

THE CONCERNING PARAGRAPH IN THE RYAN ROUTH COMPLAINT

Of all the coverage on Ryan Routh – the seemingly unbalanced man who fled Trump’s golf course after being spotted with a gun yesterday – just the NYT (that I’ve seen) notes that Routh’s various statements seeming to express regret about the US’ worsening relationship with Iran.

In one convoluted passage, Mr. Routh vented his anger at Mr. Trump’s dismantling of the Obama administration’s nuclear deal with Iran.

After writing “Iran, I apologize,” Mr. Routh added, “you are free to assassinate Trump” – although he moves freely in the book between addressing his general readers and specific subjects.

Mr. Trump and his allies have long warned about the threat posed by Iran to the former president’s personal safety. In August, the Justice Department charged a Pakistani man who had recently visited Iran with trying to hire a hit man to assassinate political figures in the United States. Investigators believe that those potential targets likely included Mr. Trump.

Most journalists report that there have been two seeming assassination plots against Trump. Not so, if you count Asif Merchant’s efforts to hire a hit man, purportedly to go after Donald Trump. That would be a third.

Unless there’s a tie between Merchant’s efforts and Routh’s.

That's almost certainly not the case.

Routh seems like someone who keep searching for grandiose meaning in his life.

Still, I keep thinking about this paragraph from the complaint charging Routh with owning a gun as a felon.

9. During their investigation, law enforcement also discovered a publicly viewable Facebook post from on or about July 10, 2024, in which ROUTH directed his followers to contact him on an instant messaging application (WhatsApp) at the following number: 1-***-***-8342. Database checks indicate that a mobile phone assigned call number 1-***-***-8342 is serviced by T-Mobile US, Inc. ("T-Mobile") and that ROUTH is the subscriber. Agents requested T-Mobile, on an emergency basis, to provide law enforcement with information pertaining to ROUTH's mobile phone usage. Those records indicated that ROUTH's mobile phone was located in the vicinity of the area along the tree line described above from approximately 1:59 AM until approximately 1:31 PM, on September 15, 2024.

Routh was offering a public way to contact him, via WhatsApp, on the phone he had with him yesterday, a phone he seems to have carried on his person even though the gun he had and the truck he drove both had identifying information obscured.

Routh was doing so on July 10, on a day when Merchant remained at large (Merchant was arrested on July 12).

One aspect of Merchant's planning involved requiring the EDNY informant – whom Merchant believed would help him find a hit squad – to get him a new phone.

On or about June 10, 2024, Merchant met with the purported hitmen, who were in fact undercover U.S. law enforcement officers (the "UCs") whom the CS introduced to Merchant at Merchant's request. Merchant advised the UCs that he was looking for three services from them, including killing a "political person." During the meeting, Merchant presented himself as the "representative" in the U.S., indicating that there were other people he worked for outside the U.S. Merchant told the UCs that he wanted to pay the hitmen in

cash through “hawalas”—an informal and unregulated method of transferring money—in Istanbul and Dubai. Merchant also stated that he would give the hitmen instructions on who to kill either the last week of August 2024 or the first week of September 2024, after he returned to Pakistan. Merchant requested that the UCs provide him with a secure cellular phone so they could communicate, and the UCs said they would do so. The UCs also told Merchant that they would be in touch about how much their services would cost.

On or about June 12, 2024, Merchant met the UCs again and obtained the cellular phone from the UCs to use in furtherance of the assassination plot. During the meeting, Merchant agreed to pay the UCs a \$5,000 advance payment for the plot. Following the meeting with the UCs, Merchant met with the CS again in furtherance of the plot.

On or about June 13, 2024, Merchant wrote out coded language on a piece of paper that he instructed the CS to copy down and use when communicating with him in the future. Merchant wrote that the word “tee-shirt” would mean a “protest,” which he described as the “lightest work.” The phrase “flannel shirt” would mean “stealing,” which was “heavier work.” The phrase “fleece jacket,” the heaviest work, would mean “the third task . . . commit the act of the game,” indicating murder as previously discussed. The phrase “denim jacket” referred to “sending money.” Merchant told the CS to use the code words only orally on the phone and not to text them. [my emphasis]

So even in the plot the FBI thwarted, Merchant had a plan to set up a dedicated device for his efforts.

Again, I think it most likely that Routh is just a mentally ill person looking to give his life meaning.

But I don't rule out that Iran tried to find more potential recruits to target Trump. Routh's public profile would make it clear he wanted to recruit and be recruited, and his beliefs were so quirky, he might well allow himself to be recruited by Iran.

Which is to say, it's early yet. Routh's story may well be more complicated than it seems.