



Office of Public Affairs
U.S. Department of Justice

PRESS RELEASE

Scheme to Transfer Money to Iran Results in Guilty Pleas

Wednesday, May 1, 2024

For Immediate Release

Office of Public Affairs

Defendants Plead to Conspiring to Violate U.S. Sanctions Against Iran

Muzzamil Zaidi, 40, and Asim Mujtaba Naqvi, 40, both of Houston, Texas, pleaded guilty today for their roles in an illicit scheme to collect tens of thousands of dollars from the United States to Iran, including in the name of Ayatollah Ali Hussein Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and arrange for the money to be exported to Iran without the required licenses from the Offices of Foreign Assets Control.

According to court documents, in December 2018, Zaidi received permission to collect khums – a religious tax on wealth – on behalf of several Imams. Between December 2018 and December 2019, Zaidi and Naqvi collected payments of this tax, as well as donations purportedly to help victims of the ongoing civil war in Yemen, from individuals in the United States.

Zaidi and Naqvi arranged for the funds to be exported from the United States to Iran and to be received by the Office of the Supreme Leader of Iran. Zaidi and Naqvi enlisted friends, family members, and other associates to carry the cash out of the United States, in amounts less than \$10,000 in order to avoid law enforcement scrutiny. One transfer of dollars to Iran involved a group of 25 travelers going on a religious pilgrimage in Iraq, and the subsequent transport of U.S. dollars hand-carried by those travelers to Iran. Both Zaidi and Naqvi were arrested in Houston on Aug. 18, 2020, as a result of this scheme.

The transfer of money was illegal because the United States has imposed economic sanctions on Iran since 1995. Every year since 1984, the U.S. State Department has named

Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism. And on June 24, 2019, the President imposed additional sanctions on the Supreme Leader of Iran that prohibit the provision of funds to, or for the benefit of, the Supreme Leader of Iran.

Zaidi and Naqvi both pleaded guilty to conspiracy and violations of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) before U.S. District Judge Tanya S. Chutkan, who scheduled sentencing for Zaidi on Aug. 13 and for Naqvi on Oct. 1.

The FBI Washington Field Office and the FBI Houston Counterterrorism team are investigating the case. FBI Field Offices in Dallas, Chicago, and Detroit provided valuable assistance.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Jolie Zimmerman, Erik Kenerson, and Maeghan Mikorski for the District of Columbia, and Trial Attorneys Adam Small and Derek Shugert of the National Security Division's Counterintelligence and Export Control Section and Jennifer Levy of the Counterterrorism Section are prosecuting the case.

Updated May 3, 2024

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