

Iran's Plot Shows Inexperience In Hitting U.S.

WASHINGTON (AP) — The alleged Iranian plot against the Saudi ambassador to Washington was "amateur hour," an unusually clumsy operation for Iran's elite foreign action unit, the Quds Force, U.S. officials said Wednesday as further stranger-than-fiction details emerged of the assassination gone wrong.

The Iranians would-be covert operative turned to a woman he met while working as a used car dealer, hoping to find a Mexican drug dealer-assassin, and wound up with an American informant instead, according to two U.S. law enforcement officials.

Other U.S. officials said Mansoor Arbabsiar made further mistakes, including arranging a pay-off for the attack in an easily traceable way. They attributed the missteps to Iran's relative inexperience carrying out covert operations in the United States and Mexico.

They said the U.S. believes the planned attack on the Saudi ambassador was conceived in part as proof that such an operation could be carried off. Then, perhaps, Iran would have followed up with a series of attacks against other embassies in the U.S. and in Argentina, officials said.

Nigerian Man Pleads Guilty In Bomb Plot

DETROIT (AP) — A Nigerian man pleaded guilty Wednesday to trying to bring down a jetliner with a bomb in his underwear, defiantly telling a federal judge that he acted in retaliation for the killing of Muslims worldwide and referring to the failed explosive as a "blessed weapon."

Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, who acknowledged working for al-Qaida and never denied the allegations, entered the plea against his attorney's advice on the second day of his trial. He stands to get a mandatory life sentence for the 2009 attack that aimed to kill nearly 300 people on Christmas Day in the skies above Detroit.

Abdulmutallab calmly answered the judge's questions and read a political statement warning that if the United States continues "to persist and promote the blasphemy of Muhammad and the prophets," it risks "a great calamity ... through the hands of the mujahedeen soon."

"If you laugh at us now, we will laugh at you later on the day of judgment," he said.

Abdulmutallab suggested more than a year ago that he wanted to plead guilty but never did. He dropped his four-person, publicly financed defense team in favor of representing himself with help from a prominent local lawyer appointed by the court, Anthony Chambers.

Cain's 9-9-9 Tax Plan Fuels Sudden Surge

ATLANTA (AP) — If there's a policy star in the Republican presidential primary it may be Herman Cain's 9-9-9 tax overhaul plan. It has helped fuel the Georgia businessman's sudden surge in the GOP race. But behind the catchy slogan is a reality: Experts say it will raise taxes on some Americans.

"The 9-9-9 plan that I have proposed is simple, transparent, efficient, fair and neutral," Cain, the former Godfather's Pizza chief executive, declared at Tuesday night's Republican presidential debate in New Hampshire, where his newfound higher status in the Republican primary race was on full display.

Better-known Republicans seeking the White House relentlessly assailed both Cain and the centerpiece of his unlikely presidential bid, mocking it as simplistic and politically unworkable.

"I thought it was the price of a pizza when I first heard about it," joked former Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman.

Minnesota Rep. Michele Bachmann dismissed it as a jobs plan, not a tax plan.

Romney In Firm Command Of Republican Race

WASHINGTON (AP) — Mitt Romney seems firmly in command in a Republican presidential field that hasn't figured out how to stop him. Twelve weeks before the first party voting, the GOP establishment is coalescing around the former Massachusetts governor. He has more campaign experience, money and organization than anyone else. He showed again this week that he's the best debater in the bunch. And President Barack Obama's campaign is treating him almost as the presumptive nominee — even though Romney still faces challenges in some early voting states.

The biggest question in Republican circles is when and how Texas Gov. Rick Perry will use his own substantial campaign funds to buy TV ads hitting Romney's record on health care, abortion, gay rights and job creation.

Perry's campaign, which seems best-positioned to challenge Romney, dropped broad hints Wednesday that the moment is near.

"Now that the field is full, the air war will start soon," said Katon Dawson, former chairman of the South Carolina GOP and Perry's top adviser in the state. "We seem to be inside a 100-day window," Dawson said. "Governor Perry will be extremely competitive on the air."

The tone is different up the coast in New Hampshire. Among rank-and-file Republicans there, even those who favor other candidates have a sense that Romney has gained an air of inevitability. "It's very frustrating," said state Rep. Jim Waddell, of Hampton, who backs former Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman.

Fla. Man Charged With Hacking Aguilera

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A Florida man was charged with hacking into celebrity email accounts in a computer invasion scheme that led to the posting of private and revealing information, including nude photos of actress Scarlett Johansson, on the Internet, federal authorities said Wednesday.

Christopher Chaney, 35, of Jacksonville, was arrested without incident as part of a yearlong investigation of celebrity hacking that authorities dubbed "Operation Hackerazzi."

There were more than 50 victims in the case, including Mila Kunis, Christina Aguilera and actress Renee Olstead, authorities said. Others were named only by initials and investigators wouldn't disclose if they were famous, but said victims named in the indictment agreed to have their identities made public.

Chaney made his initial court appearance in a Florida courtroom Wednesday and was released on \$10,000 bond. He was charged with 26 counts of identity theft, unauthorized access to a protected computer and wiretapping. If convicted, he faces up to 121 years in prison.

8 Killed In So. California Salon Shooting

BY GILLIAN FLACCUS
Associated Press

SEAL BEACH, Calif. — A gunman opened fire Wednesday in a busy hair salon, killing eight people and critically wounding another while leaving bodies scattered throughout the business in a normally sedate Southern California beach community.

The gunman got into a car and drove away from Salon Meritage after opening fire about 1:30 p.m. He was stopped by officers about a half-mile away and surrendered without incident, said police Sgt. Steve Bowles.

His name was not immediately released.

Police were struggling to determine the motive for the killings.

"There may be something to the motive as to a relationship with somebody in the salon, that is our assumption," Bowles said.

Seal Beach has seen just one other homicide in the past four years.

Police responding to a report of shots fired found six people dead and three wounded. Two of those three died at a hospital. The other person was listed in critical condition.

Bowles said bodies of the victims were scattered throughout the salon, along with two of the wounded. The other wounded person, a man, was found outside the building. It wasn't clear if he was trying to flee when he was shot or if he was the one survivor.

"We're unsure at this point if he shot from the entrance and people, as they were shot, ran in



Investigators stand outside the scene of a mass shooting where eight people were killed after a heavily-armed gunman opened fire in Salon Meritage in Seal Beach, California, on Wednesday. One other was seriously wounded before the suspect was taken into custody.

seeking cover or seeking shelter, but we have fatalities throughout the salon," Bowles told reporters at a news conference outside the business.

"From my observation, it did look like people were seeking shelter at the time," he said.

He said the salon was busy at the time, with every hair-dressing station in operation.

He didn't know what type of weapon was used or if the man used more than one.

Salon employee Lorainne Bruielle, who wasn't working Wednesday, told the *Long Beach Press-Telegram* the gunman was the husband of another employee.

Bruielle said she talked to the husband of one of the employees involved, who said one employee

locked herself in the salon's facial room and was unharmed while another man locked himself in a bathroom but was wounded.

The suspect was cooperative when officers, following a description of the shooter, stopped him nearby. He told them he had multiple weapons in his car, Bowles said.

TV news video showed the man, in handcuffs, being placed in a patrol car and taken away after about two-and-a-half hours after the shooting. A new white pickup truck that was believed to be his was parked on the modest residential street with its doors open.

The killings stunned this normally quiet community of about 25,000 that boasts on its website

that it has "retained its quaint, small-town atmosphere" since it was founded in 1915.

Several visibly distressed people stood near the scene talking on cellphones or to police shortly after the shootings. They declined to be interviewed.

"All I heard was a siren and then after that one of my co-workers got a phone call from her nephew. He was outdoors when the suspect got into his truck and took off," said Cindy Spinosa, 51, who works at a nearby business.

"It's a little disarming," she said. "This is such a quiet community. We don't expect things like this."

Relatives of victims in the salon shooting were being taken to a nearby spiritual center.

"Obviously, a crime of this magnitude is something that Seal Beach is not familiar with," Bowles told reporters.

The quiet beachfront city is home to Leisure World, a gated senior citizen community of 9,000 people, as well as the Seal Beach Naval Weapons Station military complex. Two-thirds of the city's 13.23 square miles are occupied by the Seal Beach National Wildlife Refuge.

The most common crime reported in Seal Beach last year was larceny, with 368 cases reported. There were four rapes reported in 2010, up from two the previous year. There were six robberies, down from 11 the previous year, and 71 assaults, down from 89 the previous year.

Associated Press writer John Rogers in Los Angeles contributed to this report.

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