

Former FAA Contractor Pleads Guilty to Illegally Acting as an Agent of the Iranian Government

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Former Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) contractor Abouzar Rahmati, 42, a naturalized U.S. citizen and resident of Great Falls, Virginia, pleaded guilty today to conspiring to act and acting as an agent of the Iranian government in the United States without prior notification to the Attorney General.

According to court documents, from at least December 2017 through June 2024, Rahmati worked with Iranian government officials and intelligence operatives to act on their behalf in the United States, including by meeting with Iranian intelligence officers in Iran, communicating with Iranian intelligence officers and government officials using a cover story to hide his conduct, obtaining employment with an FAA contractor with access to sensitive non-public information about the U.S. aviation sector, and obtaining open-source and non-public materials about the U.S. solar energy industry and providing it to Iranian intelligence officers.

In August 2017, Rahmati offered his services to the Iranian government through a senior Iranian government official who previously worked in Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security and with whom Rahmati had previously attended university. Four months later, in December 2017, Rahmati traveled to Iran, where he met with Iranian intelligence operatives and government officials and agreed to obtain information about the U.S. solar energy industry, to provide that information to Iranian officials, and to conduct future communications under a cover story based on purported discussions about research with fellow academics.

Upon returning to the United States in early 2018, Rahmati obtained various private and open-source materials related to the U.S. solar energy industry and provided them to an

official from the office of Iran's Vice President for Science and Technology in response to tasking from Iranian government officials.

In response to tasking from Iranian officials, and in furtherance of his role as an agent of the Government of Iran, Rahmati exploited his employment as an FAA contractor, working for U.S. COMPANY 1, by downloading at least 172 GB of U.S. COMPANY 1 files, which included sensitive access-controlled FAA documents related to the National Aerospace System (NAS), NAS Airport Surveillance Radar systems, and radio frequency data. Rahmati stored those files on removable media, which he took to Iran, where he provided sensitive documents to the Government of Iran in April 2022.

Also in April 2022, in response to tasking from Iranian government officials, Rahmati sent additional information relating to solar energy, solar panels, the FAA, U.S. airports, and U.S. air traffic control towers to his brother, who lived in Iran, so that he would provide those files to Iranian intelligence on Rahmati's behalf.

Sentencing is scheduled for Aug. 26. Rahmati faces a maximum statutory penalty of 10 years in prison for acting as an agent of a foreign government without prior notification to the Attorney General, and up to five years in prison for conspiracy. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Sue Bai, head of the Justice Department's National Security Division, U.S. Attorney Edward R. Martin Jr. for the District of Columbia, and Assistant Director Roman Rozhavsky of the FBI's Counterintelligence Division made the announcement.

The FBI's Washington Field Office is investigating the case, with significant assistance from the FAA's Office of Counterintelligence and Technical Operations.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Christopher Tortorice and Kimberly Paschall for the District of Columbia and Trial Attorneys Beau Barnes and Alexander Wharton of the National Security Division's Counterintelligence and Export Control Section are prosecuting the case, with significant assistance from the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Virginia.

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