

CYBERSECURITY EDITORS' PICK

# EXCLUSIVE: ISIS Plotting To Assassinate George W. Bush In Dallas

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An ISIS-linked Iraqi man allegedly carried out surveillance on properties associated with former President George W. Bush in

what the FBI described as a revenge plot to assassinate him. Much of it was being organized over WhatsApp, investigators said. (Photo by Roger L. Wollenberg-Pool/Getty Images) GETTY IMAGES

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***Two confidential informants and surveillance of the alleged plotter's WhatsApp account reveal plans to smuggle assassins into the U.S. to murder the former president, according to a search warrant application discovered by Forbes.***

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An Iraqi man in the U.S. accused of being linked to ISIS operatives was plotting to kill George W. Bush, going so far as to travel to Dallas in November to take video around the former president's home and recruiting a team of compatriots he hoped to smuggle into the country over the Mexican border, according to an FBI search-warrant application filed March 23 and unsealed this week in the Southern District of Ohio.

The FBI said it uncovered the scheme through the work of two confidential informants and surveillance of the alleged plotter's account on the Meta-owned WhatsApp messaging platform. The

suspect, Shihab Ahmed Shihab Shihab, based in Columbus, Ohio, said he wanted to assassinate Bush because he felt the former president was responsible for killing many Iraqis and breaking apart the country after the 2003 U.S. military invasion, according to the warrant.

The case shows how federal investigators continue to monitor threats from ISIS even as the group has been severely weakened by American intelligence and military operations in recent years. It also shows how the FBI, despite its claims of being prevented from investigating major crimes because of Meta and other tech providers' use of encryption, has been able to work around WhatsApp security by using old-school policing with sourcing of informants and tracking the metadata they can get from the messaging company.

92. During the same February 9, 2022 meeting, [REDACTED] assured CS1 that he [REDACTED] will pay back CS1 money for the airfare and hotel room soon. [REDACTED] advised CS1 that as soon as he received any word from Qatar [REDACTED] will call or text CS1 and use coded language and say "the invitation is ready".

93. During the same February 9, 2022 meeting [REDACTED] and CS1 discussed meeting in Columbus, Ohio in approximately the end of February 2022. [REDACTED] advised CS1 that if CS1 has firearms and police uniforms to show [REDACTED] CS1 should use the coded language and say the "samples" are ready. CS1 and [REDACTED] discussed obtaining the sizes that would be needed for the uniforms for the "AL-RAED" and DAESH (ISIS) members who would be carrying out the assassination of former president BUSH.

94. During the same February 9, 2022 meeting, [REDACTED] advised that when [REDACTED] and CS1 communicate over the Target Cell Phone they should activate the "sensors off" function in order to protect their communications and primarily use WhatsApp.

A snippet from the search warrant uncovered by Forbes detailing the plot on George W. Bush's life. The name of the suspect has been redacted. FORBES SCREENSHOT

Shihab is an Iraqi national who'd been in the U.S. since 2020 and had an asylum application pending, according to the FBI's search-warrant application. Federal agents used two different confidential sources to investigate the plot, one who claimed to offer assistance obtaining false immigration and identification documents, the second a purported customer of the alleged people smuggler, who was willing to pay thousands of dollars to bring his family into the country.

(As the criminal complaint against the suspect has not been made public, *Forbes* is not publishing the full warrant. According to NBC, he was arrested earlier today, a fact later [confirmed](#) by the Department of Justice.)

Freddy Ford, chief of staff for the Office of George W. Bush, said, "President Bush has all the confidence in the world in the United States Secret Service and our law enforcement and intelligence communities."

In November 2021, Shihab revealed to the FBI insider the plot to assassinate Bush and asked the confidential source if he knew how to "obtain replica or fraudulent police and/or FBI identifications and badges" to help carry out the killing, and whether it was possible to smuggle the plotters out of the country the same way they came in after their mission was complete, according to the warrant. The alleged smuggler said he also wanted to find and assassinate a

former Iraqi general who helped Americans during the war and whom he believed was living under a fictitious identity in the U.S., investigators said.

The alleged plotter claimed to be part of a unit called “Al-Raed,” meaning “Thunder,” that was led by a former Iraqi pilot for Saddam Hussein who had been based out of Qatar until his recent death, the warrant said. As many as seven members of the group would be sent to the U.S. to kill President Bush, according to a conversation described in the warrant, and the Shihab’s job was “to locate and conduct surveillance on former president Bush’s residences and/or offices and obtain firearms and vehicles to use in the assassination.”

After traveling to Dallas with the informant to take video of Bush’s residence, the accused took more footage at the George W. Bush Institute, according to federal agents. The Texas city was the site of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963.

Bush, a Republican who was in the news last week when he inadvertently referred to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in a speech about the Russian invasion of Ukraine, was president from 2001 to 2009.

In one conversation with a confidential FBI source, the suspect said he was planning to get four Iraqi national males located in Iraq, Turkey,

Egypt and Denmark into the U.S., according to the warrant. In a later conversation, he claimed that one of the four was “the secretary of an ISIS financial minister,” the FBI said. The alleged smuggler described the men as “former Baath Party members in Iraq who did not agree with the current Iraqi government and were political exiles,” the FBI said. He was planning to charge each \$15,000 to be smuggled into America, the FBI said. The Baath Party was the political organization of Hussein, who was deposed in the 2003 U.S. invasion.

His plan, according to the warrant, was to get Mexican visitor visas for the ISIS operatives, using passport information he would send to the informant over WhatsApp, before getting them over the border. Meanwhile, he was communicating with a contact in Egypt over a fake Facebook profile, which carried a profile picture of two individual hands each holding a rose, designed to look romantic and “not suspicious,” according to the FBI’s account. In 2021, the FBI got a warrant to search that Facebook account, though it’s unclear what they obtained.

Seamus Hughes, deputy director of the Program on Extremism at George Washington University, told *Forbes*, “It’s clear this was a sophisticated counterterrorism operation with a lot of moving parts. It was both far reaching and unique in its targeting.

“It also shows that while the debate on so called “going dark” can be overcome through the use of undercover operatives, it’s labor intensive but possible.” The term “going dark” is used by law enforcement to describe the inability to get to data that has been encrypted by software applications.

“Also, we haven’t seen a plot of this scale in a number of years. It shows that while domestic terrorism rightly takes a good amount of counterterrorism focus, the threats are not there alone.”

### **Spying on ISIS via WhatsApp and mobile location**

As part of its surveillance of the alleged plotters, the FBI recently received permission to acquire mobile location information from AT&T. It had already used what’s known as a “pen register” on the WhatsApp account believed to belong to the chief suspect, helping them determine how often the account was used, what numbers it was contacting and whether or not it was active.

Though Shihab seemed convinced his WhatsApp account was secure, he was unaware that the confidential sources were passing on messages to the FBI. Nor was he aware that starting in October he was using a phone that he was given by the informant at the FBI’s request. The informant noted that the target was a keen user of WhatsApp and was a member of Baath and ISIS chat groups on the app. In another conversation

with an informant, the suspect claimed to have “been in recent communications with a friend in Qatar who was a former minister in Iraq under Saddam Hussein who had access to large quantities of money” and was messaging him over WhatsApp, the FBI said.

74. ██████ stated that once a new leader was selected for “Al-Raed” they would continue to plan for the “mission” to assassinate former president Bush. ██████ further stated that “they” will send approximately six (6) or seven (7) people for this mission. ██████ advised that part of his ██████ role in the mission will be to locate and conduct surveillance on former president Bush’s residences and/or offices and obtain firearms and vehicles to use in the assassination. ██████ inquired with CS1 if it would be difficult to obtain firearms that would be able to penetrate a vehicle. Further, ██████ stated that the best type of vehicle to obtain for use in the mission would be a large van with sliding doors. CS1 and ██████ discussed that obtaining these items were possible as long as ██████ had access to the money that was needed to procure these things.

A mysterious group known as Al-Raed was allegedly plotting to kill former President George W. Bush, according to an FBI search warrant, shown here in redacted form. FORBES SCREENSHOT

While the sources were passing on what they learned over WhatsApp throughout 2021 and 2022, they were also secretly recording the in-person meetings with the alleged plotter in which additional startling details were revealed, according to the FBI. In one conversation from December, according to the warrant, the suspect claimed to have had just smuggled two individuals associated with Hezbollah — a terrorist organization, according to the U.S. — into the U.S. for a fee of \$50,000 each.

Also in the FBI court filing, the alleged plotter claimed to be a member of “the resistance” and had killed many Americans in Iraq between 2003



and 2006, packing vehicles with explosives and detonating them when U.S. soldiers were near.

*Updated at 1.50pm ET to publish the suspect's name, following NBC reporting that he had been apprehended.*

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