

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
District of Columbia

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Two Individuals Plead Guilty to Acting as Illegal Agents of the Government of Iran

WASHINGTON – Ahmadreza Mohammadi-Doostdar, 39, a dual U.S.-Iranian citizen, and Majid Ghorbani, 60, an Iranian citizen and resident of California, entered pleas of guilty yesterday to charges stemming from their conduct conducting surveillance of and collecting identifying information about American citizens and U.S. nationals who are members of the Iranian dissident group Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK).

On Oct. 8, 2019, Doostdar entered a guilty plea to one count of acting as an agent of the Government of Iran without notifying the Attorney General, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 951, and one count of conspiring to violate that statute, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 371. On November 4, 2019, Ghorbani entered a guilty plea to one count of violating the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, 50 U.S.C. § 1705, and the Iranian Transactions and Sanctions Regulations, 31 C.F.R. Part 560.

“The Iranian government thought it could get away with conducting surveillance on individuals in the United States by sending one of its agents here to task a permanent resident with conducting and collecting that surveillance,” said Jessie K. Liu, United States Attorney for the District of Columbia. “This case highlights our efforts to pursue those who threaten national security and disrupt foreign governments that target U.S. persons.”

“These individuals admitted to breaking the law and acting on behalf of the government of Iran by collecting information about the activities of Iranian dissidents in our country. The FBI’s actions in this case illustrate how seriously we take our mission of protecting the American people and upholding the Constitution,” said Executive Assistant Director Jay Tabb of the FBI’s National Security Branch. “The FBI will continue to aggressively investigate illegal activity that threatens our fellow citizens and their constitutionally protected rights, and we will not tolerate any such activity conducted by the government of Iran or its agents.”

As part of his plea, Doostdar admitted under oath that he traveled to the United States from Iran on three occasions in order to meet with Ghorbani and to convey directions for Ghorbani’s activities on behalf of the Government of Iran. Prior to Doostdar’s first trip to the United States, his handler with the Government of Iran identified Ghorbani by name, showed Doostdar a photograph of Ghorbani, and told him where Ghorbani worked.

During Doostdar’s first trip to the United States in July 2017, Doostdar met Ghorbani at Ghorbani’s workplace. Doostdar admitted that during a subsequent conversation, Ghorbani told Doostdar that he was willing to work for the Government of Iran in the United States.

On Sept. 20, 2017, Ghorbani attended an MEK rally in New York City. The rally consisted of constitutionally protected activity, including U.S. citizens denouncing the Iranian regime. At the rally, Ghorbani photographed rally attendees, including MEK leaders.

During Doostdar’s second trip to the United States as part of the conspiracy, in December 2017, Doostdar met with Ghorbani and collected the rally photographs from Ghorbani. The

photographs depicted MEK leaders, and included hand-written notes identifying the individuals and listing their positions in the group. Ghorbani and Doostdar also discussed Ghorbani's planned travel to Iran in March 2018, and Ghorbani offered to provide an in-person briefing on rally attendees during this trip. Under oath, Ghorbani admitted to attending the September 2017 MEK rally and to photographing and gathering information on rally attendees to provide to Doostdar and ultimately to individuals in Iran.

In December 2017, Doostdar departed the United States for Iran with the photographs and the handwritten notes provided by Ghorbani. Doostdar paid Ghorbani \$2,000 for his work, which Doostdar admitted had been provided by Doostdar's Government of Iran handler.

In May 2018, Ghorbani traveled to another MEK rally in Washington, D.C., where he again collected information on participants critical of the Iranian regime. Following that rally, Doostdar admitted that he and Ghorbani spoke by telephone and discussed the methods that Ghorbani could use to provide information collected at that rally to Doostdar in Iran. Doostdar further admitted that during his travel to the United States to task Ghorbani with collecting information on U.S. persons on behalf of the Iranian regime, he communicated with his Government of Iran handler through another co-conspirator. Doostdar's handler relayed instructions and encouragement, and answered Doostdar's questions that came up during his mission to the United States.

Doostdar is scheduled to be sentenced on Dec. 17, 2019, at 2:00 p.m., before the Honorable Paul L. Friedman of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. Ghorbani is scheduled to be sentenced before Judge Friedman on Jan. 15, 2020, at 10:00 a.m.

The maximum penalty for conspiracy is five years; the maximum penalty for acting as an agent of a foreign power is 10 years; and the maximum penalty for violating the International Emergency Economic Powers Act is 20 years. The maximum statutory sentence is prescribed by Congress and is provided here for informational purposes. Each defendant's sentence will be determined by the court based on the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

The investigation into this matter was conducted by the FBI's Washington Field Office and Los Angeles Field Office. The case is being prosecuted by the National Security Section of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia and the Counterintelligence and Export Control Section of the National Security Division of the Department of Justice.