



IRAN

# Revelations In Grisly Death Of Iconic Iranian Dissident: Did Tehran Hire A Friend To Kill Him?

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By [Hooman Askary](#) [Shahriar Siami](#) [Carl Schreck](#)

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BONN, Germany -- Shortly before midnight on August 6, 1992, police in Bonn entered the small, cluttered apartment of Fereydoun Farrokhzad, a renowned Iranian entertainer, poet, and dissident who had fled his homeland after the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Farrokhzad's neighbors in the apartment block on Riemann Street, in the southwest of the former West German capital, had been alarmed that Farrokhzad's dogs had barked incessantly for several days.

In the kitchen, police found the body of the singer with a switchblade in his right shoulder and a longer kitchen knife lodged in his mouth.

The burners on the stove where Farrokhzad had been cooking still smoldered, pushing the temperature in the small kitchen to above 50 degrees Celsius -- charring the saucepans and baking his decaying corpse.

In exile, Farrokhzad had become a scathing critic of Iran's hard-line regime, mocking Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini as being illiterate, delusional, and obsessed with sex in his writings. He produced a radio show for the Paris-based opposition group Flag of Freedom and helped engineer the defection of an Iranian pilot to Iraq during the two countries' bloody war.

Farrokhzad's grisly murder was widely seen as part of what became known as the "chain murders" -- a string of assassinations and disappearances of dozens of Iranian intellectuals carried out by Iranian intelligence from 1988 to 1998.

Nearly three decades after Farrokhzad's murder, however, the crime remains officially unsolved, and German law-enforcement authorities have declined to comment on the case or its alleged political context, citing the ongoing investigation.

But a new investigation by RFE/RL's Persian-language service, Radio Farda, reveals that German police thought that Farrokhzad's murder bore the hallmarks of an Iranian government operation and that the perpetrators appeared to have used one of the singer's acquaintances to carry out the killing.

That assessment was found in excerpts, obtained by Radio Farda, of an internal 1993 report on "Iranian state terrorism" by the German federal criminal police (BKA), who say the "department-specific publication" has since been destroyed.

Furthermore, a former senior Iranian intelligence defector told Radio Farda in an interview that Tehran deployed an Iranian emigre and acquaintance of the singer who was based in Los Angeles to murder Farrokhzad.

The Iranian government denies any involvement in Farrokhzad's killing, suggesting it was committed by a male lover of Farrokhzad or Iranian opposition activists.

The Radio Farda investigation gives an unprecedented look into Farrokhzad's personal, political, and professional struggles in the final years before his murder based on interviews with those close to him as well as excerpts from his home videos and diaries never seen by the public. (Watch Radio Farda's three-part investigative documentary [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).)

Radio Farda's investigation also reveals that:

- An ex-associate of Farrokhzad says German police questioned him in 2019 about an alleged Iran-backed smear campaign against the artist before he died.
- Farrokhzad said shortly before his murder that he intended to return to North America to perform, despite meeting with Iranian officials about securing his return to Iran.
- German police assessed in 1993 that Iran's leaders "apparently could not accept unpunished the disgrace inflicted on Islam" by Farrokhzad's public statements.
- The emigre alleged by the Iranian ex-spy to be Farrokhzad's killer later obtained political asylum in the United States after giving conflicting stories to immigration officials.
- U.S. authorities worked with German investigators on the murder case, according to one person who says he was questioned by the FBI on the matter.

## | Silencing Dissidents

With the advent of the Internet era, Farrokhzad has reached a new generation of Iranians who share his politically charged quotes on social media, while video clips of his fiery speeches and performances are regularly broadcast into Iran on Persian-media platforms operating from exile.

Farrokhzad's life was also the subject of a play staged across North America the past two years and a biopic shot in Hollywood and released in May.

Even among today's opponents of Iran's regime, Tehran's long reach remains a concern.

In July, a U.S. federal court unsealed an indictment accusing Iranian intelligence officials of plotting to kidnap Masih Alinejad -- an Iranian-American journalist and activist based in New York -- "for mobilizing public opinion in Iran and around the world to bring about changes to the [Iranian] regime's laws and practices."

On December 2, U.S. Senators Ben Cardin (Democrat-Maryland) and Pat Toomey (Republican-Pennsylvania) unveiled a bill bearing Alinejad's name aimed at punishing Tehran for what Toomey described as "Iran's transnational repression to silence dissidents." Farrokhzad's murder is one of several cases cited in the draft legislation, which notes that his death "is allegedly the work of Iran-directed agents."

For Farrokhzad's brother Mehrdad, who died in 2018, there was no mystery about those responsible for the killing. He told the German filmmaker Claus Strigel in 2007: "Everyone knows that the [Iranian] government killed him."

## | 'They Won't Let You Live'

Farrokhzad was born into a military family in Tehran in 1936, the fourth of seven children. One of his sisters was the acclaimed feminist poet Forough Farrokhzad, who died in a car accident in 1967 at the age of 32.

He came to Germany in the late 1950s and studied political science in Munich. While there, he also published a book of his German-language poems, *Another Season*, in 1964.

After returning to Iran, he embarked on a career as a singer and entertainer on radio and television, recording popular music and earning a huge following among his compatriots during the rule of the shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Decked out in tuxedos, he hosted a popular variety show, *Silver Carnation*, which ran from 1976-78 and helped propel numerous Iranian performers to stardom.

At the height of his fame, Farrokhzad challenged taboos in Iran's broadly conservative society.

"[He was] so bold, bringing a woman on stage, hugging her, wanting to kiss her or hold her hand, and saying: 'Let's dance together.' This was not common in Iranian society," Ali Limonadi, founder of the Los Angeles-based, Persian-language IRTV, told Radio Farda.

Meanwhile, rumors about Farrokhzad's homosexuality swirled.

Following the 1979 revolution, Farrokhzad was summoned before an Islamic Revolutionary Court and was also detained several times before fleeing to Europe through Turkey in 1982 as Ayatollah Khomeini consolidated his power.

Numerous personal diaries of Farrokhzad's that Radio Farda obtained show that life in exile weighed heavily on his psyche.

"I am lonely.... I feel like killing myself and freeing myself from all this pain and anguish," he wrote in one entry dated January 28, 1984.

**SEE ALSO:**

'Chain Murders' Timeline: Iran's Long, Bloody Reach

Farrokhzad had voiced moderately leftist politics in his youth but was hardly a firebrand during his period of national fame in the Pahlavi era. In exile, however, he became a thorn in the side of Iran's Islamic government.

He produced a weekly radio program for the Paris-based opposition group Flag Of Freedom, led by the shah's former education minister, Manuchehr Ganji, and also railed against the ayatollahs at his concerts for emigre audiences.

"Khomeini writes that if you get it on with a four-legged [animal], take it to a town 40 kilometers away and sell it. Only you can get it on with a four-legged [animal].... Only you, Mr. Khomeini!" Farrokhzad told an audience at a concert in the 1980s.

"You are the children of Saadi, Hafez, Rumi, and Avicenna," Farrokhzad added, referring to famous Persian poets and scholars, "and now you have ended up with [Ayatollah] Ruhollah Khomeini, who writes such nonsense."

Audio cassettes of Farrokhzad's speeches and performances abroad were bootlegged and smuggled into Iran -- the same way that Khomeini's messages reached the masses during his exile in France.

"Fereydoun Farrokhzad transformed from a singer of popular songs to a fighter like Che Guevara," Saeed Mohammadi, Farrokhzad's musical collaborator -- and, according to German police, his paramour -- said in an interview with Radio Farda. Mohammadi denied that the two men were romantically involved.

Publicly, Farrokhzad remained guarded about his love life, though his relationships with other men were no secret to those who knew him. One video from his home archive obtained by Radio Farda features a lengthy speech by Farrokhzad to an audience in Australia that is one of the few known instances in which he discussed his sexuality openly.

"I have this bravery, this courage, so I will stand in front of you like a man and I will tell you what I think. For 10 years of my life I lived with a man and I loved him to bits," Farrokhzad told the crowd.

While in exile, Farrokhzad also embraced the plight of Iranian child soldiers in the Iran-Iraq War as his cause célèbre, traveling to Iraq multiple times to meet the juvenile prisoners of war. He helped facilitate the dramatic 1986 defection of Iranian pilot Ali Akbar Mohammadi -- the brother of Saeed Mohammadi. The pilot was later assassinated by two gunmen after taking his daughter to kindergarten in Hamburg in January 1987.

It was also Farrokhzad's embrace of the child-soldier issue that precipitated his disillusionment with the Iranian emigre community in Los Angeles.

In November 1988, Farrokhzad staged a telethon in Los Angeles seeking donations for children victimized by the Iran-Iraq War. The following year, however, Los Angeles police launched an investigation against him, alleging that he had embezzled \$28,500 from the proceeds of the telethon and absconded to Europe. He was also accused of forging a check for nearly \$13,000.

The Los Angeles District Attorney's Office sought to extradite Farrokhzad, who ultimately returned to Los Angeles and voluntarily surrendered in March 1992. He was released on bail, but the case against him was never brought to trial as Farrokhzad was murdered less than five months later.

Farrokhzad, who insisted he was innocent of the charges and that he was the target of a smear campaign, had grown increasingly isolated and despondent in the final year of his life, in part due to the Los Angeles criminal case, according to those who knew him.

"He was in a bad place psychologically and financially. He was probably hoping to return [to Iran]. The Islamic republic had recently been letting many people back in," Roxanne Ganji, the daughter of exiled opposition leader Manuchehr Ganji, told Radio Farda.

### 'Supposed To Be The Mole'

Ganji, who is now 90, **told the Germany weekly magazine Focus** in November 1994 that four people from the Iranian Embassy in Bonn attempted to use Farrokhzad to infiltrate the Flag of Freedom opposition group, and that the dissident artist "confessed that to me himself."

"He was supposed to be the mole in our organization. That didn't work out, so he was liquidated. These people have absolutely no qualms about this. Just don't underestimate them," Ganji said.

Farrokhzad had indeed taken up contact with officials, including intelligence officers, at the Iranian Embassy in Bonn to discuss his possible return to Iran to visit his ailing mother.

Word of those contacts drifted back to Ganji and his Flag Of Freedom opposition group in Paris.

"I told him that this was all a setup to assassinate him. I told him, 'They are not going to let you live and go to Iran.' So after a half-hour discussion he promised me that he would cut the contact," Ganji told Radio Farda.

Ganji said he learned that Farrokhzad had again contacted the embassy after their conversation and brought him in for a second meeting in Paris.

"I told him, 'Alright, it has now been almost two years that we have been cooperating and recording this radio program, but unfortunately we seem to have reached the end of the line. Today is your last day here,'" Ganji recalled saying.

"But what I want to tell you is: These people are not going let you live."

## 'Invited In For A Meal'

Farrokhzad was preparing food on the stove in the cramped kitchen of his Bonn apartment when he was attacked from behind and stabbed to death, German police concluded.

Whoever killed him "apparently had been invited into his apartment for a meal," a 1993 report by Germany's federal criminal police (BKA) that Radio Farda obtained states, adding: "The table was set for two people."

Down a short staircase from the kitchen, two plates and cutlery had been set on the living room floor next to the two stacked mattresses that served as Farrokhzad's bed. Dozens of pieces of traditional Persian nougat lay strewn nearby.

### Iran's Two-Man 'Hit Teams'

According to the 1993 BKA report obtained by Radio Farda, the "hit teams" believed to have been deployed by the Iranian government against its opponents typically consisted of two people. A section of the report titled Direct Perpetrators reads:

"The murders of dissidents presumed to be the result of Iranian state terrorism are carried out based on a division of labor. The head of the operation is the so-called 'controller,' who is fully informed about the entire action and the people involved. This person is someone who knows the location and who instructs the other parties involved and provides logistical support. There is also a reconnaissance team that consists of up to 10 people. The direct execution of the act is assigned to the so-called 'hit team' that, according to available knowledge, consist[s] of two people."

The BKA report estimates that Farrokhzad had likely been killed several days earlier. A contemporaneous [news report](#) cites police as saying that police had investigated cries for help at the building on the evening of August 3, but that responding officers were unable to identify which apartment the screams had emanated from.

Friends of Farrokhzad corroborated this account to Radio Farda.

It was only days later, after neighbors called police a second time due to the incessant barking of the dogs, that police entered Farrokhzad's apartment and found his corpse.

Rolf Mueller, the Bonn homicide inspector overseeing the case at the time, was quoted by a German-based, Persian-language magazine as saying that Farrokhzad had been stabbed 10 times and left to bleed to death.

Precisely for whom Farrokhzad was preparing food on the day of his murder remains unclear. According to a friend of Farrokhzad's who spoke on condition of anonymity due to safety concerns, the singer would typically take a photograph of anyone who visited his apartment. Police said his handbag containing a Canon Top Twin camera was missing from the apartment after the murder.

Also missing was a notebook -- or possibly several notebooks -- that Farrokhzad regularly used as a planner, according to Parviz Mardani, a friend of the singer who spoke with police following the murder.

"I asked police: 'Did you find it?' The policeman said, 'No, we didn't find it.' I said that if you get that notebook, all the information is listed there: who he's been meeting with, his appointments, his comings and goings, his plans. The policeman said, 'No, unfortunately we didn't find it,'" Mardani said.

The mystery of who visited Farrokhzad on the day of his murder may hinge on a pair of travelers who arrived in Bonn by train.

Farrokhzad went to meet two acquaintances at Bonn's main train station shortly before he was killed, according to multiple sources interviewed by Radio Farda. Two of these sources said they were told this by Saeed A., the young Iranian man with whom Farrokhzad had lived.

The young man had urged Farrokhzad not to meet them but was rebuffed by the entertainer, who suggested the two men were his friends, according to one of these sources.

Saeed A. was not living with Farrokhzad at the time of murder, according to Mardani, and he was briefly arrested in connection with the killing but subsequently released due to a lack of evidence that he was involved.

Attempts by Radio Farda to locate Saeed A. and obtain his account about Farrokhzad's two mystery visitors were unsuccessful.

Farrokhzad's now-deceased brother, Mehrdad, and their family friend Saeed Behnejad were allowed to enter the performer's Bonn apartment shortly after the murder -- a visit they decided to film. Behnejad recalls a horrific stench and cleaning up "blood and body fat that had been cooked and melted under the kitchen cabinets."

Behnejad said in an interview before he died in July 2020 that German police refused to tell them anything about the investigation. "Whatever you say, a half an hour later phones will light up all over the world," he recalls being told by police. "We're investigating, and this will end the investigation."

## | 'Presumed State-Terrorist Operations'

While suspicion quickly fell on the Iranian government, Tehran denied any involvement in Farrokhzad's murder.

"German Judge Identifies Homo Youth As Farrokhzad's Murderer" read a headline in the ultra-hard-line Iranian daily Kayhan less than a week after Farrokhzad's body was discovered, using a pejorative term for a gay man. The news items claimed that a German judge had charged "a 27-year-old Iranian homo" -- a reference to Saeed A., who was arrested but then subsequently released -- with the murder.

In a statement to the UN Commission on Human Rights less than four months after the crime, the Iranian government claimed the German investigation had found that Farrokhzad's murderer "was a homosexual and his motivation was sex-related, not a political matter," while noting that this information "has not been proved and the investigations continue."

The German government, for its part, told the commission only that the investigation had "not furnished any proof of participation of Iranian officials in the assassination" of Farrokhzad.

Seyed Hossein Musavian, the Iranian ambassador in Bonn at the time, claimed in a telephone interview with Radio Farda that Germany's head of intelligence, Bernd Schmidbauer, told him a week after the crime that "it is evident to our security apparatus that Iran had no role in this issue."

"Neither the German Foreign Ministry, nor the German security apparatus, nor the German Chancellor's Office raised a claim about Iran's involvement in this matter. No claim. They never mentioned in any meeting and were not even willing to say who [was involved]. Either they did not know, really, they did not know, or did not want to show their own incompetence, or they knew and did not want to tell us," Musavian claimed.

Schmidbauer answered concisely when asked whether he had said that to Musavian or discussed the Farrokhzad case with Iran's then-intelligence chief, Ali Fallahian.

"I can answer all of your questions with 'no,'" Schmidbauer wrote in an e-mail.

These questions also included whether German intelligence had information about Iranian involvement in Farrokhzad's murder.

But the 1993 BKA report obtained by Radio Farda indicates German authorities found sufficient grounds to suspect Tehran murdered Farrokhzad.

The report analyzed 21 cases of murder, kidnapping, and surveillance targeting Iranian opposition figures in Europe that "are presumed to be due to state-terrorist operations."

Farrokhzad's murder is among them.

**Excerpts from an October 1993 German federal criminal police report on Iranian "state terrorism" that includes an analysis of Fereydown Farrokhzad's murder.**

This report, Findings On Iranian State Terrorism, has since been destroyed as part of routine maintenance, a BKA spokesperson said. But Radio Farda obtained excerpts of the document, which states that the analysis is based on "findings of foreign authorities, communications from intelligence services, and our own investigations."



The report describes Farrokhzad as among those deemed to "have harmed the Iranian government or Islam" and that Tehran "apparently could not accept unpunished the disgrace inflicted on Islam by [his] public statements."

As an example, it cites the following purported quote from Farrokhzad that Radio Farda was unable to independently confirm: "I admit my homosexuality, but if I would tell you which mullahs I did it with, it would open your eyes."

The BKA report posits that allowing Farrokhzad to return to Iran to visit his ailing mother might have put the leadership in an awkward position: Either allow an ardent critic to move freely in the country or arrest him and risk "worldwide protests of Iranian oppositionists, politicians, and artists."

"It can therefore not be excluded that the Iranian regime might have rid itself of this dilemma by liquidating Farrokhzad," the report states, adding that the investigation had not been able to either "confirm nor discount this theory."

## | FBI Interrogation

The BKA report mentions only one individual by name as someone who might be considered a suspect in the crime -- Saeed Mohammadi, the musician and partner of Farrokhzad's whose brother, the pilot, defected to Iraq with the singer's help -- but does not offer any evidence other than bad blood between the two men.

Mohammadi is described in the report as Farrokhzad's former romantic partner, though he denied this in an interview with Radio Farda. The BKA report says their relationship ended at the insistence of Mohammadi's brother, Ali Akbar Mohammadi.

After Mohammadi's brother was killed by two gunmen in Hamburg in 1987, German authorities investigated Farrokhzad on suspicion of tipping off Iranian intelligence about the fugitive pilot's whereabouts, but dropped the case due to a lack of evidence.

The BKA report states that Mohammadi's involvement in Farrokhzad's murder "might be considered possible" due to a "revenge motive" because of the singer's possible role in his brother's murder -- and it suggests he could have done that by perhaps helping the killers gain entry into Farrokhzad's Bonn apartment.

Mohammadi told Radio Farda that he was in Frankfurt -- 170 kilometers southeast of Bonn -- when he learned that Farrokhzad had been murdered. He denies any involvement and there is no indication German authorities have considered him a suspect in the ensuing decades.

Mohammadi said in a written response that when he arrived in the United States in order to immigrate about two weeks after Farrokhzad's murder, he "heard from my friends that the German police had come after me to the shop I used to have in Frankfurt."

From his residence in Oakland, California, Mohammadi made contact with German police, who said the FBI would contact him on their behalf, Mohammadi said.

"It was in September or October 1992 that two FBI agents came to my doorstep and took me with them. First they took me to a hospital where my blood sample was taken and then we went to the police headquarters in downtown Oakland. There I was interrogated nonstop for some four to five hours," Mohammadi said.

"Then they returned me to my home and told me that they would contact me, which they never did. Ever since that time, neither the U.S. police nor their German colleagues have contacted me," Mohammadi told Radio Farda.

FBI spokesperson Carol Cratty said the agency had no comment when asked about its role in the Farrokhzad murder investigation and referred reporters to German authorities.

### | Dangerous Liaisons

As an example of security gaps, the BKA report cites the assassination of Iranian opposition figure Shapur Bakhtiar, the shah's last prime minister, in France almost exactly a year prior to Farrokhzad's murder. Bakhtiar was killed by assailants with fake Turkish passports who entered his heavily guarded home together with a confidant of the former prime minister who betrayed him. Like Farrokhzad, Bakhtiar was killed with a kitchen knife.

Comparing the cases of Iranian opposition figures murdered on European soil, the BKA report notes that "even elaborate protective measures...could not prevent an assassination attempt."

"Security gaps stemming from the victims' naivete about confidants from their personal circles inevitably arise and are recognized and exploited using good planning," the BKA report states. "The perpetrators apparently used a confidant in the murder of Farrokhzad."

### | 'Witness C' and Mr. X

Precisely which of Farrokhzad's "confidants" might have been involved in his murder remains unclear.

But in an exclusive interview with Radio Farda, a former senior Iranian intelligence official who defected to the West in the 1990s claimed that the man who fatally stabbed Farrokhzad was a friend of the singer's previously based in Los Angeles.

The former spy, Abolghasem Mesbahi, was a crucial witness in Germany's 1997 conviction of four Iranian agents in the assassination of three Kurdish-Iranian opposition figures and an Iranian dissident at Berlin's Mykonos restaurant six weeks after Farrokhzad's murder.

### | Who Is 'Witness C'?

The Mykonos verdict provides the following biographical details about Abolghasem Mesbahi, the man known as Witness C:

- Mesbahi headed Iran's intelligence operations in France for several years while formally serving as economic attache of Tehran's embassy. France expelled him in December 1983 due to his intelligence activities.
- German intelligence confirmed that Mesbahi traveled in Germany and Switzerland after his expulsion from France using a service passport for Iranian government employees.
- Mesbahi's testimony and travel records indicate he continued to work with senior intelligence officials, including on hostage negotiations, until 1988.
- Iran arrested Mesbahi for alleged treason in November 1988. He left the intelligence services and spent some 18 months under house arrest.
- Mesbahi testified that he later served as a government adviser and was present at a 1993 visit to Iran by Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze. German prosecutors obtained images of an official meeting during that visit in which Mesbahi was visible.
- In early 1996, Mesbahi allegedly received a tip that Iranian intelligence intended to assassinate him, after which he fled to Pakistan in April of that year before making his way to Germany.

German intelligence concluded that Iran's government was "directly involved" in the Mykonos assassinations and, in an unprecedented move, German Chief Federal Prosecutor Kay Nehm issued an arrest warrant for Ali Fallahian, Iran's intelligence minister at the time.

The Berlin court's verdict implicated the Islamic republic's top leaders in the Mykonos assassinations and EU governments responded to the ruling by expelling Iranian diplomats and recalling ambassadors from Iran.

Mesbahi, who was known as Witness C in the Mykonos trial, was deemed a credible witness in the case, though he has since made numerous explosive and unproven claims -- including that Argentina's former president was a paid agent of the Iranian government -- raising questions about his credibility as a source.

In his interview, Mesbahi could only recall the first name of Farrokhzad's friend from Los Angeles. But Radio Farda independently identified a man fitting Mesbahi's description -- and was able to corroborate multiple details the ex-spy provided about this individual.

Radio Farda has decided to publish Mesbahi's account of Farrokhzad's murder given the credible testimony he gave in the Mykonos assassinations and the decades-long silence by German authorities about a possible suspect.

Because Mesbahi is the lone source implicating the alleged killer, who died a decade ago after receiving political asylum in the United States, Radio Farda is identifying the purported killer only as Mr. X.

## | 'Fereydoun's Full Trust'

According to Mesbahi, Mr. X was a "car dealer" in Los Angeles and a friend of Farrokhzad's whose property had been confiscated by the Iranian regime following the 1979 Islamic Revolution. A known supporter of the shah, he and his family subsequently left the country and ultimately settled in California.

Mr. X learned through an intermediary that he could recover his seized assets in Iran if he demonstrated his loyalty to the Iranian government, Mesbahi claimed to Radio Farda.

"I can take out Farrokhzad as he is very, very close to me, and I can even go to his place while no one else is there with him," Mesbahi, describing Mr. X's message to Iranian intelligence, told Radio Farda.

The intermediary informed Iranian intelligence officials in Germany of the plan, who signed off on the operation, according to Mesbahi.

Because Farrokhzad had already been fired from his radio job with the opposition Flag of Freedom, Iran determined no further intelligence could be gained from him and he should be eliminated, Mesbahi claimed.

"He goes on stage and swears at Mr. Khomeini and the system like that," Mesbahi added.

According to Mesbahi, Mr. X was trained for the operation by Akbar Khoshkushk, a notorious former Iranian security agent who was part of a group of Iranian intelligence officers later accused of "rogue" assassinations of the Iranian government's critics.

"In Iran, he was trained and even practiced. He was told not to take any weapons because if they were later found, they could give investigators a lead. Secondly, he was instructed to make sure to use something in the home, like a kitchen knife, for example, and make sure the first blow was in the neck because that would silence the person, and the victim wouldn't be able to shout or make any noise," Mesbahi claimed.

He added that the assassin was "so trusted" by Farrokhzad "that even when he entered and when he committed the crime, Mr. Farrokhzad was still not in a position to even scream."

The day after Farrokhzad's murder, Mr. X flew to Iran from Frankfurt using a passport supplied by an Iranian intelligence officer named Seyed Reza Saberi, Mesbahi said. He was accompanied on the flight by the intermediary who allegedly connected him with Iranian intelligence -- a man with the last name Ghodsi.

A man with the same last name as the alleged intermediary, meanwhile, surfaced in the January 1993 [report](#) by the UN Commission on Human Rights. Farrokhzad claimed prior to his murder that he had been warned "about his anti-regime activities" by a man named Dr. Javad Ghodsi.

Radio Farda attempted to locate Ghodsi but was unable to establish the individual's identity. But according to Musavian, the Iranian government's ambassador to Germany at the time of the murder, such a person did work for the Iranian Embassy in Bonn.

Musavian described Ghodsi as a shy and pious local hire who helped out at an Iranian cultural center in Bonn while his wife received medical treatment in Germany.

## | An Iranian Assassination Boss In Europe

Reached by telephone, Akbar Khoshkushk denied any involvement in Farrokhzad's killing. But Canadian Supreme Court records obtained by Radio Farda (download [here](#)) show that, at the very least, he was traveling under a false identity in Europe in the months prior to Farrokhzad's killing -- and that he trained operatives in assassination techniques.

The records stem from a case related to **Canada's 2002 deportation** of an admitted Iranian intelligence agent named Mansur Ahani, who told Canadian intelligence that Khoshkushk was involved in training him as an assassin.

Ahani met Khoshkushk in Switzerland in May 1992 and shortly thereafter in Italy as well. They were detained, questioned, and subsequently released by Italian authorities. Ahani then traveled to Istanbul, where he delivered a camera that Khoshkushk had given him to the Iranian Consulate before returning to Canada with a fake Andorran passport.

At the time, Khoshkushk was "in charge of all Iranian assassinations teams," the court records state.

Ahani told Canadian intelligence that he spoke again with Khoshkushk in July 1992, after he had returned to Canada. He described Khoshkushk as his "team leader" who "eliminates people who prove a threat to the Iranian revolution, and...performs these assassinations in Iran and in other countries."

Musavian said Ghodsi was about 55 years old at the time and had no links to Iran's security apparatus. Ghodsi returned to Iran after a temporary stint with the embassy's cultural section in Bonn, Musavian claimed.

Mesbahi described Ghodsi as an uncle of Mr. X, though Radio Farda found no evidence of this. Mr. X's family did not respond to questions about Ghodsi.

## | Mr. X's Strange Journey

Radio Farda was unable to find a second source to corroborate Mesbahi's claims about Mr. X's alleged role in Farrokhzad's murder. But multiple other parts of his account check out -- including that Mr. X lost his assets in Iran after the revolution, was a "royalist," and was linked to a car dealership while living in Los Angeles.

Two people -- including a relative of Mr. X -- also confirmed to Radio Farda that he and Farrokhzad knew each other while the two men lived in Los Angeles.

Radio Farda also uncovered evidence that around two years before Farrokhzad's murder in August 1992, Mr. X may have traveled to Iran for an unspecified period of time -- despite previously telling U.S. officials that he feared for his life should he return.

Mr. X arrived in Los Angeles from Germany in September 1986 and applied for political asylum nearly three years later, claiming he fled Iran with his family after he was arrested, tortured, and had his property seized following the revolution, according to his U.S. immigration records, which Radio Farda obtained under the Freedom of Information Act.

In July 1989, the U.S. immigration officer assigned to his case described him as a "supporter of the shah," matching Mesbahi's account.

In his asylum application filed the previous month, Mr. X said he "would be jailed and executed" if he returned to Iran.

Six months later, in December 1989, U.S. immigration officials informed Mr. X that they intended to deny his asylum application "because you have failed to establish a well-founded fear of persecution...were you to return to Iran." The letter cites an advisory opinion from the U.S. State Department.

Despite Mr. X's stated fears of being "jailed and executed," his immigration records indicate that he may have returned to Iran the same year that his first asylum application was filed.

"During 1989 and 1997, I heard that the regime had ended and I decided to go back. However, the regime did not change and I then decided to sign up with a new lawyer and apply for asylum," Mr. X wrote in a subsequent U.S. asylum application he submitted in 2004.

It is the lone mention of Mr. X's possible return to Iran from the United States in the 488 pages of his immigration records that Radio Farda obtained. Copies of his Iranian passport submitted with his asylum applications do not show any records of Mr. X's travel after his arrival in Los Angeles in September 1986.

At various times during his bids for U.S. asylum, Mr. X gave differing accounts of his escape from Iran.

In his second application, he claimed he "was allowed to leave Iran under the pretenses that I will become a spy for the Iranian government," adding that his "intention was to leave the country and not return until the regime would change."

### | Killer's Remorse

In his book, *The Red Eminence And The Gray Eminences*, dissident Iranian journalist Akbar Ganji claimed the order to kill "F.F." -- a clear reference to Farrokhzad -- came from an official that Ganji later identified as Iranian intelligence chief Ali Fallahian.

Ten days after the murder, "the agent who carried out the operation was reportedly sobbing," Ganji wrote.

"It was [Fallahian's] order to kill him. When I talked to the officials in charge of his file, they said [Farrokhzad] was our operative, he was cooperating with us, and killing him was against our plans. Now if I die, how am I going to answer to God in the other world?"

Ganji did not identify the source of this account in his book, which was published in 2000. He declined to discuss it when reached by Radio Farda.

In his first U.S. asylum application in June 1989, however, Mr. X claimed Iranian authorities had released him "only for the purpose of selling personal properties for the benefit of the [Iranian government]," after which he fled to Germany with his family.

Ultimately, Mr. X was granted U.S. political asylum in 2004. He died seven years later.

## | 'They Were Friends Or Something'

If Mesbahi's claims about Mr. X's alleged role in Farrokhzad's murder were fabricated, or simply misinformed, he could hardly have chosen a more obscure figure to pin the crime on.

Public information about Mr. X is scant, and he left virtually no digital footprint. But Radio Farda located two photographs of him on the social-media accounts of his immediate family, who still live in the Los Angeles area, and showed them to Amir Shadjareh, founder of the Los Angeles-based, Persian-language Pars TV.

Shadjareh recognized the man and confirmed that Farrokhzad and Mr. X knew one another.

Shadjareh recalled that Mr. X befriended Farrokhzad and introduced himself as an "automobile dealer."

"I later figured out that he was not. He was only a [small-time] reseller. He used to find potential customers for car dealers," Shadjareh recalled.

Shadjareh said that Mr. X had visited the Pars TV studios with Farrokhzad, who hosted a show on the network during his time in Los Angeles.

Shadjareh recalled that he did not see or hear about Mr. X after Farrokhzad's murder.

Radio Farda reached out to immediate family members of Mr. X, only one of whom agreed to speak. The relative said Mr. X and Farrokhzad were "friends or something" but did not elaborate.

Asked by Radio Farda if Mr. X had been involved in a car dealership in Los Angeles, the relative said: "Yeah, he was involved in a lot of things."

Radio Farda reached the widow of Mr. X by telephone, but she hung up immediately after the mention of Farrokhzad's name.

After obtaining Mr. X's immigration records, Radio Farda sent inquiries via e-mail, text messages, and encrypted messengers to several of his relatives seeking a response to the claim of his alleged role in Farrokhzad's murder, as well as his whereabouts at the time of the crime and the different accounts he gave to U.S. immigration officials about his departure from Iran.

All of these inquiries went unanswered as of publication.

Reached by telephone, the same relative who had previously confirmed that Mr. X and Farrokhzad knew one another told a reporter to stop contacting the family.

"We have nothing to do with this guy," the relative said, referring to Farrokhzad.

## | Persons Of Interest

While German authorities have never publicly accused Iranian officials of involvement in Farrokhzad's killing, the names of multiple Iranian intelligence agents have repeatedly surfaced among the slain dissident's associates as potential suspects in the crime.

Several of these agents are linked to the slayings of other Iranian political exiles in Europe, a review of decades-old German intelligence reports and French court records by Radio Farda shows.

These agents include three men that Mesbahi identified by their last names: Gholami, Osouli, and Saberi.

Gholami relayed to his superiors Mr. X's proposal to assassinate Farrokhzad, while Saberi furnished a passport for the killer to fly out of Frankfurt the day after the killing together with the mysterious intermediary Ghodsi, Mesbahi claimed.

A list of accredited diplomats in Germany obtained by Radio Farda shows that as of March 1992 -- five months before Farrokhzad's killing -- only one man with the last name Gholami was officially stationed at the Iranian Embassy in Bonn: Morteza Gholami, who is listed as an attaché.

Gholami, however, was much more than a simple attaché. He was an intelligence officer responsible for monitoring the Iranian opposition and "likely had a leading role" in the assassination of Kurdish opposition leaders at Berlin's Mykonos restaurant six weeks after Farrokhzad's murder, according to a June 1993 intelligence report by Germany's Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV).

The 1993 UN report states that an alleged Iranian intelligence agent named "Ali Gholami" had reportedly "threatened to kill [Farrokhzad] if he would not collaborate with the [Iranian] regime."

Despite the different first name, the Gholami cited in the UN report appears to be the same Iranian diplomat listed as an attaché at the Bonn embassy. Farrokhzad's boss at Flag Of Freedom radio, Manuchehr Ganji, wrote in one of his books that "Morteza-Ali Gholami" was one of the Iranian diplomats Farrokhzad had met with prior to his murder.

Gholami appears to have left Germany shortly after the Mykonos attack. The June 1993 BfV report states that Gholami "returned to Iran prematurely" and was replaced by Ali Osouli -- another spy who returned to Iran in 1995 amid allegations of intelligence activities.

Both Osouli and Gholami surfaced in the French investigation into the May 1996 murder of Reza Mazluman -- a former Iranian official and opposition figure -- in Paris.



An Iranian exile based in Germany who was later convicted of complicity in Mazlumani's slaying had been in contact with both Osouli and Gholami, who used cover identities when dealing with the convicted accomplice, French court records obtained by Radio Farda show.

## | The Usual Suspects

The names of several alleged conspirators in Mesbahi's account of Farrokhzad's assassination previously surfaced in a 2003 Persian-language article published by the now-deceased exiled Iranian journalist Esmail Purvali.

In Purvali's account, which cites no sources, these individuals served in different roles in the crime than in Mesbahi's telling.

According to Purvali, the Iranian intelligence agents Saberi and Gholami directly carried out Farrokhzad's murder in his Bonn apartment, with Saberi posing as a businessman interested in buying a hotel in Germany.

Khoshkush and Osouli, meanwhile, were involved in organizing the murder and used a friend of Farrokhzad's to lure the dissident to the Bonn train station, Purvali claimed. The profile of the alleged friend described in Purvali's article does not appear to resemble that of Mr. X.

Purvali writes that the fate of a person named Ghodsi -- who had "disappeared" the day after Farrokhzad's murder -- "remains a mystery."

French security services also monitored an Iranian spy with the same name as another man whom Mesbahi accused of complicity in Farrokhzad's murder: Seyed Reza Saberi.

Mesbahi described Saberi as a senior Iranian intelligence officer who delivered a passport to Farrokhzad's killer so he could fly from Frankfurt to Tehran the day after the murder with Ghodsi, the mysterious intermediary.

Radio Farda was unable to find any record of Saberi being in Germany around the time of Farrokhzad's killing.

But France's Directorate of Territorial Surveillance established that a man named Seyed Reza Saberi, formally employed as head of security of Tehran's state-operated Iran Air in France, was in fact a senior Iranian intelligence officer "whose specific role covers the assassination of dissidents in exile."

That assessment was included in an April 1996 French prosecutor's referral concerning two Iranian men later convicted of complicity in the October 1990 murder of exiled Iranian opposition leader Cyrus Elahi in Paris.

According to the document, an English translation of which was obtained by Radio Farda, Saberi was the handler of one of the accomplices later convicted. The indictment also states that Saberi was "known to the British authorities for his terrorist activities" and "barred entry into the United Kingdom."

Asked whether Saberi had been banned from Britain due to "terrorist activities," a British Home Office spokesman said: "We do not routinely comment on individual cases."

## Political Considerations

Farrokhzad's murder came just months before the European Union's formal embrace of the so-called "critical dialogue" policy toward Iran seeking to change Tehran's behavior on human rights, international law, and terrorism while maintaining cultural and economic ties.

It also came against the backdrop of cooperation between German and Iranian intelligence services that triggered heightened scrutiny and controversy in the wake of the assassination of Kurdish-Iranian opposition leaders at the Mykonos restaurant in Berlin six weeks after Farrokhzad was killed.

### Photo Gallery: The Murder Of Fereydoun Farrokhzad: Persons Of Interest

#### Contentious Cooperation

During his controversial October 1993 visit to Germany, Iranian intelligence chief Ali Fallahian claimed to reporters that bilateral security cooperation between Germany and Iran had been under way for two years. Der Spiegel **subsequently reported** that Germany's Federal Intelligence Service had delivered a computer to Iran in 1991 and provided two months of training to Iranian agents.

In October 1993, just weeks before the trial of five men -- four Lebanese and one Iranian -- accused of carrying out the Mykonos killings, Iranian Intelligence Ministry chief Fallahian traveled to Bonn for an official visit with Schmidbauer, his German counterpart.

Schmidbauer faced withering criticism over the visit and was called before the German parliament to answer questions about the meeting -- which he described as "humanitarian" in nature -- and whether it was linked to the Mykonos trial.

Schmidbauer later testified that during their talks, Fallahian tried to persuade the German government to impede or shut down the Mykonos trial.

In March 1996, a German court issued an arrest warrant for Fallahian on suspicion of masterminding the Mykonos assassinations. The following year, a Berlin court found four of the suspects guilty of carrying out the killings on the orders of Iranian's leadership, sentencing two of the convicted men to life in prison.

The Mykonos assassinations largely overshadowed Farrokhzad's murder. But German parliamentarian Omid Nouripour, a Tehran-born member of the Greens party who emigrated to Germany with his family in 1988, says political considerations continue to hang over the singer's murder.

"It's obvious that there's political pressure there not to go into the details of a case which could be very harmful for a bunch of people on both sides, of course, harming also the German-Iranian relationship," Nouripour told Radio Farda.

Nouripour said solving Farrokhzad's murder "is not only a question of justice."

"It is a question of sovereignty [for] Germany to keep such kinds of [murders off] our soil," he said.

Musavian, Tehran's ambassador to Germany at the time of Farrokhzad's killing, told Radio Farda that he did everything possible to facilitate the dissident's return to Iran. He suggested the Iranian opposition may have been responsible for the murder to discourage Iranians in exile from returning to the country, but provided no evidence for this claim.

"Just when he was about to start selling his belongings and move back to Iran, they hit him," Musavian said.

Evidence, however, suggests Farrokhzad may have had second thoughts about returning.

Pars TV founder Shadjareh told Radio Farda that Farrokhzad left a message on his answering machine just weeks before his murder in Bonn.

### | The Los Angeles Fraud Case

Radio Farda obtained 37 pages of records from the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office related to the criminal case against Fereydoun Farrokhzad prior to his murder in 1992. The documents, obtained under the California Public Records Act, can be downloaded [here](#).

"I was in L.A. for a few days.... Unfortunately, there was so little time that I didn't manage to call you.... But I did hear that you are broadcasting my shows, for which I am grateful to you. I am soon going to be in L.A. There is going to be a huge concert in Canada and then all over America. Then I'll pay you a visit. Anyway, thanks again for airing my programs," Farrokhzad can be heard saying on the message.

In March of that year, Farrokhzad had indeed returned to Los Angeles to speak with investigators regarding the criminal case against him. He was briefly arrested and released on \$12,000 bail.

According to Shadjareh, Farrokhzad had told him he wanted to return to the United States and use Pars TV to relaunch the show he hosted in Iran prior to the revolution.

Shadjareh said Farrokhzad was calling from Canada when he left the answering-machine message. That claim lines up with the artist's known whereabouts in the months before his murder.

In what is billed as his last concert, Farrokhzad performed for an audience in Vancouver, Canada. Two associates of Farrokhzad -- including one in attendance at the concert -- told Radio Farda that the event was held in late June 1992, around six weeks before his murder.

If he was still planning on going back, Farrokhzad seemed unconcerned about railing against Iran's rulers ahead of his return.

"These days I am ashamed to say I am an Iranian, while being an Iranian has always been an element of pride for Iranian people throughout history," Farrokhzad bellowed into the microphone. "What has happened to us [is] that just like Germans under Hitler, we are ashamed to say that our leader is Adolf Hitler? Alas, there are people even in these very gatherings who praise the Adolf Hitler in Tehran."

## 'No Political Conclusions'

In a July 2020 inquiry to Germany's Interior Ministry, Nouripour asked about the "political conclusions" the government had drawn from the investigation.

The ministry responded that federal prosecutors took over the case from their Bonn colleagues in 2004 "because of the intelligence background" of the crime and discontinued it that same year. But the investigation resumed in 2007 and has since been carried out by the BKA on behalf of federal prosecutors "against unknown persons."

"Since the investigation has not yet been concluded, no political conclusions can be drawn from the crime," the ministry replied.

German investigators on the case have been pursuing leads at least as recently as 2019, according to Ali Limonadi, the founder of the Los Angeles-based, Persian-language IRTV.

Limonadi told Radio Farda that German police contacted him while he was in Frankfurt in August 2019 and questioned him about Farrokhzad.

"I said: 'But how is this file still open?' They said it was open until they solve it," Limonadi said.

Radio Farda could not independently verify the questioning that Limonadi says he underwent, though he provided evidence that he was in Germany at the time he says it took place.

Limonadi claims German police showed him a copy of an internal memo from Iran's Intelligence Ministry indicating that Tehran had financed a smear campaign against Farrokhzad within the large Iranian emigre community in Los Angeles to the tune of tens of thousands of dollars.

Radio Farda was unable to independently verify Limonadi's account or the authenticity of the alleged memo, and the BKA declined to comment.

Farrokhzad himself insisted he was innocent of the charge.

An alleged victim in Farrokhzad's criminal case, Bahman Sharifzadeh, insisted to Radio Farda that there was no smear campaign against Farrokhzad. Investigators closed the case due to Farrokhzad's murder, Sharifzadeh said in a telephone interview.

Radio Farda sent a lengthy inquiry to the BKA inquiring about multiple leads uncovered in this investigation, including the alleged smear campaign and the purported involvement of Mr. X, whose fingerprints are included in his U.S. immigration documents.

Its press office referred reporters to federal prosecutors, who said that "since the investigations are ongoing, we cannot provide further details."

"Moreover, as a rule, we do not comment on specific investigation measures or evidence," a spokesperson for Germany's Public Prosecutor General said in an e-mail.

Under German law, a legal representative of an immediate family member of a crime victim can apply for permission to review investigative materials in the matter. All of Farrokhzad's six siblings have died and his lone survivor is his son, Rostam Buczkowski, from whom he was estranged.

Buczkowski, 54, was born to Farrokhzad and his first wife, Austrian-born actress and radio presenter Anja Buczkowski. The couple divorced sometime in the late 1960s or early '70s. A legal guardian manages affairs for Rostam, who is disabled and lives in Munich.

Radio Farda sought Rostam's cooperation in order to access the case materials in his father's murder.

His legal guardian responded that Rostam has no interest in the matter.

*With additional reporting by Correctiv.org and RFE/RL senior correspondents Golnaz Esfandiari and Todd Prince*

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