US Justice Department charges Iranian with trying to assassinate John Bolton

August 10, 2022

By [Hannah Rabinowitz](https://www.cnn.com/profiles/hannah-rabinowitz-bio), [Marshall Cohen](https://www.cnn.com/profiles/marshall-cohen), [Jennifer Hansler](https://www.cnn.com/profiles/jennifer-hansler) and [Kylie Atwoo](https://www.cnn.com/profiles/kylie-atwood)

CNN

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/08/10/politics/justice-department-charges-iranian-with-trying-to-assassinate-john-bolton/index.html>

The US Justice Department [announced criminal charges](https://www.justice.gov/opa/press-release/file/1525106/download) Wednesday against a member of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps for allegedly trying to orchestrate the assassination of John Bolton, who served in senior national security positions during the Trump and Bush administrations.

The alleged plot was "likely in retaliation" for the January 2020 US air strike that killed [Qasem Soleimani](https://www.cnn.com/2020/01/03/asia/soleimani-profile-intl-hnk/index.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the Justice Department said. After the strike, leaders of the [terrorist organization](https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/28/middleeast/mideast-summary-03-28-2022-intl/index.html) vowed "revenge against Americans" for Soleimani's death and publicly lashed out against then-President Donald Trump and other high-ranking officials in his administration.

Prosecutors said Shahram Poursafi, a 45-year-old Iranian national and IRGC member, attempted to pay $300,000 to an individual in the United States to kill Bolton and said he had a "second job" for $1 million.

Former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was also a target of the Iranian assassination plot, according to a federal law enforcement source familiar with the investigation and a source close to Pompeo. The "second job" was a reference to Pompeo, the source close to Pompeo said.

A known Iran policy hawk, Pompeo served as Trump's secretary of state at the time of the airstrike that killed Soleimani. He was informed directly by the Justice Department last Wednesday that he was the second target of an IRGC assassination plot, the source close to Pompeo told CNN.

Poursafi, who has not been arrested and remains at large, originally contacted the US-based individual -- who was secretly working as an FBI informant, also known as a "confidential human source," or CHS -- and asked them to take photos of Bolton "for a book that Poursafi was writing," according to court documents.

He later asked if the informant could hire a person to "eliminate someone," who was later revealed to be Bolton, and promised protection for the CHS and the assassin, prosecutors said. Poursafi also allegedly suggested the murder should be done "by car," provided the CHS with an address for Bolton's office, and noted that Bolton had a habit of taking walks alone.

In November 2021, the informant traveled to Washington, DC, and sent Poursafi photos of Bolton's office and descriptions of the building. Poursafi allegedly said that the killing should happen in the building's garage, as it was a "high traffic" area.

Poursafi has been charged with the use of interstate commerce facilities in the commission of murder-for-hire, which carries a 10-year maximum prison sentence, and attempting to provide material support to a transnational murder plot, which carries up to 15 years in prison.

'Embarrassed at the low price'

Bolton -- Trump's national security adviser starting in April 2018 until Trump fired him in [September 2019 via Twitter](https://www.cnn.com/2019/09/10/politics/trump-john-bolton-out) -- thanked the Justice Department, FBI and Secret Service for their efforts.

"While much cannot be said publicly right now, one point is indisputable: Iran's rulers are liars, terrorists, and enemies of the United States," he said. "Their radical, anti-American objectives are unchanged; their commitments are worthless; and their global threat is growing."

Speaking with CNN's Wolf Blitzer on "The Situation Room" Wednesday evening, Bolton quipped that he was "embarrassed at the low price" allegedly offered to assassinate him.

The former national security adviser said he has "long had a general understanding of what the threat was" from Iran but learned many of the specifics of the assassination plot from documents released by the Justice Department earlier in the day.

"I think it's quite correct to say many other Americans are in the targets of this regime. It tells you what the regime is. It tells you about its character," Bolton said.

A hawkish neoconservative, Bolton had previously advocated for regime change in Iran and backed Trump's decision to pull the US out of the multinational Iran nuclear deal. Turning to the current administration, Bolton called on Biden to end the efforts to [return to the Iran nuclear deal](https://www.cnn.com/2022/08/10/middleeast/iran-talks-trump-shadow-mime-intl/index.html), from which the US withdrew in 2018 while Bolton was national security adviser.

"Frankly, from my point of view, the regime's terrorist activities are just the other side of the coin of its nuclear weapons program, and any idea this regime will adhere to its commitments on anything is just a terrible delusion," Bolton told Blitzer.

Bolton said he hadn't been aware Pompeo was also reportedly targeted, but that it didn't surprise him.

"I think there are substantial number of people who are vulnerable to these Iranian efforts. And unfortunately, I'm afraid we may learn it more," he said.

Security provided

Pompeo, who also served as CIA director under Trump, has received continuous security since the end of the Trump administration because of threats from Iran, the source close to him said.

Former Ambassador Jim Jeffrey, who served as special representative for Syria and special envoy to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS under Pompeo, said that "Pompeo was central to the Trump administration's strategy and execution of Iran policy as" CIA director and secretary of state.

Jeffrey said that "given (the) record of Iranian assassinations in Europe and aborted ones there and here," including the failed plot against the former Saudi foreign minister at a DC restaurant in 2011, "the threats should be taken seriously."

Multiple current and former US officials continue to receive significant personal security due to the Iranian IRGC threats, according to a source directly familiar with all of those being protected. The security is being provided by the US government, that source said.

There are multiple IRGC plots continuing to be investigated, the source said, including threats against senior military leaders that could be consider equivalents of Soleimani.

The IRGC set the goal of assassination, but there are competing factions within the organization trying to carry out various plots. The plot involving Bolton is only one element, the source noted.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Nasser Kanani, said Wednesday that the "Islamic Republic of Iran strongly warns against any action against Iranian citizens under the pretext of these ridiculous accusations and emphasizes that it reserves the right to take any action within the framework of international law to defend the rights" of the government and citizens, according to state news IRNA.