

San Diego Jury Finds Former Iranian National Guilty of Illegal Scheme to Export Sensitive US Technology to Iran

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On Thursday, April 23, a federal jury convicted a naturalized U.S. citizen and former Iranian national of violations of U.S. export and money laundering laws, arising from his involvement in a scheme to purchase marine navigation equipment and military electronic equipment for illegal export to, and end-use in, Iran, announced Assistant Attorney General for National Security John P. Carlin and U.S. Attorney Laura E. Duffy of the Southern District of California.

Arash Ghahreman, 45, of Staten Island, New York, was convicted of attempted export to Iran, and conspiracy to do the same, in violation of the Iran Trade Embargo (formerly known as the Iranian Transactions and Sanctions Regulations); smuggling goods from the United States, and conspiracy to the same; and aiding and abetting the transfer of money from Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE), to the United States, in support of an illegal export activity, and conspiracy to do the same. The case involved a seven-day jury trial, beginning on April 13, 2015, and ending on April 23, 2015, when the jury returned a guilty verdict on seven counts of a nine-count superseding indictment after one day of deliberation. The jury was unable to reach a verdict on two of the counts involving the attempted exportation and smuggling of a fiber optic gyrocompass, used in both military and civilian marine navigation applications.

“The defendants used a front company to illegally send U.S. goods and technologies – including those used in military applications – to Iran,” said Assistant Attorney General Carlin. “These violations of the Iran Trade Embargo have the potential to harm U.S. national security objectives, and we will continue to hold accountable those who seek to circumvent its restrictions. I would like to thank the agents and prosecutors for their hard work in obtaining this conviction.”

The evidence presented at trial showed that Ghahreman acted an agent of an Iranian procurement network which used a front company in Dubai to acquire U.S. goods and technologies for illegal transshipment to, and end-use in, Iran. Co-defendant Koorush Taherkhani, 43, an Iranian national and resident, was the managing director and founder of that front company, co-defendant TIG Marine Engineering Services. Because of his German nationality, co-defendant Ergun Yildiz, 35, a resident of UAE, was hired by Taherkhani to be the “face” of the front company, as the president/CEO of TIG Marine. Before Ghahreman immigrated to the United States in 2007, Ghahreman and Taherkhani had been friends and dorm mates at an Iranian university, where each received a degree in marine engineering. Upon graduation, both Ghahreman and Taherkhani worked as engineers for various Iranian shipping companies, including the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines and its subsidiaries. After immigrating to the United States, Ghahreman was employed by various shipyards in the United States, and became a naturalized U.S. citizen. Because of his employment and citizenship status, Ghahreman was well placed to act as an agent of the illegal procurement network.

From December 2012 through June 17, 2013, Ghahreman and his co-defendants negotiated via email, text, telephone and meetings with U.S. Immigration Customs and Enforcement’s Homeland Security Investigations (ICE-HSI) and the Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS) undercover agents to purchase marine navigation components (fiber optic gyrocompasses), military electronic components (electron tubes) and other U.S. technology for illegal export to, and/or end-use in, Iran. The undercover agents were posing as brokers of U.S. goods and technology, willing to sell U.S. goods to the defendants for end-use in Iran. Ultimately, as a result of these negotiations, Ghahreman and his co-defendants agreed to purchase four Navigat-2100 fiber optic gyrocompasses and 50 Y-690 units (electron tubes).

Pursuant to that agreement, Ghahreman and his co-defendants wired approximately \$60,000 in partial payment for the gyrocompasses and electron tubes from a bank in Dubai to the undercover agents’ bank account. Ultimately, on June 17, 2013, ICE-HSI agents arrested Ghahreman and Yildiz after they traveled to the United States and took partial delivery of one gyrocompass and two electron tubes and attempted to ship the items indirectly to Iran, via third countries.

Ghahreman is scheduled to be sentenced on July 17, 2015, before U.S. District Judge Dana M. Sabraw of the Southern District of California. Yildiz pleaded guilty to conspiracy to export to Iran on Oct. 9, 2014, and is scheduled to be sentenced on May 8, 2015, before Judge Sabraw. Co-defendant Taherkhani, an Iranian national and resident, remains a fugitive. Co-defendant TIG Marine is a Dubai company.

The case was investigated by ICE-HSI and DCIS. The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Shane P. Harrigan and Timothy D. Coughlin of the Southern District of California, with assistance provided by the Justice Department's National Security Division.

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