

Virginia Man Accused of Acting as Unregistered Agent of Syrian Government and Spying on Syrian Protestors in America

WASHINGTON – Mohamad Anas Haitham Soueid, 47, a resident of Leesburg, Va., has been charged for his alleged role in a conspiracy to collect video and audio recordings and other information about individuals in the United States and Syria who were protesting the government of Syria and to provide these materials to Syrian intelligence agencies in order to silence, intimidate and potentially harm the protestors.

The charges were announced by Lisa Monaco, Assistant Attorney General for National Security; Neil MacBride, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia; and James McJunkin, Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI Washington Field Office.

Soueid, aka “Alex Soueid” or “Anas Alswaid,” a Syrian-born naturalized U.S. citizen, was charged by a federal grand jury on Oct. 5, 2011, in a six-count indictment in the Eastern District of Virginia. Soueid is charged with conspiring to act and acting as an agent of the Syrian government in the United States without notifying the Attorney General as required by law; two counts of providing false statements on a firearms purchase form; and two counts of providing false statements to federal law enforcement.

Soueid was arrested on Oct. 11, 2011, and will make an initial appearance before U.S. Magistrate Judge Theresa C. Buchanan today at 2:00 p.m. If convicted, he faces a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison on the conspiracy and foreign agent charges, 15 years in prison on the firearms purchase charges and 10 years in prison on the false statement charges.

“Today’s indictment alleges that the defendant acted as an unregistered agent of the Syrian government as part of an effort to collect information on people in this country protesting the Syrian government crack-down. I applaud the many agents, analysts and prosecutors who helped bring about today’s case,” said Assistant Attorney General Monaco.

“The ability to assemble and protest is a cherished right in the United States, and it’s troubling that a U.S. citizen from Leesburg is accused of working with the Syrian government to identify and intimidate those who exercise that right,” said U.S. Attorney MacBride. “Spying for another country is a serious threat to our national security, especially when it threatens the ability of U.S. citizens to engage in political speech within our own borders.”

“Our national security is threatened when foreign governments use unregistered agents in an attempt to influence and intimidate those who live here lawfully,” said FBI Assistant Director in Charge McJunkin. “Their alleged acts desecrate the values cherished in our fair and open society. The FBI will be counted on to detect and deter unregistered agents who attempt clandestine activities on behalf of a foreign political power and work to bring them swiftly to justice.”

According to the indictment, since March 2011, Soueid has acted in the United States as an agent of the Syrian *Mukhabarat*, which refers to the intelligence agencies for the Government of Syria, including the Syrian Military Intelligence and General Intelligence Directorate. At no time while acting as an agent of the government of Syria in this country did Soueid provide prior notification to the Attorney General as required by law, the indictment alleges.

Under the direction and control of Syrian officials, Soueid is accused of recruiting individuals living in the United States to collect information on and make audio and video recordings of protests against the Syrian regime – including recordings of conversations with individual protestors – in the United States and Syria. He is also charged with providing the recordings and other information to individuals working for the *Mukhabarat*. According to the indictment, Soueid and others conspired to use this information to undermine, silence, intimidate and potentially harm those in the United States and Syria who engaged in the protests.

The indictment states that in late June 2011, the Syrian government paid for Soueid to travel to Syria, where he met with intelligence officials and spoke with President Bashar al-Assad in private.

He returned to the United States in early July 2011, and he was searched and questioned at Dulles International Airport upon his arrival. The indictment states that Soueid communicated with his “boss,” an unindicted co-conspirator (or UCC-1) who was working for the *Mukhabarat*, soon after to alert him of the search and questioning and to assure the individual that the airport encounter would not “stop the project.”

In addition to the recordings, Soueid is accused of providing the *Mukhabarat* contact information, including phone numbers and email addresses, for protestors in the United States. In a handwritten letter sent to UCC-1, Soueid allegedly expressed his belief that violence against protestors – including raiding their homes – was justified and that any method should be used to deal with the protestors. The indictment also alleges that Soueid provided information regarding U.S. protestors against the Syrian regime to an individual who worked at the Syrian Embassy in Washington, D.C.

On Aug. 3, 2011, FBI agents interviewed Soueid, and the indictment accuses him of lying to the agents when he denied that he had collected information on U.S. persons and transmitted that information to the government of Syria. In addition, Soueid allegedly made further false statements when he denied to FBI agents that he had directed someone to audio or videotape a conversation, meeting, rally or protest, or that he was aware of any individual taking photographs or videotaping people. He also allegedly made false statements when he denied that he had ever been an agent of the Syrian government or a foreign intelligence officer.

The indictment states that the day following the interview, Soueid asked UCC-1 to inform the *Mukhabarat* about his FBI interview.

In addition, the indictment alleges that, when purchasing a Beretta pistol on July 11, 2011, Soueid listed a false current residence address on a firearms purchase application and in records that were kept by a licensed firearms dealer.

This investigation is being conducted by the FBI’s Washington Field Office with assistance from the Loudon County, Va., Sheriff’s Office. The prosecution is

being handled by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Dennis Fitzpatrick and Neil Hammerstrom of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Virginia and Trial Attorney Brandon L. Van Grack of the Counterespionage Section of the Justice Department's National Security Division.

The public is reminded that an indictment contains mere allegations and that a defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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National Security Division