



Shapour Moinian

- Iranian-born, naturalized U.S. citizen; immigrated to the U.S. at age 21 (1976)
- Retired U.S. Army mechanic and pilot (1977-2000); achieved the rank of Chief Warrant Officer 4
- B.S. in Biology (1988) and M.S. in Aeronautical Science (2000)
- Worked for various cleared defense contractors on programs related to military aviation (from 2000 until his arrest in 2021)
- 67 years old at the time of sentencing (2022)



CDSE

Center for Development
of Security Excellence

CASE STUDY

Economic Espionage

WHAT HAPPENED

In 2016, Shapour Moinian of San Diego, CA, worked for an aerospace defense contractor that required he maintain national security eligibility to work on classified military projects. According to court records, in the same year, an individual affiliated with Chinese intelligence services contacted Moinian on a popular employment services website by posing as a corporate recruiter. Moinian subsequently agreed to offer his services as an aviation consultant.

In 2017, Moinian travelled to Hong Kong for the first of several overseas meetings to provide the aforementioned individual and her associates various aviation-related material, including proprietary information, in exchange for cash payments. Moinian made three more trips in 2017, 2018, and 2019 to Shanghai, Bali, and Hong Kong, respectively, to deliver additional information for payments of as much as \$22,000.

In accordance with his defense contractor employment, and a requirement for continued national security eligibility, Moinian completed an SF-86, Questionnaire for National Security in 2017 and an SF-86C, Certification in 2020. Moinian made false statements to the Government when he denied on both occasions to having any foreign contacts or financial activities.

Following his arrest in 2021, Moinian admitted to U.S. authorities that he was aware that his overseas dealings likely involved individuals employed by the People's Republic of China and that he was acting at their direction.

Moinian pled guilty in 2022 to acting as an unregistered agent of a foreign government and lying on his national security background questionnaires. He was sentenced to 20 months in federal prison.

INDICATORS

- **Access Attributes:** Moinian possessed a security clearance, access to corporate proprietary information, and extensive military aviation training.
- **Professional Lifecycle and Performance:** Moinian documented his military-related work experience and made himself available for contact via an online job search platform.
- **Foreign Influence:** Moinian made several unofficial foreign trips and continued contact with a known or suspected foreign intelligence entity.
- **Technical Activity:** Investigators alleged Moinian used a thumb drive to store proprietary information and received a cell phone and other equipment from Chinese intelligence services to securely communicate and transfer information.
- **Financial Considerations:** Moinian claimed that mounting personal financial obligations were the impetus for his selling information to China.

IMPACT

- Special Agent in Charge Michelle Kramer of the NCIS Office of Special Projects succinctly described the criminal activities that led to the investigation, arrest, and conviction of Shapour Moinian. “Mr. Moinian sold information to the Chinese government, and lied repeatedly to cover up his crimes.”
- FBI Special Agent in Charge Suzanne Turner further highlighted the tactics foreign governments employ against U.S. individuals to acquire information and technology. “This case serves as a stark reminder of the social media exploitation strategies Chinese intelligence agencies will utilize to target, recruit, and maintain contact with valuable foreign assets.”
- Court documents suggest Moinian’s history prior to committing the acts for which he was convicted included 23 years of honorable military service, positive employment since retiring from the military, and no criminal record. Randy S. Grossman, United States Attorney, noted, “While [Moinian’s] military service is laudable, it is both a mitigating and an aggravating factor. Because of his experience, he has much more information of interest to foreign governments than a typical individual.”
- Prosecutors offered no indication that Moinian’s crimes were ideologically motivated; Moinian stated that his struggles as his family’s “primary financial provider” precipitated his “lapse of judgement.” As the consequence of his felony conviction and incarceration, Moinian will likely encounter additional and significant employment and financial challenges. “[Moinian] lost his job at a [cleared defense contractor] and will lose his security clearance. He is unlikely to be able work on projects with access to sensitive materials...” said Grossman.

ADDITIONAL INFO

According to court records, Moinian was first contacted in May 2015 by the same individual posing as a recruiter on the same job search platform as referenced above. At the time, when informed that a consultancy offer would require travel to China, Moinian objected. He “advised that his security clearance prevented him from supporting” non-U.S. persons or companies. Investigators noted it was not until a year later, in June 2016, that the “recruiter” contacted Moinian once again—using a new alias and company affiliation—with a similar, and this time successful, offer.

Resources for further exploration:

- **FBI / NCSC Threat Awareness Film – The Nevernight Connection**
<https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/counterintelligence/the-china-threat/clearance-holders-targeted-on-social-media-nevernight-connection>
- **CDSE Job Aid - Employment Application Risks and Mitigation for National Security Insiders**
https://www.cdse.edu/Portals/124/Documents/jobaids/insider/INT_Employment_JobAid.pdf
- **CDSE Job Aid – Receive and Maintain Your National Security Eligibility**
https://www.cdse.edu/Portals/124/Documents/jobaids/personnel/Receive_and_Maint_Sct_Clnc.pdf

Supporting Through Reporting!

Contact the appropriate POC to report any observed potential risk indicators:

Name: _____
Title: Supervisor/Security Officer/ITP

Agency/Department: _____
Senior Official/ITP Manager