iran, the report concluded:

The iron triangle of state-sponsored terrorism—Iran, Hamas, and Hezbollah—is potentially as significant a threat to U.S. interests as a reconstituted al-Qaeda. Iran remains vd by bringing freedom to the people under the tyranny of the leadership in Tehran—change that has to come from within the country.

Action Required. While the foiling of this plot demonstrates that effective counterterrorism investigative and information-sharing tools are essential for stopping attacks against the U.S. before they come to fruition, dealing with state-sponsored terrorism demands additional measures. The Administration should:

- **Take strong measures to respond.** The U.S. is fully within its rights to conduct a proportional military response against suitable, feasible, and acceptable targets in Iran. (In many ways, the situation is similar to military operations conducted against

al-Qaeda in Pakistan.) The Iranian government knows full well that the Iran Qods Force is a terrorist group that has provided material support to the Taliban and other groups. The Tehran government has not restrained this organization and is responsible for its conduct.

- **Impose and enforce the strongest sanctions.** The U.S. should push other concerned countries to enforce targeted sanctions on the Iranian regime and its internal security organs; ban all foreign investment, loans, and credits, subsidized trade, and refined petroleum exports to Iran; and deny visas to its officials.
- **Target public diplomacy to expose the regime’s human rights abuses.** Such a campaign should document the abuses and aid victims, step up broadcasting and support for independent Iranian broadcasters outside the country to expose corruption of officials and the regime’s lavish aid to terrorists, and educate Iranians about genuine representative democracy.
- **Reduce Iran’s meddling in Iraq.** The U.S. should maintain the strongest troop presence that Iraq will permit to aid in containing and reducing Iran’s influence. A stable and democratic Iraq offers Shiites an alternative model that helps delegitimize Iran’s Islamist system.

A Dangerous Threat. Finally, the Administration should rescind and rewrite its counterterrorism strategy, acknowledging that the document fails to properly account for the nature of the threats the nation faces today. The U.S. cannot afford to overlook this latest threat to its security.

—James Jay Carafano, Ph.D., is Deputy Director of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies and Director of the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies, a division of the Davis Institute, at The Heritage Foundation.

1. The Heritage Foundation Counterterrorism Task Force, “A Counterterrorism Strategy for the ‘Next Wave,’” Heritage Foundation *Special Report* No. 98, August 24, 2011, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2011/08/A-Counterterrorism-Strategy-for-the-Next-Wave>.