



THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
EASTERN DISTRICT *of* VIRGINIA

[U.S. Attorneys](#) » [Eastern District of Virginia](#) » [News](#)

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Eastern District of Virginia

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, April 22, 2021

Six Language Recruiters Indicted for Recruiting Unqualified Linguists for Deployment with U.S. Armed Forces in Afghanistan

ALEXANDRIA, Va. – A federal grand jury in the Eastern District of Virginia returned an indictment Wednesday charging six former employees of a government contractor for their role in a conspiracy to commit wire fraud in connection with a U.S. government contract to recruit and deploy qualified linguists to Afghanistan where they would provide language services in Dari and Pashto to the U.S. military, including interacting with Afghan civilians and military forces.

According to court documents, Mezghan N. Anwari, 41, of Centerville, Virginia, Abdul Q. Latifi, 45, of Irvine, California, Mahjoba Raofi, 47, of San Diego, California, Laila Anwari, 54, of Fredericksburg, Virginia, Rafi M. Anwari, 54, of Centerville, Virginia, and Zarghona Alizai, 48, of Annandale, Virginia, were employed as linguist recruiters for the Arlington, Virginia-based government contractor, which performed subcontract services such as recruiting linguists to serve in support of U.S. military operations, pursuant to a U.S. government prime contract valued in excess of \$700 million.

"As alleged in the indictment, the defendants exploited the trust placed in them by the U.S. military and recruited unqualified linguists to be deployed to Afghanistan," said Acting U.S. Attorney Raj Parekh for the Eastern District of Virginia. "We are committed to holding accountable those who undermine the integrity of the procurement process and potentially jeopardize the United States' mission overseas."

The indictment alleges, among other things, that the defendants knowingly recruited linguists who lacked the minimum language proficiency in Dari or Pashto. The defendants arranged for other individuals with stronger language skills to fraudulently impersonate the unqualified linguist candidates during oral proficiency interviews, which were tests independently conducted by another government contractor to ensure that candidates identified by the defendants met minimum proficiency standards. In so doing, the defendants sought to make it appear that the linguist candidates possessed stronger language skills than was the case and to ensure that their unqualified linguist candidates would receive passing scores. At times, the defendants themselves fraudulently impersonated candidates during interviews. During the scheme, the defendants received a base salary plus a series of incentive-based bonuses determined by how far through a multi-step vetting process a recruited candidate progressed.

"The defendants in this case allegedly engaged in an expansive conspiracy to enrich themselves at the expense of American soldiers and military operations in Afghanistan," said Acting Assistant Attorney General

Nicholas L. McQuaid of the Justice Department's Criminal Division. "Fraud and abuse of U.S. government contracts paid for by the American taxpayer, and designed to support our men and women uniform, will not be tolerated."

"This indictment alleges serious crimes that threatened to put American troops at greater risk in a combat zone," said John F. Sopko, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR). "I'm proud that SIGAR special agents and their investigative partners got to the bottom of this alleged scheme. We remain committed to protecting our country's investment in Afghanistan reconstruction, and to pursuing justice anytime that investment is put at risk."

"The Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS) is committed to ensuring the integrity of the Department of Defense's procurement system" said Special Agent in Charge Stanley A. Newell of the Transnational Operations Field Office for DCIS. "The special agents of DCIS along with our investigative partners will vigorously investigate contractors who attempt to rig the system for their own ill-gotten gain. Illicit conduct of this sort deprives our military forces of crucial services and cheats the American taxpayer. We remain steadfast in our mission to root out fraud against U.S. Department of Defense and bring those responsible to justice."

Mezghan Anwari is charged with conspiracy to commit wire fraud and six counts of wire fraud. Latifi is charged with conspiracy to commit wire fraud and five counts of wire fraud. Raofi is charged with conspiracy to commit wire fraud and two counts of wire fraud. Laila Anwari is charged with conspiracy to commit wire fraud and two counts of wire fraud. Rafi Anwari is charged with conspiracy to commit wire fraud and three counts of wire fraud. Alizai is charged with conspiracy to commit wire fraud and two counts of wire fraud.

The defendants are scheduled for arraignment on May 5, before U.S. District Court Judge Anthony J. Trenga in the Eastern District of Virginia. If convicted, each of the defendants face a maximum of 20 years in prison per count. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command, and DCIS are investigating the case.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Matthew Burke and Trial Attorneys Michael McCarthy and Matthew Kahn of the Criminal Division's Fraud Section are prosecuting the case.

A copy of this press release is located on the website of the [U.S. Attorney's Office](#) for the Eastern District of Virginia. Related court documents and information are located on the website of the [District Court](#) for the Eastern District of Virginia or on [PACER](#) by searching for Case No. 1:21-cr-85.

An indictment is merely an accusation. The defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

Topic(s):

Financial Fraud

Component(s):

[USAO - Virginia, Eastern](#)

Contact:

Press Office

USAVAE.Press@usdoj.gov

Updated April 22, 2021

