

PRESS RELEASE

Founder of Iranian Company Arrested for Providing Material Support to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and for Scheme to Procure Sensitive U.S. Technology for Use in IRGC Military Drones, One of Which Killed Three U.S. Servicemembers

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Founder of Iranian Company and his Co-Defendant, an Employee of a U.S. Microelectronics Manufacturer, Also Charged with Violating Export Control Laws in Conspiracy to Procure Sensitive U.S. Technology for Use in IRGC Military Drones

Mahdi Mohammad Sadeghi, 42, a dual U.S.-Iranian national of Natick, Massachusetts, and Mohammad Abedininajafabadi, also known as Mohammad Abedini (Abedini), 38, of Tehran, Iran, have been charged with conspiring to export sophisticated electronic components from the United States to Iran in violation of U.S. export control and sanctions laws. Abedini is also charged with providing material support to a foreign terrorist organization (FTO), that resulted in the deaths of three U.S. service members who were killed by a one-way attack Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV), also known as a drone, on a military base in Jordan.

Sadeghi was arrested and made his initial appearance today in the District of Massachusetts. Abedini was also arrested today in Italy by Italian authorities at the request of the United States.

"Today, the Justice Department has charged, and our foreign partners have taken into custody, Mohammad Abedini, who we allege supplied sensitive technology used by the Iranian military to kill three American servicemembers in Jordan earlier this year," said Attorney General Merrick B. Garland. "In addition, we have charged and arrested Mahdi Mohammad Sadeghi, a dual U.S.-Iranian citizen, for conspiring with Abedini to export sensitive U.S. technology to Iran. Today's arrests demonstrate that the Justice Department will hold accountable those who enable the Iranian regime to continue to target and kill Americans and undermine the national security of the United States."

"Earlier this year, Iran-backed militias murdered three American soldiers and wounded dozens more in a brutal drone attack at the Tower 22 base in Jordan," said Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco. "Today, working with our partners here and abroad, we have charged and arrested two men who conspired to evade U.S. sanctions and supply the Iranian government with the type of drone navigation technology used in that attack. Our message is unmistakable: if you provide support to the Iranian regime's campaign of terror and violence targeting Americans – we will find you, arrest you, and hold you accountable in a U.S. court, no matter where you are."

"This case reflects our commitment to pursuing those who unlawfully aid Iran's military drone program and to seeking justice for the U.S. servicemembers killed at the hands of the IRGC-backed militants earlier this year," said Assistant Attorney General Matthew G. Olsen of the Justice Department's National Security Division. "Export laws exist to keep cutting-edge U.S. technology out of the hands of foreign terrorist organizations. When sensitive drone technology is supplied to the IRGC – as alleged in this case – it places our military at risk and imperils American citizens."

"These defendants are charged with supplying sensitive technology to an Iranian company that develops technology the IRGC uses in its one-way attack drones to commit acts of terror around the world," said Assistant Secretary for Export Enforcement Matthew S. Axelrod of the Department of Commerce Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS). "Export crimes are much more than just regulatory violations – they enable our adversaries to engage in numerous malign activities harmful to U.S. interests, including the sowing of terror worldwide."

"The FBI will continue to aggressively use all of our authorities to investigate and arrest anyone who assists the Government of Iran in obtaining technology that can be used for deadly purposes," said FBI Deputy Director Paul Abbate. "These perpetrators allegedly facilitated the transfer of electronic components to an Iranian company which one of them owned. According to the charges, the company owner then supplied the IRGC with drone technology that was used in various terrorist acts, including an attack on a U.S. military base in Jordan which killed three servicemembers and injured dozens more."

Such acts are wholly unacceptable, and the FBI will work tirelessly with our partners to cut off illegal transfers of technology to foreign terrorists and other adversaries.”

“Holding culpable people accountable for the death and maiming of U.S. service men and women bravely serving our nation abroad is about as important a prosecution as there is. These allegations make clear the grievous harm that can result when highly sophisticated American technologies subject to export controls end up in the hands of our adversaries,” said U.S. Attorney Joshua S. Levy for the District of Massachusetts. “These criminal charges are the direct product of the dogged work of the FBI and the Department of Commerce, in close collaboration with DOJ lawyers, as part of the Disruptive Technologies Task Force launched in February 2023, and I commend their outstanding work.”

According to court documents, Abedini is the founder and managing director of an Iranian company, San’at Danesh Rahpooyan Aflak Co. (SDRA or SADRA), that manufactures navigation modules used in the IRGC’s military drone program. SDRA’s main business is the sale of a proprietary navigation system — known as the Sepehr Navigation System — to the IRGC, which the United States designated as an FTO on April 15, 2019. The primary application of SDRA’s Sepehr Navigation System is for use in UAVs, as well as cruise and ballistic missiles. Sadeghi is currently employed by a Massachusetts-based microelectronics manufacturer (U.S. Company 1) and was one of the founders of a Massachusetts-based technology company (U.S. Company 2) that specializes in wearable sensors that provide kinetic monitoring for fitness applications.

As alleged in court documents, Abedini, Sadeghi, and others conspired to evade U.S. export control and sanctions laws by procuring U.S. origin goods, services, and technology from, among others, U.S. Company 1 and causing those goods, services, and technology to be exported or otherwise supplied to Iran and, in particular, Abedini’s Iranian company, SDRA.

As further alleged, in or around 2016, Sadeghi traveled to Iran to request funding for U.S. Company 2 from the Iranian National Elites Foundation (INEF), which is an Iranian governmental organization whose main purpose is to recognize, organize, and support Iran’s elite national talents. In exchange for funding for U.S. Company 2, which Sadeghi’s company ultimately received from the INEF, Sadeghi and others created a second company in Iran (Iranian Company 1). Shortly after forming Iranian Company 1, Sadeghi, through Iranian Company 1, entered into a contract with SDRA for the purchase of SDRA’s technology. It is also alleged that, since in or around 2016, on multiple occasions, Sadeghi has helped Abedini procure U.S. export-controlled electronic components for Abedini’s use in Iran.

Due to U.S. laws restricting exports to Iran, Abedini established a Switzerland front company for SDRA, Illumove SA (Illumove). With Sadeghi's assistance, Abedini, through Illumove, entered into a contract with U.S. Company 1 to develop a mechanism to evaluate U.S. Company 1's electronic components, including sophisticated semiconductors. Sadeghi and Abedini subsequently caused U.S.-origin goods, services, and technology to be transferred to Iran, through Illumove, for the benefit of SDRA. Certain of the electronic components that Abedini obtained through Illumove were the same types of electronic components used in SDRA's Sepehr Navigation System.

Abedini is also charged with providing material support to a foreign terrorist organization, the IRGC, specifically, the IRGC Aerospace Force, which is the strategic missile, air, and space force within the IRGC. Since at least in or about 2014, SDRA has had multiple projects with the IRGC Aerospace Force, including projects for guided rockets and integrated navigation systems. As alleged, between 2021 and 2022, approximately 99% of SDRA's sales of the Sepehr Navigation System, which are used in IRGC one-way attack drones, were to the IRGC's Aerospace Force.

On Jan. 28, three U.S. service members were killed, and more than forty others were injured, in a drone attack by IRGC-backed militants on a military base located in northern Jordan, known as Tower 22. According to court documents, FBI analysis of the drone that was recovered from the site of the attack showed that the drone was an Iranian Shahed UAV and that the navigation system used in the drone was the Sepehr Navigation System, which was manufactured by Abedini's company, SDRA.

Sadeghi and Abedini were charged by criminal complaint with one count of conspiracy to violate the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, which carries a penalty of up to 20 years in prison, three years supervised release, and a fine of up to \$1 million. Abedini was also charged with one count of conspiracy to provide material support to a Foreign Terrorist Organization, resulting in death, and one count of provision and attempted provision of material support to a Foreign Terrorist Organization, resulting in death, which carries a penalty of up to life in prison, lifetime supervised release, and a fine of up to \$250,000. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

The FBI, Department of the Army Criminal Investigation Division, and BIS are investigating the case.

U.S. Attorneys Jared Dolan and Alatheia Porter for the District of Massachusetts, Trial Attorney Christina Clark of the National Security Division's Counterintelligence and Export Control Section, and Trial Attorneys Katie Sweeten and David Smith of the National Security Division's Counterterrorism Section are prosecuting the case. The

Justice Department's Office of International Affairs is providing assistance and is seeking extradition of Abedini from Italy.

This prosecution is being coordinated through the Disruptive Technology Strike Force, an interagency law enforcement strike force co-led by the Departments of Justice and Commerce designed to target illicit actors, protect supply chains, and prevent critical technology from being acquired by authoritarian regimes and hostile nation states. Under the leadership of the Assistant Attorney General for National Security and the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Export Enforcement, the Strike Force leverages tools and authorities across the U.S. Government to enhance the criminal and administrative enforcement of export control laws.

A complaint is merely an allegation. All defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.