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CRIMINAL CHARGES FILED AGAINST TWO IRANIAN NATIONALS FOR VIOLATING MONEY LAUNDERING AND SANCTIONS LAWS BY PROCURING PETROLEUM TANKER

Related Forfeiture Complaint Filed for Approximately $12.3 Million in Funds Is Largest Ever Seizure of IRGC-QF Related Funds

WASHINGTON – Amir Dianat, 55, and Kamran Lajmiri, 42, both Iranian nationals, were charged with violating U.S. export laws and sanctions against Iran in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia.

A two-count criminal complaint returned today charges Dianat and Lajmiri with conspiracy to provide U.S. financial services to Iranian entities and their front companies attempting to purchase a petroleum tanker, the Nautic, in September 2019. The complaint alleges that the defendants concealed from the seller, financial institutions that clear U.S. dollar transactions, and the U.S. government that the sale of this vessel was destined for Iran, all as part of a scheme to enrich the defendants and other conspirators, and to evade the regulations, prohibitions, and licensing requirements of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) and the Iranian Transactions and Sanctions Regulations (ITSR).

A related verified civil forfeiture complaint was filed against $12,338,941.91. These funds were allegedly involved in this scheme to launder funds into the United States to illicitly procure the Nautic. The civil forfeiture complaint alleges that this scheme involved the National Iranian Oil Company, the National Iranian Tanker Company (NITC), and the IRGC-Qods Force (IRGC-QF), all specially designated nationals. The IRGC has also been designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization. This forfeiture action represents the largest ever seizure of IRGC-QF related funds. All funds of terrorist organizations are subject to forfeiture.

“These defendants purchased a crude oil tanker valued at over $10 million by illegally using the U.S. financial system, defiantly violating U.S. sanctions,” said Assistant Attorney General for National Security John C. Demers. “This is yet another example of Iran brazenly using front companies and false documentation in an attempt to hide the illegal transactions that the Iranian regime desperately needs to fund its malign activities. The enforcement of U.S. sanctions and related financial criminal laws is a major component of the National Security Division’s commitment to protecting the national security of the United States. I commend the efforts of the prosecutors, agents, and analysts who uncovered this illegal scheme and whose work resulted in the largest ever forfeiture action involving IRGC-QF.”

“Employing civil forfeiture authorities specifically available to the U.S. Attorney’s Office in the District of Columbia, we will continue to aggressively prosecute those who abuse our financial system to support sanctioned entities,” said U.S. Attorney Timothy J. Shea for the District of Columbia. “We will use every measure available under the law, to include civil forfeiture to recover funds for the victims of terrorism. These laws exist and serve to prevent hostile countries from illicitly generating revenue, such as through the sale of oil, to fund their weapons proliferation programs. Today’s charges are another example of the dedicated and unrelenting efforts of our office, the FBI, and HSI.”

“Today's complaint demonstrates that those who use the U.S. financial system to benefit the Iranian oil industry will be investigated by the FBI and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law,” said FBI Minneapolis Special Agent in Charge Rainer Drolshagen. “Iran's petrochemical and petroleum sectors are primary sources of funding for the Iranian regime, and the FBI will continue to aggressively pursue those who illegally use the U.S. financial system for their benefit.”

“Protecting our homeland encompasses many missions, including safeguarding our nation's exports and currency," said Steven W. Cagen, HSI Colorado Special Agent in Charge. “These criminals thought they could enrich themselves while aiding Iran, a country that continues to pose a serious threat to our nation’s security. They will now face the consequences of their actions.”

A concurrent action was filed by the Department of the Treasury, sanctioning Dianat and his related front company, Taif Mining.

According to the pleadings, beginning around May 2019 through December 2019, Dianat and Lajmiri conspired to purchase the Nautic via a complex web of front companies, including Taif Mining. After sending the final wire payment to the seller, Taif Mining took possession of the Nautic. It quickly changed its name and began making trips to Iran to load Iranian petroleum. Because a U.S. bank froze the funds related to the sale of the vessel, the seller never received payment. As a result, the seller instituted a civil action in the U.A.E. to recover the vessel.

On March 15, 1995, the President, pursuant to IEEPA, issued Executive Order No. 12957, finding that “the actions and policies of the Government of Iran constitute an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States” and declaring “a national emergency to deal with the threat.” In subsequent Executive Orders, the President imposed economic sanctions, including a trade embargo, on Iran. The Executive Orders and the ITSR prohibit the exportation, re-exportation, sale, or supply, directly or indirectly, to Iran of any goods, technology, or services from the United States or by a United States person without prior authorization or license from the U.S. Department of the Treasury, the Office of Foreign Assets Control, located in Washington, D.C. The conspirators utilized the U.S. correspondent banking system to process illicit transactions in U.S. Dollars, and at no time were U.S. financial institutions alerted that they were financing the purchase of a tanker for Iranian entities.

If convicted, Dianat and Lajmiri would face a maximum of 20 years imprisonment.

The investigation was conducted by special agents from the FBI Minneapolis Field Office and HSI Colorado Springs.

The details contained in the pleadings are mere allegations. All defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty in a court of law, and the burden to prove forfeitability in a civil forfeiture proceeding is upon the government.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Zia M. Faruqui and Brian Hudak, National Security Division Trial Attorney David C. Recker, and Supervisory Paralegal Specialist Elizabeth Swienc and Legal Assistant Jessica McCormick from the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia, are representing the government.

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