

U.S. Attorney Announces Murder-For-Hire Charges Against IRGC Brigadier General And Former Intelligence Officer And Members Of An Iranian Intelligence Network

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Ruhollah Bazghandi and Members of His Iran-Based Network, Contracted Members of an Eastern European Organized Crime Group to Murder a U.S. Citizen of Iranian Origin in New York City Who Has Publicly Opposed the Iranian Government

Damian Williams, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York; Merrick B. Garland, the Attorney General of the United States; Matthew G. Olsen, the Assistant Attorney General for National Security; Christopher A. Wray, the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation ("FBI"); and James E. Dennehy, Assistant Director in Charge of the New York Field Office of the FBI, announced the unsealing of murder-for-hire, money-laundering, and sanctions charges against RUHOLLAH BAZGHANDI, a/k/a "Roohollah Azimi," FNU LNU, a/k/a "Haj Taher," ("HAJ TAHER"), HOSSEIN SEDIGHI, and SEYED MOHAMMAD FOROUZAN. The charges are contained in a [Superseding Indictment](#) unsealed today in Manhattan federal court. As detailed in the Superseding Indictment, BAZGHANDI, HAJ TAHER, SEDIGHI, and FOROUZAN contracted members of an Eastern European criminal organization, including RAFAT AMIROV, a/k/a "Farkhaddin Mirzoev," a/k/a "Рим," a/k/a "Rome," POLAD OMAROV, a/k/a "Araz Aliyev," a/k/a "Polad Qaqa," a/k/a "Haci Qaqa," and ZIALAT MAMEDOV, a/k/a "Ziko," to murder a U.S. citizen of Iranian origin in New York City who has publicly opposed the Iranian Government and who has previously been the target of similar plots by the Iranian Government. AMIROV, OMAROV, and MAMEDOV previously were arrested on charges contained in underlying indictments. AMIROV and OMAROV are in custody in the U.S.,

pending trial; Mamedov was extradited from the Czech Republic to the Republic of Georgia ("Georgia") to face charges there. BAZGHANDI, HAJ TAHER, SEDIGHI, and FOROUZAN, all of whom are based in Iran, remain at large. The case is pending before U.S. District Judge Colleen McMahon.

U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said: "As alleged, for years, the Government of Iran has attempted to assassinate, on U.S. soil, a U.S. citizen of Iranian origin who is a prominent critic of the Iranian regime. In January 2023, we unsealed charges alleging that members of an Eastern European crime group engaged in a plot to murder this victim. As we allege, that group was not acting alone. Today, we hold their Iranian masters to account, and allege that these Iran-based co-conspirators, including a Brigadier General in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, directed the murder plot. By charging these Iran-based defendants, we seek to strike another public blow at the heart of the Government of Iran's efforts to execute the victim—as well as its lethal targeting, intimidation, and repression of other Iranian dissidents critical of the regime in the U.S. and abroad."

Attorney General Merrick B. Garland said: "The Justice Department has now charged eight individuals, including an Iranian military official, for their efforts to silence and kill a U.S. citizen because of her criticism of the Iranian regime. We will not tolerate efforts by an authoritarian regime like Iran to undermine the fundamental rights guaranteed to every American. Three of the defendants charged in this horrific plot are now in U.S. custody, and we will never stop working to identify, find, and bring to justice all those who endanger the safety of the American people."

Assistant Attorney General Matthew G. Olsen said: "Today's indictment makes plain that the Iranian regime for years has been behind a violent campaign to stalk, intimidate, and arrange the killing of an American dissident on U.S. soil for bravely speaking up for the rights of the Iranian people. The Department is committed to exposing and holding accountable those in Tehran who believe they can hide their hand in carrying out such reprehensible activities."

FBI Director Christopher A. Wray said: "Today's indictment exposes the full extent of Iran's plot to silence an American journalist for criticizing the Iranian regime. According to the charges, a brigadier general in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and a former Iranian intelligence officer, working with a network of conspirators, planned to kill a dissident living in New York City. The FBI's investigation led to the disruption of this plot as one of the conspirators was allegedly on their way to murder the victim in New York. As these charges show, the FBI will work with our partners here and abroad to hold accountable those who target Americans."

FBI Assistant Director in Charge James E. Dennehy said: "Today we charge four members of the Bazghandi Network – each connected to the Iranian government – as being responsible for hiring members of an Eastern European Organized Crime Group to murder an American citizen in New York City. This crime was intended to stop an American from exercising their Constitutionally protected right to free speech; to end their life for speaking out publicly against the Iranian regime and its human rights violations. The FBI will aggressively pursue, disrupt, and hold accountable any foreign government which attempts to murder our citizens on our soil."

According to the allegations contained in the Superseding Indictment, other court filings, and statements made during court proceedings:¹¹

BAZGHANDI, who resides in Iran, is an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps ("IRGC") Brigadier General and has previously served as chief of an IRGC Intelligence Organization ("IRGC-IO") counterintelligence office. In April 2023, the U.S. Secretary of State designated IRGC-IO as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist under Executive Order 14078, relating to hostage-taking and the wrongful detention of U.S. nationals abroad. On the same date, the U.S. Treasury Department sanctioned BAZGHANDI in connection with his involvement with the detention of foreign prisoners held in Iran. BAZGHANDI was designated by the Treasury Department a second time in June 2023, this time under Executive Order 13224, for his participation in IRGC-IO's lethal targeting operations. HAJ TAHER, SEDIGHI, and FOROUZAN (collectively with BAZGHANDI, the "Bazghandi Network"), each of whom resides in Iran, also have connections to the Government of Iran.

The Bazghandi Network contracted AMIROV, OMAROV, MAMEDOV, and Khalid Mehdiyev to murder, on U.S. soil, a victim (the "Victim") residing in New York City. The Victim is a journalist, author, and human rights activist who has publicized the Government of Iran's human rights abuses and suppression of political expression, including in connection with continuing protests against the regime across Iran. As recently as 2020 and 2021, Iranian intelligence officials and assets plotted to kidnap the Victim from within the U.S. for rendition to Iran in an effort to silence the Victim's criticism of the regime. That plot was disrupted and exposed by the FBI and led to the filing of federal kidnapping conspiracy and other charges in the Southern District of New York against several participants in the plot in *U.S. v. Farahani, et al.*, 21 Cr. 430 (RA) (S.D.N.Y.).

Since at least July 2022, the Bazghandi Network tasked members of the Organization with assassinating the Victim. The Organization's participation in the murder-for-hire plot was directed by AMIROV, who resided in Iran and who was tasked with targeting the Victim by individuals in Iran. On approximately July 13, 2022, AMIROV forwarded

targeting information—which Amirov had received from individuals in Iran—about the Victim and the Victim’s residence to OMAROV. OMAROV, in turn, together with MAMEDOV, directed and collaborated with Mehdiyev, who was residing in Yonkers, New York, to carry out the plot against the Victim. Mehdiyev’s participation in the plot was disrupted when he was arrested near the Victim’s home on or about July 28, 2022, while in possession of the assault rifle, along with 66 rounds of ammunition, approximately \$1,100 in cash, and a black ski mask.

In January 2023, AMIROV, OMAROV, and MAMEDOV were arrested overseas. On January 27, 2023, they were charged publicly for their roles in the plot to assassinate the Victim. Nevertheless, in the months that followed, members of the Bazghandi Network continued to target the Victim. For example, in or about March 2023, HAJ TAHER searched for information about the Victim’s family members and SEDIGHI saved an image of the Victim’s residence. As recently as on or about May 1, 2023, BAZGHANDI conducted an Internet search, in Farsi, for, “a person in the house of [the Victim] movie,” and, on the same date, watched a video with the title, “A video of the arrested gunman in front of [the Victim]’s home in New York received by [the Victim’s employer].”

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BAZGHANDI, HAJ TAHER, SEDIGHI, and FOROUZAN, all of Iran, have been charged with murder-for-hire, which carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison (Count One); conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire, which carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison (Count Two); conspiracy to commit money laundering, which carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison (Count Three); and conspiring to violate the International Emergency Economic Powers Act and sanctions against the Government of Iran, which carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison (Count Six).

AMIROV, 45, of IRAN; OMAROV, 39, of the Czech Republic and Slovenia; Mamedov, 32, of Georgia; also have been charged in Counts One, Two, and Three, as well as with attempted murder in aid of racketeering, which carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison (Count Four); and possession and use of a firearm in connection with the attempted murder, which carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment and a mandatory minimum sentence of 5 years in prison (Count Five).

The potential maximum sentences in this case are prescribed by Congress and provided here for informational purposes only, as any sentencing of the defendants will be determined by Judge McMahon.

Mr. Williams praised the outstanding investigative work of the FBI and its New York Field Office Counterintelligence-Cyber Division and the New York FBI Iran Threat Task

Force. Mr. Williams also thanked the New York City Police Department (“NYPD”) and the NYPD Intelligence Bureau, as well as the Department of Justice’s National Security Division and the Department of Justice’s Office of International Affairs, for their assistance.

This case is being handled by the Office’s National Security and International Narcotics Unit. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Michael D. Lockard, Jacob H. Gutwillig, and Matthew J.C. Hellman are in charge of the prosecution, with assistance from Trial Attorneys Christopher Rigali and Leslie Esbrook of the Counterintelligence and Export Control Section, and Dmitry Slavin of the National Security Division’s Counterterrorism Section.

The charges in the Superseding Indictment are merely accusations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

[\[1\]](#) As the introductory phrase signifies, the Superseding Indictment, and the description of the Superseding Indictment set forth herein, constitute only allegations, and every fact described should be treated as an allegation.

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