

Justice Department Announces Murder-For-Hire and Related Charges Against IRGC Asset and Two Local Operatives

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For Immediate Release

Office of Public Affairs

Iranian Asset Farhad Shakeri Employed Multiple Associates in the New York City Area to Surveil and Murder a U.S. Citizen of Iranian Origin Who Has Publicly Opposed the Iranian Government

Shakeri Was Tasked by Iranian Regime with Surveilling and Plotting to Assassinate President-Elect Donald J. Trump

Farhad Shakeri, 51, of Iran; Carlisle Rivera, also known as Pop, 49, of Brooklyn, New York; and Jonathon Loadholt, 36, of Staten Island, New York, were charged today in a criminal complaint in connection with their alleged involvement in a plot to murder a U.S. citizen of Iranian origin in New York. Rivera was arrested in Brooklyn, New York, and Loadholt was arrested in Staten Island, New York, yesterday. Shakeri remains at large and is believed to reside in Iran. Rivera and Loadholt made their initial appearance in the Southern District of New York yesterday and were ordered detained pending trial.

“There are few actors in the world that pose as grave a threat to the national security of the United States as does Iran,” said Attorney General Merrick B. Garland. “The Justice Department has charged an asset of the Iranian regime who was tasked by the regime to direct a network of criminal associates to further Iran’s assassination plots against its targets, including President-elect Donald Trump. We have also charged and arrested two individuals who we allege were recruited as part of that network to silence and kill, on U.S. soil, an American journalist who has been a prominent critic of the regime. We will not stand for the Iranian regime’s attempts to endanger the American people and America’s national security.”

“The charges announced today expose Iran’s continued brazen attempts to target U.S. citizens, including President-elect Donald Trump, other government leaders and dissidents who criticize the regime in Tehran,” said FBI Director Christopher Wray. “The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps — a designated foreign terrorist organization — has

been conspiring with criminals and hitmen to target and gun down Americans on U.S. soil and that simply won't be tolerated. Thanks to the hard work of the FBI, their deadly schemes were disrupted. We're committed to using the full resources of the FBI to protect our citizens from Iran or any other adversary who targets Americans."

"Actors directed by the Government of Iran continue to target our citizens, including President-elect Trump, on U.S. soil and abroad. This has to stop," said U.S. Attorney Damian Williams for the Southern District of New York. "Today's charges are another message to those who continue in their efforts – we will remain unrelenting in our pursuit of bad actors, no matter where they reside, and will stop at nothing to bring to justice those who harm our safety and security. I want to thank the career prosecutors of this office and our law enforcement partners for their ongoing work in this and related investigations. They are truly the best of the best and work tirelessly to keep our country safe."

According to the complaint and other public statements and filings, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran (the Government of Iran) is actively targeting nationals of the United States and its allies living in countries around the world for attacks, including assault, kidnapping, and murder, both to repress and silence dissidents critical of the Iranian regime and to take vengeance for the January 2020 death of then-Commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Qods Force (IRGC-QF), Qasem Soleimani, who was killed by a U.S. drone strike in Baghdad. The IRGC is an Iranian military and counterintelligence agency under the authority of Iran's Supreme Leader, comprised of components including an external operations force, the IRGC-QF, and has been designated as a foreign terrorist organization by the U.S. Secretary of State since April 15, 2019. The IRGC has publicly stated its desire to avenge the death of Soleimani, and, among its activities, the IRGC plots and conducts attack operations outside Iran targeting U.S. citizens residing in the United States and abroad.

Shakeri is an IRGC asset residing in Tehran, Iran. Shakeri immigrated to the United States as a child and was deported in or about 2008 after serving 14 years in prison for a robbery conviction. In recent months, Shakeri has used a network of criminal associates he met in prison in the United States to supply the IRGC with operatives to conduct surveillance and assassinations of IRGC targets. Two members of Shakeri's network are his co-defendants, Loadholt and Rivera. At Shakeri's instruction, Loadholt and Rivera have spent months surveilling a U.S. citizen of Iranian origin residing in the United States (Victim-1). Victim-1 is an outspoken critic of the Iranian regime and has been the target of multiple prior plots for kidnapping and/or murder directed by the Government of Iran. In exchange for Shakeri's promise of \$100,000, Rivera and Loadholt repeatedly sought to locate Victim-1 for murder.

During their efforts to locate and kill Victim-1, Shakeri, Loadholt, and Rivera shared messages about their progress and photographs relating to their scheme. For example, in or about February 2024, Rivera and Loadholt messaged about an incoming payment from Shakeri, and then traveled to Fairfield University, where Victim-1 was scheduled to appear, and took photographs on campus. In or about April, Shakeri sent Rivera a series of voice notes discussing their efforts to locate and kill Victim-1. In one voice note, Shakeri told Rivera that Victim-1 spent most of her time in particular locations of her home, and told Rivera that "you just gotta have patience ... You gotta wait and have patience to catch her either going in the house or coming out, or following her out somewhere and taking care of it. Don't think about going in. In is a suicide move." On several occasions over the last several months, consistent with this instruction from Shakeri, Rivera and/or Loadholt have surveilled a location in Brooklyn that they had identified as associated with Victim-1.

In addition, according to statements made by Shakeri in recorded interviews with law enforcement agents, the IRGC has also tasked Shakeri with carrying out other assassinations against U.S. and Israeli citizens located in the United States. In particular, Shakeri has informed law enforcement that he was tasked on Oct. 7, 2024, with providing a plan to kill President-elect Donald J. Trump. During the interview, Shakeri claimed he did not intend to propose a plan to kill Trump within the timeframe set by the IRGC. He also stated he was tasked with surveilling two Jewish American citizens residing in New York City and offered \$500,000 by an IRGC official for the murder of either victim. He was also tasked with targeting Israeli tourists in Sri Lanka.

Shakeri, Rivera, and Loadholt have all been charged with murder-for-hire, which carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison; conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire, which carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison; and money laundering conspiracy, which carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison.

Shakeri has also been charged with conspiring to provide material support to a foreign terrorist organization, which carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison; providing material support to a foreign terrorist organization, which carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison; and conspiracy to violate the International Emergency Economic Powers Act and sanctions against the Government of Iran, which carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison. If convicted, a federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

The FBI New York Field Office is investigating the case. The U.S. Customs and Border Protection New York Field Office and Drug Enforcement Administration New York Division assisted in the investigation.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Jacob H. Gutwillig and Michael Lockard and Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Julie Isaacson for the Southern District of New York, Trial Attorneys Dmitry Slavin of the National Security Division's Counterterrorism Section, and Christopher Rigali and Leslie Esbrook of the National Security Division's Counterintelligence and Export Control Section are prosecuting the case.

A complaint is merely an allegation. All defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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