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Attorney General Eric Holder speaks during a news conference at the Justice Department in Washington, Tuesday, Oct. 11, 2011 about an alleged plot directed by elements of the Iranian government to murder the Saudi Ambassador to the United States. □ (Credit: AP Photo/Haraz N. Ghanbari)

(updated below – Update II – Update III – Update IV)

The most difficult challenge in writing about the Iranian Terror Plot unveiled yesterday is to take it seriously enough to analyze it. Iranian Muslims in the Quds Force sending marauding bands of Mexican drug cartel assassins onto sacred American soil to commit Terrorism — against Saudi Arabia and possibly Israel — is what Bill Kristol and John Bolton would feverishly dream

up while dropping acid and madly cackling at the possibility that they could get someone to believe it. But since the U.S. Government rolled out its Most Serious Officials with Very Serious Faces to make these accusations, many people (therefore) do believe it; after all, U.S. government accusations = Truth. All Serious people know that. And in the ensuing reaction one finds virtually every dynamic typically shaping discussions of Terrorism and U.S. foreign policy.

To begin with, this episode continues the FBI’s record-setting [undefeated streak](#) of heroically saving us from the plots they enable. From all appearances, this is, at best, yet another spectacular “plot” hatched by some hapless loser with delusions of grandeur but without any means to put it into action except with the able assistance of the FBI, which yet again provided it through its own (paid, criminal) sources posing as Terrorist enablers. The Terrorist Mastermind at the center of the plot is a

[failed used car salesman](#)

in Texas with a history of pedestrian money problems. Dive under your bed. “For the entire operation, the government’s confidential sources were monitored and guided by federal law enforcement agents,” explained U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara, and “no explosives were actually ever placed anywhere and

no one was actually ever in any danger

.”

But no matter. The U.S. Government and its mindless followers in the pundit and think-tank “expert” class have seized on this ludicrous plot with astonishing speed to all but turn it into a hysterical declaration of war against Evil, Hitlerian Iran. “[The US attorney-general](#) Eric Holder said Iran would be ‘held to account’ over what he described as a flagrant abuse of international law,” and “the US says military action remains on the table,” though “it is at present seeking instead to work through diplomatic and financial means to further isolate Iran.” Hillary Clinton thundered that this “crosses a line that Iran needs to be held to account for.” The CIA’s spokesman at

The Washington Post

, David Ignatius,

[quoted](#)

an anonymous White House official as saying the plot “appeared to have been authorized by senior levels of the Quds Force.” Meanwhile, the State Department has issued

[a Travel Alert](#)

which warns American citizens that this plot “may indicate a more aggressive focus by the Iranian Government on terrorist activity against diplomats from certain countries, to include possible attacks in the United States.”

In case that’s not enough to frighten you — and, really, how could it not be? — some Very Serious Experts are very, very afraid and want you to know how Serious this all is. Within

moments of Holder’s news conference, National Security Expert Robert Chesney – without a molecule of critical thought in his brain — [announced](#) that this “remarkable development” was “**very scary.**”

Very, very scary. Chesney then printed large blocks of the DOJ’s Press Release to prove it. Self-proclaimed “counter-terrorism expert” Daveed Gartenstein-Ross tapped into his vast expertise

[to explain](#)

: “Holder weighing in on the plot’s connection to Iran means the administration is **deadly serious**

about it.” Progressive think-tank expert and *Atlantic*

writer Steve Clemons

[decreed](#)

that if the DOJ’s accusations are true, then “the US has reached a point where it **must take action**

” and “this is time for a

significant strategic response

to the Iran challenge in the Middle East and globally,”

[which](#)

“could involve military.”

The ironies here are so self-evident it’s hard to work up the energy to point them out. Outside of Pentagon reporters, *Washington Post* Editorial Page Editors, and Brookings “scholars,” is there a person on the planet anywhere who can listen with a straight face as drone-addicted U.S.

Government officials righteously condemn the evil, **illegal**

act of entering another country to commit an assassination? Does anyone, for instance, have any interest in finding out who is responsible for the spate of serial murders

[aimed at Iran’s nuclear scientists](#)

? Wouldn’t people professing to be so outraged by the idea of entering another country to engage in assassination be eager to get to the bottom of that?

Then there’s the War on Terror irony: our Hated Enemy here (Iran) is a country which had absolutely nothing to do with the 9/11 attack. Meanwhile, our close ally, the victim on whose behalf we are so outraged (Saudi Arabia), is not only one of the most tyrannical and [aggressiv](#)

[e](#)

[regimes on the planet](#)

, but produced 15 of the 19 hijackers and had

[extensive](#)

and

[still-unknown](#)

involvement in that attack. If the U.S. is so deeply offended by the involvement of a foreign government in an attack on U.S. soil, it would be looking first to its close friend Saudi Arabia,

where “elements of the government” were likely involved in an actual plot rather than a joke of a plot.

To make sure you understand just how dastardly and evil the Iranian plotters here are, the DOJ in [its complaint](#) highlighted that the used-car-salesman-Terrorist-Mastermind said that he preferred that nobody else be killed when the Saudi Ambassador was assassinated, but if it were absolutely necessary, he could accept some unintended deaths! Here’s how the *NYT* summarizes that:

The complaint quotes Mr. Arbabsiar as making conflicting statements about the possibility of bystander deaths; at one point he is said to say that killing the ambassador alone would be preferable, but on another occasion he said it would be “no big deal” if many others at the restaurant — possibly including United States senators — died in any bombing.

What kind of monster thinks that way, we are supposed to ponder. Behold the warped mind of the Terrorist! He’s actually willing to accept that others die besides his intended targeted! Is that not the mentality that drives U.S. behavior in multiple countries around the world every day?

The U.S. [flattened an entire civilian apartment building in Baghdad](#) with a 2,000-pound bomb when it thought Saddam Hussein was there (he wasn’t — oops — but lots of innocent people were). NATO

[repeatedly bombed structures](#)

in Tripoli where it thought (mistakenly) Moammar Gadaffi was located, in the process almost certainly killing large numbers of unintended targets. The U.S. just killed one of its own citizens that it insists (

[not very credibly](#)

) it did not intend to kill in order to eradicate the life of Anwar Awlaki, and

[killed dozens of innocent people](#)

when it previously tried to kill Awlaki with cluster bombs.

The U.S. is the living, breathing symbol of this “collateral damage” rationale. It’s what drives all the multi-nation American wars and occupations and drone campaigns and assassinations that continuously [pile up the corpses of innocent people](#). But we’re all going to gather in righteous disgust at the idea that this monstrous International Terrorist would be willing to incur some unintended civilian deaths in order to assassinate an official of the peaceful, freedom-loving Saudi regime. Really, for brazen irony, how can

[this be beat](#)

?

Tom Kean, former chairman of the 9/11 Commission said the alleged plot “surprises me.” Speaking to CNN’s Erin Burnett, Kean said the plot is “pretty close to an act of war. **You don’t go in somebody’s capital to blow somebody up.**”

Meanwhile, President Obama decried this plot as “a flagrant violation of US and international law.” But maybe some Persian [Marty Lederman](#) in Tehran wrote a secret legal memo concluding that this was all in accordance with domestic and international law, which — as we know — is conclusive and provides a full shield of immunity.

So facially absurd are the claims here — why would Iran possibly wake up one day and decide that it wanted to engage in a Terrorist attack on U.S. soil when it could much more easily kill Saudi officials elsewhere? and if Iran and its Quds Force are really behind this inept, hapless, laughable plot, then nothing negates the claim that Iran is some Grave Threat like this does — that there is more skepticism expressed even in establishment media accounts than one normally finds about such things. Even the *NYT* noted — with great understatement — that the allegations “provoked puzzlement from specialists on Iran, who said it **seemed unlikely that the government would back a brazen murder and bombing plan on American soil**”

.”

The Post

[noted](#)

that “the very rashness of the alleged assassination plot raised doubts about whether Iran’s normally cautious ruling clerics supported or even know about it.”

The Atlantic

’s Max Fisher

[has more](#)

on why this would be so out of character for Iran.

But while some attention has been devoted to asking what motive Iran would have for doing this, little attention has been paid to asking what motive the U.S. would have for exaggerating or concocting the connection of Iran’s government to this plot. Aside from the benefits the FBI and DOJ receive when breaking up a “very scary” plot — the bigger, the better — it has been one of Obama’s highest foreign policy priorities to isolate Iran and sanction it further: as a means of placating Israel and [punishing Iran for thwarting America’s natural right to rule that region](#) (so

monstrous is Iran that, as the U.S. has repeatedly complained, they actually continue to [“interfere” in Iraq](#)

as well as

[in Afghanistan](#)

!). As Ignatius explains, the U.S. Government instantly converted this plot into a vehicle for furthering those policy ambitions:

With its alleged plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to Washington, Iran has handed the United States an opportunity to undermine Tehran at a moment when U.S. officials believe the Iranian regime is especially vulnerable. . . . **“We see this as a chance to go out to capitals around the world and talk to allies and partners about what the Iranians tried to do,**” the [White House] official said. “We’re not going to tolerate targeting a diplomat in Washington.

We’re going to try to use this to isolate them to the maximum extent possible

.”

Meanwhile, Joe Biden [announced today](#) that the U.S. is “working to unite the world” behind a response to Iran’s “outrageous” actions [and that](#)

“nothing has been taken off the table.” So Iran’s supposed involvement in this plot is the ideal weapon for the U.S. to advance its long-standing goals with regard to that country. Maybe that warrants some serious skepticism about whether the U.S. Government’s claims are true? But we all know that only Bad Muslim countries exploit foreign policy exaggerations or fabrications for political gain, and not the United States of America (

[especially not with Barack Obama](#)

, rather than a Republican, in the White House).

What’s most significant is that not even 24 hours have elapsed since these allegations were unveiled. No evidence has been presented of Iran’s involvement. And yet there is no shortage of people — especially in the media — breathlessly talking about all of this as though it’s all clearly true. **If the Obama administration decided tomorrow that military action against Iran were warranted in response, is there any doubt that large majorities of Americans — and large majorities of Democrats — would support that?** As I said when discussing the Awlaki killing, the truly “scary” aspect of all of this is that the U.S. Government need only point and utter the word “Terrorist” and hordes of citizens will rise up and demand not evidence, but blood.

UPDATE: Perpetual war-cheerleader Ken Pollack of Brookings [says that](#), if true, this plot “shows that Tehran is meaner and nastier than ever before” and “would represent a major escalation of Iranian terrorist operations against the United States.” Also, he announces, this “should remind us that Iran also is not a normal country by any stretch of the imagination.” That — self-anointed arbiter of who is and is not a “normal country” — from a person [as responsible](#) as any pundit or think-tank expert for the attack on Iraq that killed at least 100,000 human beings, denouncing as Terrorists and abnormal a country that has invaded nobody.

UPDATE II: [On NPR this morning](#), Ray Takeyh of the Council on Foreign Relations — and Ken Pollack’s [co-author on Iran](#) — said this when asked if he has any doubts about the accuracy of U.S. government statements: “The only unusual aspect of this is actually having a terrorist operation on American territory.

I don’t know what the evidence about this is, but I’m not in a position to doubt it.” That perfectly summarizes the political, media and “expert” class’ attitude toward U.S. Government claims:

they’re keeping everything secret about their accusations, so there’s no reason to doubt what they’re claiming.

The National Security Priesthood that uncritically amplified every U.S. Government claim and fanned the flames of war against Iraq is alive, well, and more mindless and dutiful than ever.

UPDATE III: The [Christian Science Monitor details](#) the many reasons why “Iran specialists who have followed the Islamic Republic for years say that many details in the alleged plot just don’t add up.”

UPDATE IV: [On Good Morning America](#) this morning, Joe Biden warned that “the Iranians

are going to have to be held accountable” and “nothing has been taken off the table,” and then promised: “And when you see the case presented

you will find there is compelling evidence for the assertion being made

.” Except — after 24 hours of media hysteria — there’s

[this](#)

[Reuters](#)

[article](#)

, which — under the headline “Officials concede gaps in U.S. knowledge of Iran plot” — reports:

Iran’s supreme leader and the shadowy Quds Force covert operations unit were **likely** aware of an alleged plot to kill Saudi Arabia’s ambassador to the United States, but

hard evidence of that is scant

, U.S. officials said on Wednesday.

The United States **does not have solid information** about “exactly how high it goes,” one official said. . . .The U.S. officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said their confidence that at least some Iranian leaders were aware of the alleged plot was based

largely on analyses and their understanding of how the Quds Force operates.

I wouldn’t exactly call that — what was the phrase Biden used? — “compelling evidence for the assertions being made.” In fact, it reminds me of the language anonymous government officials

[began using](#)

to describe their “knowledge” of Anwar Awlaki’s alleged operational role in plots against the U.S. once they killed him: “patchy”; “partial”; “suspicion.” But what we learned with Awlaki is likely what we’ll see here: many people reflexively believe government accusations even when unaccompanied by evidence, and that belief is not diluted even when government officials began acknowledging (albeit anonymously) that they do not possess and never did possess any conclusive evidence to support their accusations.