



Mostafa Ahmed Awwad

- Born in Saudi Arabia and raised in Egypt.
- Civilian General Engineer at Norfolk Naval Shipyard
- Lived in Yorktown, Virginia, not far from the Norfolk Naval Shipyard.
- Married with two small children.
- Age at time of conviction: 36



CDSE

Center for Development
of Security Excellence

CASE STUDY

Attempted Espionage

WHAT HAPPENED

Mostafa Awwad came to the United States after he married his wife, who was a U.S. citizen.

After earning a degree in electrical engineering from Old Dominion University, Awwad took a job with the Department of the Navy as a civilian general engineer in the Nuclear Engineering and Planning Department at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard. Awwad agreed to meet with an undercover FBI agent posing as an Egyptian intelligence officer. During their meeting, Awwad volunteered to use his position with the U.S. Navy to obtain military technology for use by the Egyptian government.

Awwad met again with the undercover FBI agent and 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. Awwad also provided the undercover FBI agent with four Computer Aided Drawings of the U.S. nuclear aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford downloaded from the Navy Nuclear Propulsion Information system. 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 that would be used to produce a fraudulent Egyptian passport so that Awwad could travel to Egypt without alerting U.S. Government officials.

On October 23, 2014, Awwad traveled to a prearranged dead drop site. He retrieved \$3,000 and then placed an external hard drive and two passport photos inside.

On December 5, 2014, Awwad and the undercover agent met again. Awwad stated that he planned to travel to Egypt where he wanted to meet with “high ranking” Egyptian intelligence and military officials in Cairo. Awwad gave the undercover FBI agent a thumb drive that contained more schematics of the USS Gerald R. Ford. The undercover FBI agent handed Awwad a fake “escape plan” and \$1,000 in currency. Awwad was arrested shortly afterward.

Awwad pled guilty to charges of attempted espionage and was sentenced to 11 years in prison.

INDICATORS

- **Access Attributes** – Mostafa Awwad had access to the Navy Nuclear Propulsion Information server where the layout of the USS Ford resided
- **Foreign Considerations** – Egyptian national with intent to spy
- **Technical violations** – Installed unauthorized software to allow him to copy documents without causing a security alert
- **Security Incidents** – Accessed information without a “need to know”

IMPACT

- USS Gerald R. Ford sails with between 4,000 and 4,500 American sailors on board. It is 1,100 feet long, about 250 feet tall, and at \$17.5 billion, it's the largest, most expensive, and most powerful warship ever built. Revealing the schematics and, in particular, the vulnerabilities of the ship would have been exceptionally dangerous to the individuals on board because it would have given an advantage to an adversary who intended to damage or sink the vessel.
- According to the Special Agent James Dougherty of the FBI Counterintelligence Division, Norfolk, VA, "He [Awwad] pointed to the computer screen and he said, 'Here. Right here. You strike this ship with a missile right here, bye-bye, that's it. Sink it.'"

ADDITIONAL INFO

- When U.S. Navy officials told Awwad that he had to be willing to renounce his dual citizenship with Egypt to get a security clearance, he went to the Egyptian embassy seeking help to keep his Egyptian citizenship. It was there that he was asked if he would be willing to hand over information about nuclear technology. He responded by saying, "Allah willing. May Allah make this possible!"
- Egyptian Embassy Officials falsified documents for Awwad saying that he had renounced Egyptian citizenship, when in fact he had not.
- The FBI launched a false flag operation to investigate this case. A false flag is essentially an undercover operation in which the FBI poses as a foreign adversary's intelligence service, in this case the Egyptian intelligence service.
- NCIS was brought in within hours of the FBI opening the investigation. "The FBI has its strengths and NCIS has its strengths. And so we combined those to-- fully and comprehensively investigate Awwad," said FBI Special Agent James Dougherty.

Questions to consider:

- What improvements to training materials might be added to heighten awareness of indicators during the process of applying for a clearance?
- What signs may have been missed during on-boarding Awwad? How can they be prevented?

Resources for further exploration:

- [Understanding Espionage and National Security Crimes](https://www.cdse.edu/Portals/124/Documents/jobaids/ci/ci-jobaidseries-understandingespionage.pdf?ver=BBKwTvmDXsNC0wb_6vl0GQ%3d%3d)
(https://www.cdse.edu/Portals/124/Documents/jobaids/ci/ci-jobaidseries-understandingespionage.pdf?ver=BBKwTvmDXsNC0wb_6vl0GQ%3d%3d)
- [Critical Program Information \(CPI\) Security Short](https://securityawareness.usalearning.gov/cdse/multimedia/shorts/cpi/Block10/Introduction/page_0020.html)
(https://securityawareness.usalearning.gov/cdse/multimedia/shorts/cpi/Block10/Introduction/page_0020.html)
- [CBS "48 Hours: NCIS:" The Terrorists, The Spies, The Hackers \(Interview with FBI and NCIS investigators\)](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/48-hours-ncis-agents-on-national-security-protecting-the-u-s-from-terrorists-spies-and-cybercriminals/)
(<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/48-hours-ncis-agents-on-national-security-protecting-the-u-s-from-terrorists-spies-and-cybercriminals/>)

IF YOU SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING!

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

Name: _____
Title: Supervisor/Security Officer/ITP

Agency/Department: _____
Senior Official/ITP Manager