

THE FOUR MONTH WARNING OF A NOT-YET RIPE PLOT

I suspect Ha'aretz and Reuters think they're helping build credibility for the Scary Iran Plot by reporting that the Saudis warned the Argentines of the plot four months ago.

Saudi officials advised Argentina four months ago of an alleged Iran-backed plot to kill the Saudi ambassador to Washington and possibly attack the Saudi and Israeli embassies in Buenos Aires, an Argentine diplomatic source said on Thursday.

[snip]

"The Saudis advised us four months ago, at the request of the United States," the Argentine source told Reuters on condition of anonymity, without providing further details.

[snip]

President Barack Obama was briefed in June about the alleged plot, soon after U.S. law enforcement agents were tipped off by a paid informant, according to court documents.

But it seems to introduce more questions than credibility.

Four months ago—assuming the anonymous Argentine diplomat is correct—would mean they were tipped off in mid-June. As Reuters points out, that may be around the time Obama first got briefed on the purported plot.

According to the complaint, the **only** piece of evidence the US had at that time was one unrecorded meeting between Manssor Arbabsiar and Narc. The complaint only supports that Narc

learned Arbabsiar wanted to attack an embassy—consistent with the possibility of attacking the Saudi Embassy in Argentina—or maybe wanted to kidnap Adel Al-Jubeir, not kill him.

Perhaps the anonymous diplomat is off by a few weeks, and she was tipped by the Saudis in late June, after Arbabsiar had returned to Mexico on June 23, and after Arbabsiar had had another unrecorded meeting or more with Narc.

Even if that were the case, the Argentines (and Saudis) were purportedly warned before any recordings of Arbabsiar's statements were made and before any money got transferred—in spite of the fact that sources say the Administration didn't really believe in this plot until that transfer.

Law enforcement and intelligence officials penetrated the alleged plot from the start. But American officials said Wednesday that what persuaded them they were tracking something much more than just idle talk between an Iranian American used-car salesman and a Drug Enforcement Administration informant was the transfer of \$100,000 from Iran in July and August as a down payment to set the assassination in motion.

Note, the reference to a July transfer must refer to the receipt of the money by "Individual 1" before Narc had even provided bank data to Arbabsiar, as the actual transfers through NYC happened in August, which also supports the completely unsurprising conclusion that we didn't need to hear about the transfer from Arbabsiar because we were tracking it electronically.

Nevertheless, do we customarily tell other countries of seemingly improbable plots before we start collecting any hard evidence on those plots?

There are some explanations for this, even

setting aside more tinfoil possibilities (like the Saudis dreamt up the plot and then got Arbabsiar to perform it). The government might, for example, have tape from that May 24 meeting between Narc and Arbabsiar, either taken by Narc or by surveillance in Mexico, that they haven't revealed in the complaint. The government may have a lot more Sigint from Arbabsiar's conversations with Quds Forces figures in Iran, though if that's the case, it means our role performing this plot is even more overdetermined than it already seems. Or it may be we knew directly from Arbabsiar what he was purportedly planning on doing without him having explained it to Narc.

There's one more interesting aspect of this revelation, if true. Why did we outsource informing Argentina to the Saudis rather than telling them ourselves? Meanwhile, the Argentines remain officially mum about the plot.