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WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2012

(202) 514-2007

MAN PLEADS GUILTY IN NEW YORK TO CONSPIRING WITH IRANIAN MILITARY OFFICIALS TO ASSASSINATE SAUDI ARABIAN AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED STATES

WASHINGTON - Manssor Arbabsiar, aka Mansour Arbabsiar, pleaded guilty today in federal court in the Southern District of New York to participating in a plot to murder the Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the United States while the Ambassador was in the United States. Arbabsiar, a 58-year-old naturalized U.S. citizen holding both Iranian and U.S. passports, was arrested on Sept. 29, 2011, at New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport. He pleaded guilty today before U.S. District Judge John F. Keenan.

The guilty plea was announced by Attorney General Eric Holder; FBI Director Robert S. Mueller; Michele M. Leonhart, Administrator of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA); Lisa Monaco, Assistant Attorney General for National Security; and Preet Bharara, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York.

Arbabsiar pleaded guilty to a superseding information that charges him with three counts. Count one charges Arbabsiar with traveling in foreign commerce and using interstate and foreign commerce facilities in the commission of murder-for-hire. Count two charges him with conspiring to do so. Count three charges Arbabsiar with conspiring to commit an offense against the United States, namely, an act of terrorism transcending national boundaries. He faces a maximum potential sentence of 25 years in prison (10 years on counts one and two, and five years on count three). Arbabsiar is scheduled to be sentenced by Judge Keenan on Jan. 23, 2013, at 11:30 a.m.

In connection with his guilty plea, Arbabsiar admitted that, from the spring of 2011 to the fall of 2011, he conspired with officials in the Iranian military who were based in Iran, to cause the assassination of the Saudi Arabian Ambassador while the Ambassador was in the United States. Arbabsiar acknowledged that at the direction of these co-conspirators, he traveled to Mexico on several occasions during 2011 in order to arrange the assassination of the Ambassador. Arbabsiar admitted that, with his co-conspirators' approval, he had arranged to hire a DEA confidential source (CS-1), who claimed to be a representative of a drug cartel, and CS-1's criminal associates, to murder the Ambassador. Arbabsiar further admitted that he agreed to pay \$1.5 million to CS-1 and had discussed with CS-1 a plan to murder the Ambassador at a restaurant in Washington, D.C. -- a plan that was approved by Arbabsiar's co-conspirators. Arbabsiar then arranged for a \$100,000 down payment, in two installments, to be wired to CS-1.

As noted in the complaint and indictment previously filed in Manhattan federal court, the Qods Force is a branch of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The Qods Force conducts sensitive covert operations abroad, including terrorist attacks, assassinations and kidnappings, and is believed to have sponsored attacks against Coalition Forces in Iraq. In October 2007, the U.S. Treasury Department designated the Qods Force under Executive Order 13224 for providing material support to the Taliban and other terrorist organizations.

"A little more than a year after his arrest, Manssor Arbabsiar has admitted to his role in a deadly plot approved by members of the Iranian military to assassinate a sitting foreign Ambassador on U.S. soil," said Attorney General Holder. "Today's plea and the disruption of this plot should serve as a reminder of the exceptional efforts of our law enforcement and intelligence agencies in protecting America against terrorist attacks and in holding accountable those who plan such actions."

"The dangerous connection between drug trafficking and terrorism cannot be overstated, and this case is yet another example of DEA's unique role in identifying potentially deadly networks that wish to harm innocent Americans and our allies worldwide," said DEA Administrator Leonhart. "Using DEA's elaborate and sophisticated investigative expertise to infiltrate violent drug and terror organizations globally, we successfully identified this threat and worked closely with the FBI to prevent a potentially deadly outcome."?

"Thanks to the collaborative efforts of many U.S. law enforcement and intelligence professionals, this international assassination plot hatched in Iran was thwarted before anyone was harmed and a key conspirator has pleaded guilty. This case underscores the evolving threat environment we face and the need for continued vigilance at home and abroad," said Assistant Attorney General Monaco.

U.S. Attorney Bharara stated: "As was originally charged, and as Arbabsiar has now admitted, he was the extended murderous hand of his co-conspirators, officials of the Iranian military based in Iran, who plotted to kill the Saudi Ambassador in the United States and were willing to kill as many bystanders as necessary to do so. Arbabsiar traveled to and from the United States, Mexico and Iran and was in telephone contact with his Iranian confederates while he brokered an audacious plot. The audacity of the plot should not cause doubt, but rather vigilance regarding others like Arbabsiar, who are enlisted as the violent emissaries of plotting foreign officials. This office will continue to pursue the co-conspirators in this plot and others in Iran or elsewhere who try to export murder. Thanks to the great work of the FBI, DEA and the prosecutors in this office, Mr. Arbabsiar must now answer for his conduct."

According to the complaint and indictment filed in Manhattan federal court, as well as the information to which Arbabsiar pleaded:

Arbabsiar met with CS-1 in Mexico on multiple occasions between May 2011 and July 2011. During the course of these meetings, 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 and the murder of the Saudi Ambassador to the United States. In a July 14, 2011, meeting in Mexico, CS-1 told Arbabsiar that he would need to use at least four men to carry out the Ambassador's murder and that his price for carrying out the murder was \$1.5 million. Arbabsiar agreed and stated that the murder of the Ambassador should be handled first, before the execution of other attacks that Arbabsiar had discussed with CS-1. Arbabsiar also indicated that he and his associates had \$100,000 in Iran to pay CS-1 as a first payment toward the assassination.

During the same meeting, Arbabsiar also described to CS-1 his cousin in Iran, who he said had requested that Arbabsiar find someone to carry out the Ambassador's assassination. Arbabsiar indicated that his cousin was a "big general" in the Iranian military; that he focuses on matters outside of 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. 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 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 dismissed these concerns as "no big deal."

On Aug. 1 and Aug. 9, 2011, Arbabsiar 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 explained to CS-1 that he would provide the remainder of the \$1.5 million after the assassination. On Sept. 20, 2011, CS-1 told Arbabsiar that the operation was ready and requested that Arbabsiar either pay one half 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. Arbabsiar agreed to travel to Mexico to guarantee final payment for the murder.

On Sept. 28, 2011, Arbabsiar flew to Mexico. Arbabsiar was refused entry into Mexico and 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 confessed to his participation in the murder plot.

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 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 also 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 CS-1 in Mexico and discussed assassinating the Ambassador. Arbabsiar said that, afterwards, he met several times in Iran with Gholam Shakuri, aka "Ali Gholam Shakuri," a co-conspirator and Iran-based member of the Qods Force, and another senior Qods Force official, where Arbabsiar explained that the plan was to blow up a restaurant in the United States frequented by the Ambassador and that numerous bystanders would be killed. The plan was approved by these officials.

In October 2011, after his arrest, Arbabsiar made phone calls at the direction of law enforcement to Shakuri in Iran that were monitored. During these phone calls, Shakuri 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." Shakuri also told Arbabsiar that he would consult with his superiors about whether they would be willing to pay CS-1 additional money. Shakuri, who was also charged in the plot, remains at large. The charges against Shakuri are merely accusations, and he is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

This investigation is being conducted by the FBI Houston Division, the DEA Houston Division and the FBI New York Joint Terrorism Task Force. The prosecution is being handled by the Terrorism and International Narcotics Unit of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, specifically Assistant U.S. Attorneys Glen Kopp, Edward Kim and Stephen Ritchin. The Counterterrorism Section of the Justice Department's National Security Division and the Office of International Affairs of the Justice Department's Criminal Division provided substantial assistance. The government of Mexico is also recognized for its cooperation in this matter.

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