

ALERT

Iranian Political Scientist Charged with Violating FARA

January 19, 2021

On January 19, 2021, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) unsealed a complaint charging Iranian-born U.S. green card holder Kaveh Afrasiabi with acting and conspiring to act as an unregistered foreign agent for Iran in violation of the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA).

FARA is a disclosure statute designed to promote transparency in the U.S. political, media, and public relations arenas, among others, with respect to foreign influence. In short, FARA requires every “agent of a foreign principal” engaging in certain political or quasi-political activities in the United States to register as such with DOJ, and to periodically – and publicly – disclose certain details of that agency relationship with the foreign principal.

Afrasiabi made frequent media appearances and published books and columns, including in major news outlets such as the New York Times, the Guardian, and Huffington Post. The complaint alleges that Afrasiabi was a secret employee of the Government of Iran and the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations. It also asserts that Afrasiabi lobbied an unidentified member of Congress and his staff. According to the complaint, because Afrasiabi engaged in such work and did not register with the U.S. government, he violated FARA.

In recent years, DOJ has taken a more aggressive approach to FARA enforcement, applying the statute broadly, including requiring media outlets to register and focusing more heavily on China and U.S. tech company activities. According to reports, today’s action was part of a number of the Trump Administration’s 11th hour foreign policy efforts. While it remains to be seen whether the incoming Biden

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Practice Areas

Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA)
International Trade
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Administration will take a similar approach to FARA administration/enforcement, the incoming Administration recently indicated that it will impose restrictions on foreign agents who seek jobs in the administration and will prohibit former officials from working as foreign agents immediately after leaving office.

Wiley has an established FARA practice that has been in existence for well over 20 years and routinely advises a wide range of clients, including foreign governments, lobbyists, public relations firms, law firms, and tourism agencies. Wiley also recently issued an updated 2021 edition of its FARA Handbook.

For more information on FARA and our related capabilities, please contact one of the lawyers listed on this alert.

Nicole Hager, a Law Clerk at Wiley Rein LLP, contributed to this alert.