



Department of Justice

Department of Justice
Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MONDAY, JUNE 15, 2015

NAVY CIVILIAN ENGINEER PLEADS GUILTY TO ATTEMPTED ESPIONAGE

Defendant Attempted to Pass Navy Supercarrier Schematics to Egypt

Mostafa Ahmed Awwad, 36, of Yorktown, Virginia, pleaded guilty today to charges of attempted espionage relating to his attempt to provide schematics of the nuclear aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford to Egypt while serving as a Navy engineer. Assistant Attorney General for National Security John P. Carlin, U.S. Attorney Dana J. Boente of the Eastern District of Virginia, Assistant Director Randall C. Coleman of the FBI's Counterintelligence Division and Special Agent in Charge Susan Triesch of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) Norfolk, Virginia, Field Office made the announcement.

"Awwad pleaded guilty to leveraging his position of trust within the Navy to share the schematics of the USS Gerald R. Ford nuclear aircraft carrier with what he believed to be a foreign government," said Assistant Attorney General Carlin. "The National Security Division will continue to pursue and bring to justice those who abuse their access to sensitive defense information. I would like to thank all of the special agents, prosecutors and other personnel whose work led to the guilty plea in this case."

"Today, Mr. Awwad is being held responsible for attempting to steal the valuable plans for the USS Ford and to provide them to a foreign government," said U.S. Attorney Boente. "This office is committed to safeguarding our nation's sensitive defense information, and we will bring to justice those who seek to steal it. I want to commend our partners at the FBI Norfolk and NCIS Norfolk for their excellent work on this case."

"This case underscores the persistent national security threat posed by insiders stealing critical national defense information in order to benefit foreign governments," said Assistant Director Coleman. "Fortunately, the aggressive counterintelligence posture of the FBI and our interagency partners enabled the identification and neutralization of Awwad's efforts before he transferred any information to a foreign power. Working together, we prevented the loss of billions of dollars in research costs and the exposure of potential vulnerabilities to our newest generation of nuclear aircraft carrier."

“This case demonstrates that NCIS aggressively pursues anyone who would endanger our national security by targeting critical platforms like the Ford class carrier,” said Special Agent in Charge Triesch. “The close collaboration between NCIS and the FBI thwarted this insider threat and we will continue cooperative efforts to safeguard those who protect and serve in the Department of the Navy.”

According to court documents, Awwad began working for the Department of the Navy in February 2014 as a civilian general engineer in the Nuclear Engineering and Planning Department at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard. Based on a joint investigation, an undercover FBI agent contacted Awwad by telephone on Sept. 18, 2014, and asked to meet him the following day. Without seeking additional information from the caller, Awwad agreed. The next day, Awwad met with the undercover FBI agent, who was posing as an Egyptian intelligence officer, in a park in Hampton, Virginia. During the meeting, Awwad claimed it was his intention to utilize his position with the U.S. Navy to obtain military technology for use by the Egyptian government, including but not limited to the designs of the USS Gerald R. Ford nuclear aircraft carrier, a new Navy “supercarrier.” Awwad agreed to conduct clandestine communications with the undercover FBI agent, and to conduct “dead drops” in a concealed location in the park.

On Oct. 9, 2014, Awwad and the undercover FBI agent met at a hotel where Awwad described a detailed plan to circumvent U.S. Navy computer security by installing software on his restricted computer system that would enable him to copy documents without causing a security alert. At this time, Awwad also provided the undercover FBI agent with four Computer Aided Drawings of a U.S. nuclear aircraft carrier downloaded from the Navy Nuclear Propulsion Information system. During the discussion, Awwad indicated his understanding that the drawings would be sent to and used in Egypt. Awwad also asked the undercover FBI agent for \$1,500 to purchase a pinhole camera that he would wear around the shipyard to photograph restricted material. At the conclusion of the meeting, Awwad agreed to provide the undercover FBI agent with passport photos which would be used to produce a fraudulent Egyptian passport so that Awwad could travel to Egypt without alerting U.S. government officials.

On Oct. 23, 2014, Awwad traveled to the pre-arranged dead drop site situated on a secluded hiking trail and utilized a concealed container disguised in a hole in the ground. He retrieved \$3,000 before placing an external hard drive and two passport photos inside.

On Dec. 5, 2014, Awwad and the undercover agent met in the Hampton Roads, Virginia, area. During this meeting, Awwad stated that he planned to travel to Egypt. Awwad subsequently said he wanted to meet with “high ranking” Egyptian intelligence and military officials in Cairo. Awwad also stated during the meeting that he had copied all of the schematics. During the meeting, Awwad provided the undercover FBI agent a thumb drive that contained more schematics of the USS Gerald R. Ford. The undercover FBI agent handed Awwad the “escape plan” – in actuality a manila envelope with no real plan inside – along with \$1,000 in currency, shortly before Awwad was arrested.

The schematics of the USS Gerald R. Ford that Awwad provided are information related to the national defense of the United States. The USS Gerald R. Ford, which is currently under construction, is the first in a new class of aircraft carriers. When completed, the USS Ford will be the most advanced aircraft carrier in the world, with approximately 4,000 sailors on board. The schematics contain Naval Nuclear Propulsion Information and they are marked with the handling restriction "NOFORN," which means they are not releasable to foreign persons.

Awwad pleaded guilty to a criminal information charging him with attempted espionage, and his plea was accepted by U.S. District Court Judge Raymond A. Jackson of the Eastern District of Virginia. He will be sentenced on Sept. 21, 2015. The maximum penalty for this offense is life in prison, but the plea agreement recommends that Awwad receive a sentence in the range of eight to 11 years. The maximum statutory sentence is prescribed by Congress and is provided here for informational purposes, as the sentencing of the defendant will be determined by the court based on the advisory Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

This case was investigated by the FBI's Norfolk Field Office and NCIS, in cooperation with the Department of the Navy. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Benjamin L. Hatch and Joseph E. DePadilla of the Eastern District of Virginia, and Senior Trial Attorney Heather M. Schmidt of the Justice Department's National Security Division.