

Manssor Arbabsiar Sentenced in New York City Federal Court to 25 Years in Prison for Conspiring with Iranian Military Officials to Assassinate the Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the United States

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WASHINGTON—Manssor Arbabsiar, aka “Mansour Arbabsiar,” was sentenced today in New York City federal court to 25 years in prison for participating in a plot to murder the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the U.S. while the ambassador was in the U.S., announced John Carlin, Acting Assistant Attorney General for the National Security Division at the Department of Justice and Preet Bharara, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York.

Arbabsiar, a 58 year-old naturalized U.S. citizen holding both Iranian and U.S. passports, was arrested on September 29, 2011, at John F. Kennedy International Airport. He pleaded guilty on October 17, 2012, to one count of murder-for-hire, one count of conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire, and one count of conspiracy to commit an act of terrorism transcending national boundaries before U.S. District Judge John F. Keenan, who also imposed today’s sentence.

“Thanks to the collaborative efforts of many U.S. law enforcement and intelligence professionals, Manssor Arbabsiar is today being held accountable for his role in this assassination plot,” said Acting Assistant Attorney General for National Security John Carlin. “I applaud all those responsible for ensuring that Arbabsiar and his co-conspirators in Iran’s Qods Force failed in their efforts. Today’s sentencing serves as a reminder of the evolving threat environment we face.”

“Manssor Arbabsiar was an enemy among us—the key conduit for, and facilitator of, a nefarious international plot concocted by members of the Iranian military to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the United States and as many innocent bystanders as necessary to get the job done,” said U.S. Attorney Bharara. “And but for the vigilance of our FBI and DEA partners, his plot, and the unspeakable harm it would have caused, may well have come to fruition, which is exactly why our commitment to using every resource we have to root out, prosecute, and punish people like Arbabsiar, who act as emissaries for our enemies, remains unflagging.”

According to the complaint and indictment filed in federal court:

From the spring of 2011 to October 2011, Arbabsiar and his Iran-based co-conspirators, including members of Iran’s Qods Force, plotted the murder of the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the U.S. In furtherance of this conspiracy, Arbabsiar met on a number of occasions in Mexico with a DEA confidential source (CS-1) who posed as an associate of a violent international drug trafficking cartel. Arbabsiar arranged to hire CS-1 and CS-1’s purported accomplices to murder the ambassador with the awareness and approval of his Iran-based co-conspirators. Arbabsiar wired approximately \$100,000 to a bank account in the U.S. as a down payment to CS-1 for the

anticipated killing of the ambassador, which was to take place in the U.S, also with the approval of his co-conspirators.

The Qods Force is a branch of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which 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 as a terrorist supporter for providing material support to the Taliban and other terrorist organizations.

Arbabsiar met with CS-1 in Mexico on several occasions between May 2011 and July 2011. During the course of these meetings, he 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 U.S. 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 doing so 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 he had discussed with CS-1. Arbabsiar also indicated that he and his associates had \$100,000 in Iran to give CS-1 as a first payment toward the assassination.

During the same meeting, Arbabsiar also described to CS-1 his cousin in Iran, whom 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— 'em." CS-1 and Arbabsiar discussed bombing a restaurant in the U.S. 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 August 1 and August 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 September 20, 2011, CS-1 told Arbabsiar that the operation was ready and requested that he 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 September 28, 2011, Arbabsiar flew to Mexico, and he was refused entry into the country and placed on a return flight destined for his last point of departure. The following day, 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.

In addition, Arbabsiar 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 U.S., and the casualties that would likely result.

Arbabsiar also told agents that his cousin, whom 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. He 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 U.S. frequented by the ambassador and that numerous bystanders would be killed. According to Arbabsiar, 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 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 October 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.

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In addition to the prison term, Arbabsiar was ordered to pay forfeiture in the amount of \$125,000.

This case was investigated by the FBI Houston Division, the DEA Houston Division, and the FBI New York Joint Terrorism Task Force, with the assistance of the Department of Justice's Office of International Affairs, its National Security Division, and the Department of State. The Government of Mexico also cooperated with the investigation.

This case is being handled by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, Terrorism and International Narcotics Unit. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Glen Kopp, Edward Kim, and Stephen Ritchin are in charge of the prosecution with assistance from the Counterterrorism Section of the Justice Department's National Security Division.