

Kenya official: Iranian agents planned attack against Israeli, U.S. targets

Kenyan officials say Ahmad Abolfathi Mohammad, Sayed Mansour, who were arrested with 15 kilograms of explosives; Netanyahu: Iranian terror is boundless.

By [The Associated Press](#) | Jul.02, 2012

Officials in Kenya said on Monday that two Iranian agents arrested with explosives planned to attack Israeli, American, British or Saudi Arabian targets inside Kenya.

The officials said that the plot appears to fit into a global pattern of attacks or attempted attacks by Iranian agents, mostly against Israeli interests.

Kenyan security forces arrested Ahmad Abolfathi Mohammad and Sayed Mansour Mousavi last week with 15 kilograms of RDX, a powerful explosive, in the coastal city of Mombasa. Several hotels on the coast are Israeli-owned.

One official said the Iranians are members of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Quds Force, an elite and secretive unit. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were discussing security issues.

Responding to the reported Iranian terror plot, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that the uncovered plot proved the "Iranian terror threat was boundless."

"After Iran sent its people to assassinate the Saudi envoy on U.S. soil, and execute attacks in Azerbaijan, Bangkok, Tbilisi, and New Delhi, now its intention to commit terror attacks on African soils are exposed," the premier added.

The prime minister added that "the international community must fight the world's greatest exporter of terror."

Last week, one of the two Iranians facing charges in Kenya told the Kenyan court that he had been interrogated by Israeli agents while in detention.

Mohammad on Wednesday said the two were interrogated by Israeli agents, a claim that, if true, would suggest security officials believe the Iranians might have been targeting an Israeli-owned property. Iranian agents are suspected in several attacks or thwarted attacks around the globe over the last year, including in Azerbaijan, Thailand and India. Most of the plots had connections to Israeli targets.

Several resorts on Kenya's coast are Israeli-owned. Militants in 2002 bombed an Israeli-owned luxury hotel near Mombasa, killing 13 people. The militants also tried to shoot down an Israeli airliner at the same time. An al-Qaida operative was linked to those attacks.

Israel's deputy ambassador to Kenya, Yaki Lopez, told The Associated Press on Wednesday that "this whole incident is an internal Kenyan issue." He said he had no further comment, including on whether Israeli agents were involved in interrogations.

Human rights lawyers say interrogations of suspects by foreign security agents in Kenya are unconstitutional unless the suspects will also be taken to face charges in the foreign country.

Mohammad also told the court he was tortured in Kenyan custody. He said he went without food for long periods and that he was forced to sleep on a cement floor with only his jacket to keep him warm. Police prosecutor Daniel Musangi denied the accusations that the suspects were tortured. Magistrate Paul Biwott said the allegations were serious and ordered an investigation.

Days after the arrest of the Iranians, the U.S. government, citing information about an imminent terrorist attack, withdrew its government workers from Mombasa and issued an alert last Friday warning against non-essential travel to Kenya's second largest city. But the warning may not have been linked to the Iranians. Last Sunday, attackers carried out a grenade and gunfire attack on a bar outside Mombasa, killing three people and wounding 25.

Kenya has seen a spate of attacks in recent months following the country's decision last October to send troops into neighboring Somalia to fight al-Shabab militants. However, al-Shabab and its partner organization al-Qaida have not traditionally used Iranian operatives in its operations.

The two Iranians were charged last week. Prosecutors say they were possession of explosives known as RDX "in circumstances that indicated they were armed with the intent to commit a felony namely, acts intended to cause grievous harm."

RDX is a powerful military-grade explosive. They denied both charges and through a translator asked for bond.

On Wednesday, lawyer David Kirimi, who represents Mohammad and Mousavi, argued that the two suspects are investors and their arrests will harm Kenya-Iran relations. But Biwott dismissed that argument, citing the magnitude of the accusations. Musangi, the police prosecutor, said the two were likely to flee if released.