



Iranian Assassination Plot Against Trump Demands Forceful Response


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The Iranian regime's reported plot to assassinate former President Donald Trump, if accurate, is an unacceptable and unprecedented attempt to perpetrate violence on American soil and meddle in U.S. politics. It is the logical culmination of a passive U.S. policy toward Iran that has done little, if anything, while Iran and its proxies attacked and killed U.S. troops in the Middle East, actively plotted to kill at least three other American officials and citizens, rained drones and missiles on U.S. Gulf Arab partners, murdered, raped, and kidnapped innocent Israelis, and disrupted global shipping. In addition to necessary counter-intelligence, homeland security, and protective measures needed to disrupt any Iranian plot and protect Trump, the United States must, if the intelligence is further corroborated, respond forcefully and directly against the Iranian regime and those responsible for this plot.

Failure to directly address this threat will only encourage similar, or worse, behavior by the Iranian regime.

What Happened?

- On July 16, [CNN reported](#) that “U.S. authorities obtained intelligence from a human source in recent weeks on a plot by Iran to try to assassinate Donald Trump.”
 - » Officials reportedly do not have any indication to believe that the plot was related to the July 13 attempted assassination of Trump.
 - » According to an official quoted by [CNN](#), “[The National Security Council] directly contacted [U.S. Secret Service] at a senior level to be absolutely sure they continued to track the latest reporting. [U.S. Secret Service] shared this information with the detail lead, and the Trump campaign was made aware of an evolving threat.”
 - » On July 16, [The New York Times reported](#) that the “threat stems from Iran’s longstanding desire to take revenge for the strike ordered by Mr. Trump in 2020 that killed Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleimani,” former head of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force (IRGC-QF).
- The Iranian regime has [denied](#) involvement in any such plot, but the regime’s serial [lying](#) and [denials](#) of its other malign behavior discredits its disavowals.

 Sample of Iran-Linked Assassination Plots on U.S. Soil		
Date	Target	Status/Outcome
Ongoing	Former President Donald Trump	<u>Unknown</u>
2020—Present	Former National Security Advisor John Bolton	<u>Requires 24/7 Security Detail; One plot foiled</u>
2020—Present	Former National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien	<u>Required 24/7 Security Detail</u>
2020—Present	Former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo	<u>Requires 24/7 Security Detail; One plot foiled</u>
2020—Present	Former Special Representative for Iran Brian Hook	<u>Requires 24/7 Security Detail</u>
August 2022	Author Salman Rushdie	<u>Rushdie stabbed and severely wounded</u>
2021	Journalist Masih Alinejad	<u>Foiled by U.S. law enforcement in 2021</u>
2011	Then-Saudi Ambassador to the United States Adel Al-Jubeir	<u>Foiled in September 2011</u>

Why Is It Important?

- Successive years of the United States placating Iran’s malign behavior have led to their logical conclusion with a reported Iranian plot on a former president and current presidential candidate. Iran’s shocking assassination plot against Trump, if further corroborated, should lead to a new, categorically different U.S. policy on Iran which confronts the regime head-on as a response to its rogue, dangerous, and unacceptable behavior, much as it would with any non-state actor that tried to assassinate a former U.S. president.
- The United States has been reticent to hold Iran directly accountable for any of its increasingly bad behavior, including its rapid [nuclear advances](#); [funding](#) and [directing](#) the mass murder of innocent Israelis; [facilitating](#) over 175 proxy attacks on U.S. troops in the Middle East, [killing](#) three Americans, and; [directing](#) its proxies, including by providing arms, training, and intelligence, to significantly [impede](#) global commercial shipping.
- Instead, when it has acted, the United States has undertaken [sporadic](#), largely [ineffective](#) strikes against Iran’s proxies, far from Iranian soil, and issued blanket statements cautioning all involved parties—including U.S. allies like Israel—against [escalation](#), loudly repeating its desire to avoid “regional war.”
- Iran’s alleged assassination plot against Trump is by no means the first instance of the Iranian regime attempting to kill former or current U.S. officials on American soil.

- » Iran has sought to assassinate former Secretary of State [Mike Pompeo](#) and former National Security Advisor [John Bolton](#), requiring around-the-clock protection for both men.
 - Due to unspecified threats from Iran, 24/7 security has also been provided to former National Security Advisor [Robert O'Brien](#) and former U.S. Special Representative for Iran [Brian Hook](#).
 - *CBS News* [reported](#) in February that “other former U.S. officials targeted by Iran include ... former Defense Secretary Mark Esper, [and former head of U.S. Central Command] General Kenneth ‘Frank’ McKenzie.”
- » National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, after revelations of Iranian assassination plots targeting his predecessors, [threatened](#) “severe consequences” for the regime, but no such punishment was meted out.
- In addition to current and former officials, Iran actively seeks to [kill](#) Iranian dissidents on U.S. soil—an unacceptable breach of U.S. sovereignty and an active threat to U.S. civilians who speak out against the regime’s barbarism.
 - » As JINSA Fellow Gabriel Noronha has [noted](#), “in total, nearly a dozen senior U.S. officials and prominent exiled dissidents are living under a sustained threat of attack.”
 - » However, this figure is likely a conservative estimate, given that Iran has [issued](#) over 200 threats—around 50 of which Reporters Without Borders characterized as death threats—to Iranian journalists abroad, including in the United States.
 - » Among the most notable of these plots against dissidents targeted Masih Alinejad, a journalist and critic of the regime whom Iranian intelligence operatives tried to [kidnap](#) from her Brooklyn, NY home in 2021.
 - » Another significant plot was the [Iran-linked](#) August 2022 attempted murder of author Salman Rushdie while he gave a book talk in upstate New York.
 - Though it is unclear the direct extent to which Iran was involved in the attempted killing of Rushdie, Iran’s leadership had previously [issued](#) a *fatwa* calling for Rushdie to be killed and put a significant bounty—upwards of \$3 million—on his head.
- Moreover, Iran has engaged in numerous other kinds of malign activity on U.S. soil, including political subversion and espionage, as JINSA has extensively [documented](#).
- Iran has also tried to have officials from other countries assassinated in the United States, most notably in a 2011 [plot](#) to pay a Mexican cartel to kill then-Saudi Ambassador to the United States Adel Al-Jubeir by detonating a bomb in a Washington, DC restaurant.
 - » Had the plot been successful, a number of innocent civilians would also have undoubtedly been injured and killed.
- The attempted assassination of current or former senior U.S. officials requires a forceful response to deter future such attempts.
 - » When then-Iraqi President Saddam Hussein [sought](#) to assassinate former President George H.W. Bush in 1993, then-President Bill Clinton responded forcefully by [firing](#) nearly two dozen cruise missiles at the headquarters of Iraq’s intelligence ministry, killing several Iraqi officials.
 - Not only did this emphatic response, which Clinton [characterized](#) as necessary to “deter aggression” and “protect our people,” not result in any further retaliation from Iraq, it also forestalled subsequent plots by Iraq against U.S. officials.

What Should the United States Do Next?

- The United States should urgently seek to corroborate intelligence assessments suggesting an Iranian plot to assassinate Trump.
- If the intelligence is deemed credible, the United States must respond quickly and forcefully. Inaction will spawn yet more assassination plots against former and current U.S. officials, ever-greater threats to the U.S. homeland, and increased malign behavior, not only in the Middle East, but [across the world](#).
 - » The United States should impose economic, diplomatic, and individual costs on the regime, and stop showcasing a reluctance to exercise the use of kinetic force against Iranian interests.
 - The use of military force, including strikes inside Iran, against the Iranian regime is a legitimate response to the attempted assassination of a former U.S. president and current presidential candidate.
 - » At a minimum, Iranian officials must face genuine obstacles to conducting “business as usual.”
 - As JINSA has previously called for, the United States should [reimpose](#) the travel restrictions set in 2019—scaled back considerably in 2021—on Iranian officials attending UN General Assembly sessions and other meetings in New York City.
 - The U.S. government, as JINSA has [called for](#), should shutter the Iranian Interests Section consulate in Washington, the closest approximation to an Iranian embassy in Washington, for as long as the regime continues to engage in assassination plots against U.S. citizens and particularly former or current officials.