



Department of Justice

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GEORGIA MAN CHARGED WITH LYING ABOUT TARGETING POLICE HELICOPTER WITH LASER

ATLANTA, GA - MOHAMMED HAGHIGHI, 24, of Decatur, Georgia, has been arrested on charges of lying to federal agents about targeting a DeKalb County Police Helicopter with a laser device. HAGHIGHI made his initial appearance in federal court in Atlanta this afternoon, where he was released on bond.

“The Justice Department takes very seriously any threat to the safety of our nation’s aviation system, to include actions against the brave men and women who pilot law enforcement aircraft,” said United States Attorney David E. Nahmias. “We are fortunate that no one was hurt in this incident. Across the nation, we have seen an increase in incidents where lasers are used to target civilian and government aircraft. This is dangerous conduct, and when we can identify those responsible we will prosecute them.”

According to the indictment, which was unsealed today: On February 4, 2007, a DeKalb County Police helicopter responded to a night-time call near the Wesley Club Apartments in Decatur. The pilots of the police helicopter were wearing night vision goggles. As the pilots sought out the crime scene, their helicopter was repeatedly targeted by a green laser beam emanating from somewhere in the Wesley Club apartment complex. When the laser beam struck the cockpit, it illuminated the entire cockpit glass and temporarily disoriented the pilots. The pilots eventually spotted an individual standing near a breezeway of the apartment complex. The green laser beam was emanating from something this individual was holding. While the pilots attempted to maintain visual contact with the individual with the laser, the individual continued targeting the helicopter.

The pilots called in DeKalb County Police ground units, who eventually located defendant MOHAMMED HAGHIGHI. These officers also found discarded in a nearby stairwell a hand-held laser with a green laser element. When confronted with this evidence by the DeKalb County Police, defendant HAGHIGHI allegedly claimed ownership of the laser and admitted to having targeted the police helicopter. However, on February 15, 2007, when federal agents from the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Force interviewed defendant HAGHIGHI about the helicopter laser incident, HAGHIGHI allegedly denied any role in the

matter. After being informed that it is a federal crime to lie to federal agents, HAGHIGHI again denied any role in the matter.

The charges brought by the federal grand jury against HAGHIGHI carry a maximum sentence of five years in prison.

Members of the public are reminded that the indictment only contains charges. The defendant is presumed innocent of the charges and it will be the government's burden to prove the defendant's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt at trial.

This case was investigated by the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force, with assistance from the DeKalb County Police Department.

Assistant United States Attorney Robert McBurney is prosecuting the case.

For further information please contact David E. Nahmias (pronounced NAH-me-us), United States Attorney, or Charysse L. Alexander, Executive Assistant United States Attorney, through Patrick Crosby, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Attorney's Office, at (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for the HomePage for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is www.usdoj.gov/usao/gan.