

ICE arrested 11 Iranian nationals with criminal records or suspected terrorist ties

The Iranians arrested over the weekend and taken into ICE custody were all men who were living in the U.S. illegally.

Eleven Iranian nationals with either criminal records or suspected terrorist ties who had been living in the United States illegally were arrested over the weekend while American war planes were bombing nuclear facilities in their homeland, federal officials announced Tuesday.

In addition, Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents arrested a U.S. citizen who is alleged to have harbored one of the Iranian nationals and threatened to “shoot ICE officers in the head,” the Department of Homeland Security [said in a statement](#).

Before President Donald Trump gave the final order for the attack on the nuclear sites, Iran warned it would unleash terrorist attacks on the United States using sleeper cells inside the country, [NBC News reported Sunday](#), citing two U.S. officials and a person with knowledge of the threat. DHS did not say any of the men who were arrested were suspected of being part of any terrorist plan, and Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said Sunday that DHS had not identified any credible threats to U.S. soil.

Unrelated to the arrests, a New York City-based immigration lawyer said ICE took an Iranian client of his into custody Monday even though he does not have a criminal record and was granted asylum in August after he told a judge he faced persecution in Iran for converting to Christianity.

“They gave him no reason for why they took him into custody,” the lawyer, Farzad Siman, told NBC News. “But he told me that there were other Iranians with him.”

Siman said his 48-year-old client, whom he asked to be identified only as Ali to protect his family back in Iran, has never broken any U.S. laws. He said Ali immediately applied for asylum after he crossed the border into the country from Mexico on July 1, 2022.

“He is a Christian convert from Islam and applied for asylum because he faces persecution for religious reasons if he were to return to Iran,” Siman said.

Immigration Judge Richard Bailey, based in Pennsylvania, said at Ali’s asylum hearing in August that he found Ali’s testimony “credible,” according to court records.

“The information he provided during testimony was consistent with the Asylum Application and other documentary evidence, including his declaration and the witness declarations,” Bailey ruled, according to the records.

The government appealed the ruling in September, and while his appeal was being considered, Ali was required to regularly check in with ICE, Siman said.

“He was supposed to check in today, but yesterday he got a call asking him to come into a center out of Long Island,” Siman said. “He did, and he was taken into custody.”

DHS did not immediately reply to a request for comment about Ali’s arrest.

In announcing the 11 arrests, Assistant Homeland Security Secretary Tricia McLaughlin said DHS “has been full throttle on identifying and arresting known or suspected terrorists and violent extremists that illegally entered this country.”

All of the Iranians arrested over the weekend and taken into ICE custody are men, and five of them have previous criminal convictions for grand larceny, drug and firearm possession and other crimes.

Ribvar Karimi, whom ICE agents arrested Sunday in Locust, Alabama, was an Iranian army sniper from 2018 to 2021. He entered the United States in 2024 on a K-1 visa, which is meant for foreigners engaged to be married to American citizens.

“Karimi never adjusted his status — a legal requirement — and is removable from the United States,” the DHS said.

Mehran Makari Saheli, 56, a former member of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, was arrested at his home near St. Paul, Minnesota. Saheli has “admitted connections to Hezbollah,” a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization backed by Iran, according to DHS. He served a 15-month prison sentence for a firearm possession conviction.

In February, a man named Mehridehno “was listed as a known or suspected terrorist, and he’s now in ICE custody pending removal proceedings,” DHS said.

Mehrzaad Asadi Eidivand was arrested Sunday in Tempe, Arizona, along with Linet Vartaniann, the American citizen who is alleged to have threatened to shoot ICE officers.

Eidivand had been in the United States since June 2012, DHS said.

ICE agents in Houston arrested Behzad Sepehrian Bahary Nejad, an Iranian national who entered the United States in Houston in 2016 on an F-1 student visa.

Hamid Reza Bayat, who was also arrested in Houston, was in the country in defiance of an immigration judge’s order to leave the United States that was issued Aug. 4, 2005, according to DHS.

Since then, according to DHS, Bayat has twice been convicted of drug crimes and once of driving on a suspended license. He also served time behind bars, for which DHS gave no specifics.

Mahmoud Shafiei and Mehrdad Mehdipour were arrested Sunday at the home they shared in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Shafiei had been under orders to leave the country since at least January 1987. His criminal history includes state and federal convictions for drug crimes and arrests for assault and child abuse, DHS said.

Mehdipour had been in the United States since June 2023, DHS said.

Also in DHS custody are:

Bahman Alizadeh Asfestani, 62, who was arrested in San Francisco and whose criminal record includes a 1994 conviction for petty theft and a 1995 conviction for possession of a controlled substance for sale. He had been sentenced to 10 years in a state prison for the drug conviction.

Mohammad Rafikian, 65, was arrested by ICE in Buffalo, New York. His record includes convictions for grand larceny, schemes to defraud, criminal impersonation and practicing as an attorney.

Arkavan Babk Moirokorli, 57, was arrested in San Diego. He had been convicted of forging an official seal.