

PRESS RELEASE

Staten Island Man Sentenced for Murder-For-Hire Plot and Stalking a Journalist and Prominent Critic of the Iranian Government

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For Immediate Release

Office of Public Affairs

Jonathan Loadholt Worked With a Criminal Associate to Stalk and Murder a U.S. Citizen of Iranian Origin Who Has Publicly Opposed the Iranian Government

Jonathan Loadholt, 37, of Staten Island, New York, was sentenced today to 10 years in prison for his participation in a plot directed by the Government of Iran targeting Masih Alinejad, a journalist, author, and human rights activist. Loadholt previously pled guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit stalking and one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering before U.S. District Judge Lewis J. Liman, who imposed today's sentence.

"Tehran attempted to murder a U.S. journalist in the United States simply because she exposed a few of that regime's many abuses," said Assistant Attorney General for National Security John A. Eisenberg. "The defendant now stands convicted and sentenced to a lengthy prison sentence for his role in this plot. The Department and its colleagues will work tirelessly to protect Americans and to seek justice when our laws are broken."

"The Government of Iran has repeatedly attempted to locate and murder Masih Alinejad, right here in New York City," said U.S. Attorney Jay Clayton for the Southern District of New York. "The Government of Iran tried to silence Ms. Alinejad because of her efforts to stand up to the Iranian regime and expose its discriminatory treatment of women, corruption, and human rights abuses. While this plot was directed from Iran, the would-be assassins were American citizens who agreed to kill Ms. Alinejad for money —

out of greed. Today's sentence should be a serious warning to anyone who tries to profit by carrying out the wishes of a hostile foreign regime on United States soil."

"With today's sentencing, Jonathan Loadholt will pay the price for participating in a plot orchestrated by Iran to kill a journalist and human rights activist who criticized the Iranian government's policies," said FBI Assistant Director Donald Holstead. "The FBI will use all our resources to detect and prevent anyone working for foreign powers who attempts to harm individuals living in the United States, and we will coordinate closely with the Justice Department to make sure such criminals face the full weight of American justice."

"Jonathan Loadholt served as a hired gun to stalk, surveil, and ultimately assassinate Masih Alinejad — a United States citizen — on behalf of the IRGC," said FBI Assistant Director in Charge James C. Barnacle Jr. "The FBI New York Joint Terrorism Task Force disrupted and arrested him before he could carry out his plan. The FBI will squash all attempts to silence critics of oppressive regimes on American soil."

As reflected in the charging instruments, other public filings, and statements in public court proceedings:

In 2024, Loadholt's friend and co-defendant, Carlisle Rivera, also known as "Pop," a convicted murderer, was hired by Rivera's criminal confederate, Farhad Shakeri, to murder Masih Alinejad on instructions from high-ranking members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The IRGC is a military and intelligence organization that directly reports to the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran and is the Government of Iran's primary instrument for providing financial and lethal aid to proxy terror groups in the Middle East. Among its activities, the IRGC plots and conducts attack operations outside Iran targeting, among others, U.S. citizens residing abroad and in the United States. Ms. Alinejad is one of the IRGC's principal targets. The IRGC and the Government of Iran's intelligence services have long sought to kidnap or murder Ms. Alinejad because of her efforts to promote gender equality and civil liberties in Iran and to expose the regime's corruption, oppression, and terrorism to the international community. In 2020 and 2021, Iranian intelligence officials and assets plotted to kidnap Ms. Alinejad in the U.S. for rendition to Iran; then, in 2022, the IRGC hired powerful, violent members of the Russian Mob to murder Ms. Alinejad. After those efforts failed, the IRGC turned to Shakeri, who hired Rivera, who in turn recruited Loadholt to assist him, to kill Ms. Alinejad.

Shakeri offered Rivera \$100,000 for he and Loadholt to locate and kill Ms. Alinejad, and Rivera agreed. Loadholt was recruited into the plot by Rivera and, using money sent by Shakeri, Rivera and Loadholt conducted surveillance on Ms. Alinejad with the aim of

killing her. Using money sent by Shakeri, Rivera and Loadholt purchased a firearm and "burner" cellphones. Loadholt and Rivera spent several months attempting to find and kill Ms. Alinejad, using Loadholt's car and fake license plates, including by following her to a public speaking event at Fairfield University and repeatedly stalking the Brooklyn house where Shakeri and the IRGC believed Ms. Alinejad lived.

During their efforts to locate and kill Ms. Alinejad, Loadholt and Rivera shared messages about their progress and photographs relating to their murder plot. For example, in February 2024, Loadholt and Rivera messaged about an incoming payment from Shakeri, and then traveled to Fairfield University, where Ms. Alinejad was scheduled to appear, and took photographs on campus. In July 2024, Loadholt and Rivera exchanged messages discussing their expected upfront payment for murdering Ms. Alinejad. During those messages, Loadholt expressed frustration about the apparent absence of a \$10,000 advance, partial payment for Ms. Alinejad's murder, writing to Rivera "So no 10 up front I'm guessing??" and, after Rivera confirmed no upfront payment had been made, Loadholt responded, "I'm so frustrated son I'm like ready to jump out the window."

On November 7, 2024, before he and Rivera could complete their task of killing Ms. Alinejad, Loadholt was arrested. At Loadholt's residence, law enforcement agents recovered, among other things, more than two dozen rounds of ammunition.

In addition to the prison term, Loadholt was sentenced to three years of supervised release.

Loadholt is the second defendant to be sentenced in this case. In January 2026, Rivera was sentenced to 15 years in prison by Judge Liman, after previously having pled guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire. Shakeri remains at large.

The case was investigated by FBI's New York Joint Terrorism Task Force, which principally consists of agents and analysts from the FBI and detectives from the New York City Police Department, and the FBI Washington Field Office. U.S. Attorney Clayton thanked the Department of Justice's National Security Division, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection New York Field Office, the Drug Enforcement Administration New York Division, and the New York State Police.

This case is being handled by the U.S. Attorney's Office's National Security and International Narcotics Unit. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Jacob H. Gutwillig and Michael D. Lockard for the Southern District of New York are in charge of the prosecution, with assistance from Leslie Esbrook of the Counterintelligence and Export Control Section.

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