

THE TWO SCARY IRAN PLOT COMPLAINTS: A COMPARISON

As I wrote on Wednesday, earlier this month, the government released Manssor Arbabsiar's original complaint in the Scary Iran Plot. As I showed, comparing the original with the amended complaint reveals that the government tried to hide the roles of Arbabsiar's brother and several western banks (possibly including Chase) in transferring the money for the plot.

A comparison of the two complaint shows a number of interesting things, which I'll detail below. But the two most striking details are the complete absence of any mention of Gholam Shakuri in the original complaint and the complaint's silence on the opium deal that formed part of Arbabsiar and Narc's discussions.

Remember what I've observed before: four of the five charges against Arbabsiar are conspiracy charges which couldn't be charged without evidence of another conspirator. Now, I expected to see a lot more implicating Shakuri in the second complaint. After all, along with getting a confession during the period when Arbabsiar purportedly waived his Miranda rights, they also got him to make 3 calls to Shakuri that, while they were inconclusive about whether Shakuri knew of an assassination, make it clear he did know about the transfer of \$100,000. But the original complaint doesn't even include the information at ¶33(d) in the amended complaint showing Shakuri delivering more funds to Arbabsiar (and therefore, not surprisingly, the earlier complaint does not include ¶3(c) claiming the earlier funding was one of the overt acts in this conspiracy). In fact, the only co-conspirator alleged in the first complaint is Arbabsiar's cousin, Abdul Reza Shahlai, described as CC-1. Now, I assume the government has a ton of intelligence-derived evidence in this case they don't want to show

us. But in their original complaint, they show very little real evidence of a conspiracy. Which makes Arbabsiar's "cooperation" all the more striking, given that that cooperation forms the key evidence (at least that we've seen) for most of the charges against him.

The complaint's silence on the drug deal is just as interesting. I had speculated that they might have charged Arbabsiar on trafficking charges and used the threat of hard time to convince him to waive Miranda and flesh out the assassination plot. But obviously that's wrong; they didn't include the drug charges in the earlier complaint. So why would the government not charge the Quds Force on efforts to set up drug deals with Los Zetas? Two possibilities are, first, that longer term drug deals are the basis for Arbabsiar's relationship with Narc; revealing that would damage the story line that Arbabsiar just found Narc by accident. A closely related possibility is that the FBI and DEA had recruited Arbabsiar to set up these deals as a way to infiltrate Quds Force, in which case Arbabsiar would be granted immunity for such things. Or maybe they just wanted to keep the focus tightly on the flashy part of the plot?

In any case, here are the other differences, laid out by paragraph (unless specified, the numbering comes from the amended complaint, which has more paragraphs).

Intro and ¶14. Two different agents wrote these complaints. James F. Walsh Jr, who has been a Special Agent since just September 2004, wrote the original complaint (this article refers to an FBI Special Agent who was probably Houston-based in 2005). O. Robert Woloszyn, who has been a Special Agent since March 1999, wrote the second complaint. In spite of having two different ostensible authors, though, the language is almost exactly the same; for the most part Woloszyn just copied over Walsh's language. That's one thing that makes amendments so interesting.

¶1, •. The amended complaint describes the start

date of the conspiracy "spring 2011," as compared to the "May 2011" date in the original complaint. That may reflect earlier conversations Arbabsiar had with Quds Force figures revealed in his confession.

¶13(a-c). As noted, the amended complaint replaces the origin of the money—probably a European bank—with "a foreign entity." And the amended complaint adds language about Arbabsiar's spending money being part of the over conspiracy.

¶14, ¶16. In the original complaint, this paragraph says the \$100,000 money transfer was "as consideration" or "in exchange for an agreement to" commit the murder. In the amended complaint, it describes it as "partial consideration" for doing so. Though both use the phrase "down-payment" in ¶16. Note, too, that the amended complaint makes it clear the Ambassador in question was from Saudi Arabia; in the original complaint, the Ambassador was described to come from "a particular Middle Eastern country." Just a thought: given how vague the reference to the target is and given that Israel, the other target country, was also referred to as a "Middle Eastern country," is it possible the target was at one point the Israeli Ambassador, Dr. Michael Oren?

¶16. In the original complaint, Arbabsiar is described as "a citizen of the United States born in Iran." In the amended complaint, he is described as "a naturalized citizen of the United States who holds both a United States and an Iranian passport." Perhaps they changed this because the latter formulation might suggest dual loyalties. Perhaps his citizenship has been treated as some negotiating chip (which would almost certainly be the case if Arbabsiar had been an informant at some time).

¶17. The amended complaint includes a paragraph on the Quds Force. I guess that's for our benefit?

¶18 [note, this is where the numbering for the

two complaints diverges]. In the original complaint, Narc's response to Arbabsiar's question about Narc's knowledge of explosives, is that "he indeed knowledgeable with respect to C-4 explosives." In the amended complaint, they take out the word "indeed." Now, maybe this change is nothing. But remember, this conversation was purportedly not taped—at least not by Narc. The "indeed" makes it sound like a direct quote. Furthermore, it would seem to suggest a prior basis for Arbabsiar to know that he had C-4 experience—perhaps just what Narc's purported aunt had told Arbabsiar, perhaps from some other representation Narc had already made to Arbabsiar, or perhaps previous knowledge. Who knows?

¶18 footnote 1. In the original complaint, the footnote doesn't specify that Narc's prior charge was in a US state.

¶22(c) adds both the description of which particular country Arbabsiar's country "had taken certain unspecified actions relating to a bombing in," naming Iraq. And adds the reference back to ¶17, which (as I've noted, is a new paragraph). Given that the way Arbabsiar seems to have been speaking from a contested Treasury Department script here, I find the emphasis notable. Also, as noted, the reference in the original complaint is to CC-1, not "Arbarbsiar's cousin, showing that the FBI believed they had implicated Shahlai more directly in this plot than they appear to have in the amended complaint.

¶23 footnote 7. There are two differences in the bracketed comments here. In the original complaint, the bracket describing that the government that Shahlai worked for was "presumably of Iran," whereas **the amended complaint removes the "presumably."** And in the amended complaint, the bracket describing what intelligence service Shahlai was working "like" specified it was a non-Iranian service. This change is, IMO, one of the most significant. As I have noted, the FBI interpretation of a

related passage from the same meeting—which reads “[ARBABSIAR’s co-conspirators in Iran] they pay this government”—seems to misread the passage, stating that it proves Shahlai was being **paid by Iran** rather than **paying it** or another government. Now we learn that another reference presented as a clear tie between Shahlai and Iran is not so clear as the amended complaint suggests. Now, I have suggested that the earlier misreading might reflect this was a rogue plot, backed by some other government (maybe Iraq, for example). While ESL issues are likely one of the factors here, what does seem clear is the tie between Shahlai’s ties to Iran with regards to this plot are weaker than claimed.

¶23(d). As noted, this entire paragraph—describing Shakuri’s involvement in Arbabsiar’s funding—is new to the amended complaint. Presumably, the government either didn’t need to present Arbabsiar’s early funding as part of the conspiracy, or just needed to add it to shore up the evidence against Shakuri, which is of course, their necessary tie to Quds Force.

Original ¶32. As is obvious, everything from amended ¶33—describing Arbabsiar’s arrest in JFK—is new. The original complaint leaves off with the description of Arbabsiar boarding “a plane in a foreign country, bound for Mexico.” So this complaint was seemingly written as he was in transit between Iran and Mexico (or possible en route to the US).