

The Iranian-Saudi Cold War Heats Up

by [Simon Henderson \(/experts/simon-henderson\)](/experts/simon-henderson)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Simon Henderson \(/experts/simon-henderson\)](/experts/simon-henderson)

Simon Henderson is the Baker fellow and director of the Bernstein Program on Gulf and Energy Policy at The Washington Institute, specializing in energy matters and the conservative Arab states of the Persian Gulf.



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The extraordinary detail of the alleged Iranian-backed plot to assassinate Saudi ambassador to the United States Adel al-Jubeir, revealed today by Attorney General Eric Holder, raises all sorts of questions. Why would Iran have wanted to carry out such a killing here in the United States, where its "fingerprints" on such a plot would have had -- indeed, will have -- such an impact on U.S. policy toward Iran?

If, as the now-unsealed amended complaint reveals, there had been "a hundred, a hundred and fifty" people killed and injured, including "senators," there would have been huge political pressure on the White House to order a retaliatory military strike on Iran. An Iranian spokesman has responded by rejecting the charges as a "ridiculous show" -- but will the Islamic Republic persist in what certainly appears to be a newly aggressive policy?

And what will be the reaction of Saudi Arabia -- where Prince Nayef's Interior Ministry last week warned rioting Saudi Shiites not to act "at the behest of a foreign country" (code for Iran) and promised that Saudi Arabia "would strike with an iron fist" against disaffected citizens to preserve the "security and stability" of the kingdom. The news of the Iran plot may have already driven the United States and Saudi Arabia closer together: King Abdullah and Jubeir met with National Security Advisor Tom Donilon on Oct. 1 to discuss "a number of issues of mutual interest" -- we now know what at least one of those items must have been.

More trivially, one could facetiously point out that targeting Jubeir would have been problematic because he often seems to be out of Washington. Indeed, he seems to spend a huge amount of time back in Saudi Arabia, where he is King Abdullah's favorite English-language translator.

And, the issue that will intrigue Washington society as well as its political class: Which was the restaurant where Jubeir was going to be "hit" where he ate "like two times a week," according to the indictment. My bet is on Cafe

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