



THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE  
EASTERN DISTRICT *of* NEW YORK

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**Department of Justice**

U.S. Attorney's Office

Eastern District of New York

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, January 19, 2021

## **Political Scientist Author Charged with Acting as an Unregistered Agent of The Iranian Government**

### **Defendant Lobbied U.S. Officials, Published Books and Articles Advancing Iranian Viewpoints While Secretly Employed by the Iranian Mission to the United Nations**

BROOKLYN, NY – A criminal complaint was unsealed today in federal court in Brooklyn charging Kaveh Lotfolah Afrasiabi, also known as “Lotfolah Kaveh Afrasiabi,” with acting and conspiring to act as an unregistered agent of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in violation of the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA). Afrasiabi was arrested yesterday at his home in Watertown, Massachusetts, and will make his initial appearance this morning in federal court in Boston, Massachusetts, before United States Magistrate Judge Jennifer C. Boal.

Seth D. DuCharme, Acting U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of New York; John C. Demers, Assistant Attorney General for National Security; William F. Sweeney, Jr., Assistant Director-in-Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation, New York Field Office (FBI); and Joseph Bonavolonta, Special Agent-in-Charge, FBI, Boston Field Office announced the arrest and charges.

“Afrasiabi allegedly sought to influence the American public and American policymakers for the benefit of his employer, the Iranian government, by disguising propaganda as objective policy analysis and expertise,” stated Acting U.S. Attorney DuCharme. “This Office is committed to the robust enforcement of the Foreign Agents Registration Act, which provides the American people the tools they need to evaluate opinions and arguments in the marketplace of ideas by requiring foreign agents to declare their paymasters. Those, like the defendant, who conceal the full extent of their work for a foreign government when the law requires disclosure will face consequences for their actions.”

“For over a decade, Kaveh Afrasiabi pitched himself to Congress, journalists, and the American public as a neutral and objective expert on Iran,” stated Assistant Attorney General Demers. “However, all the while, Afrasiabi was actually a secret employee of the Government of Iran and the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations (IMUN) who was being paid to spread their propaganda. In doing so, he intentionally avoided registering with Department of Justice as the Foreign Agents Registration Act required. He likewise evaded his obligation to disclose who was sponsoring his views. We now begin to hold him responsible for those deeds.”

“Anyone working to advance the agenda of a foreign government within the United States is required by law to register as an agent of that country,” stated FBI Assistant Director-in-Charge Sweeney. “Mr. Afrasiabi never disclosed to a Congressman, journalists or others who hold roles of influence in our country that he was being paid by the Iranian government to paint an untruthfully positive picture of the nation. Our laws are designed to create transparency in foreign relations, and they are not arbitrary or malleable. As today's action demonstrates, we will fully enforce them to protect our national security.”

“Our arrest of Kaveh Afrasiabi makes it clear that the United States is not going to allow undeclared agents of Iran to operate in our country unchecked. For more than a decade, Mr. Afrasiabi was allegedly paid, directed, and controlled by the Government of Iran to lobby U.S. government officials, including a Congressman; and to create and disseminate information favorable to the Iranian government,” stated FBI Special Agent-in-Charge Bonavolonta. “The FBI will continue to do everything it can to uncover these hidden efforts and hold accountable those who work for our adversaries to the detriment of our national security.”

According to the complaint, Afrasiabi is a citizen of the Islamic Republic of Iran and a lawful permanent resident of the United States. Afrasiabi holds a PhD, and frequently publishes books and articles, and appears on English-language television programs discussing foreign relations matters, particularly Iran's relations with the United States. Afrasiabi has identified or portrayed himself as a political scientist, a former political science professor or as an expert on foreign affairs.

Since at least 2007 to the present, Afrasiabi has also been secretly employed by the Iranian government and paid by Iranian diplomats assigned to the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations in New York City (IMUN). Afrasiabi has been paid approximately \$265,000 in checks drawn on the IMUN's official bank accounts since 2007 and has received health insurance through the IMUN's employee health benefit plans since at least 2011.

In the course of his employment by the Iranian government, Afrasiabi has lobbied a U.S. Congressman and the U.S. Department of State to advocate for policies favorable to Iran, counseled Iranian diplomats concerning U.S. foreign policy, made television appearances to advocate for the Iranian government's views on world events, and authored articles and opinion pieces espousing the Iranian government's position on various matters of foreign policy. Afrasiabi has long known that FARA requires agents of foreign principals to register with the U.S. Department of Justice and has discussed information obtained from FARA disclosures with others. Nevertheless, Afrasiabi did not register as an agent of the Government of Iran.

For example, in January 2020, Afrasiabi emailed Iran's Foreign Minister and Permanent Representative to the United Nations with advice for “retaliation” for the U.S. military airstrike that killed Major General Qasem Soleimani, the head of the Quds Force, the external operations arm of the Iranian government's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, proposing that the Iranian government “end all inspections and end all information on Iran's nuclear activities pending a [United Nations Security Council] condemnation of [the United States] illegal crime.” Afrasiabi claimed that such a move would, among other things, “strike fear in the heart of [the] enemy.”

Afrasiabi has admitted in his own communications that his extensive body of published works and television appearances, in which he has consistently advocated perspectives and policy positions favored by the Iranian government, has been attributable to the funding he receives from the Iranian government. For example, in a July 28, 2020 email to Iran's Foreign Minister, Afrasiabi included “links for many of [his] works, including books, hundreds of articles in international newspapers and academic journals,” telling Iran's Foreign Minister “Without support none of this would have been possible! This has been a very productive relationship spanning decades that ought not to be interrupted.”

The charges in the complaint are allegations, and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty. If convicted of both charged offenses, Afrasiabi faces a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison.

The government's case is being handled by the Office's National Security and Cybercrime Section. Assistant United States Attorneys Ian C. Richardson and Michael T. Keilty are in charge of the prosecution, with assistance from Trial Attorney David C. Recker of the National Security Division's Counterintelligence and Export Control Section.

**The Defendant:**

KAVEH LOTFOLAH AFRASIABI (also known as "Lotfolah Kaveh Afrasiabi")

Age: 63

Watertown, Massachusetts

E.D.N.Y. Docket No. 21-MJ-50

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**Attachment(s):**

[Download Kaveh Afrasiabi Complaint](#)

**Topic(s):**

National Security

**Component(s):**

[USAO - New York, Eastern](#)

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