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Southern District of New York*

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**U.S. CHARGES 18 WITH ALLEGED PLOT TO IMPORT AND SELL
RUSSIAN SHOULDER-FIRED MISSILES, ROCKET PROPELLED
GRENADE LAUNCHERS, AND OTHER WEAPONS**

DAVID N. KELLEY, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, PASQUALE D'AMURO, the Assistant Director in Charge of the New York Office of the FBI, and RAYMOND W. KELLY, the New York City Police Commissioner, announced today the unsealing of a complaint in Manhattan federal court charging 18 individuals with various weapons trafficking offenses, including a scheme to smuggle rocket propelled grenade launchers ("RPGs"), shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles ("SAMs"), and other Russian military weapons into the United States for sale. In addition, the defendants are also charged with conspiring to traffic in machineguns and other similar assault weapons, and in fact sold eight such weapons during the course of the investigation. The arrests are the result of a

year-long investigation that utilized a confidential informant ("CI") who posed as an arms trafficker selling weapons to terrorists. The FBI's investigation also included court-authorized wiretaps on seven different phones and interceptions of more than 15,000 calls.

Specifically, the 61-page federal complaint unsealed today in Manhattan federal court charges ARTUR SOLOMONYAN, CHRISTIAAN DEWET SPIES, IOSEB KHARABADZE, JOSEPH COLPANI, and MICHAEL GUY DEMARE with conspiring to transport destructive devices in interstate and foreign commerce. The complaint also charges 13 other individuals with weapons trafficking for their roles in supplying SOLOMONYAN and SPIES with machineguns and other assault weapons, which were then sold to the CI.

The Complaint alleges that SOLOMONYAN and SPIES, with the help of KHARABADZE, COLPANI, DEMARE, and other unidentified co-conspirators were actively preparing to import RPGs, SAMs, anti-tank missile systems, and other military weapons into the country from Eastern Europe. The CI, it is alleged, had multiple conversations with SOLOMONYAN and SPIES over the course of the conspiracy in which the CI indicated that his clients were terrorists.

According to the Complaint, SOLOMONYAN and SPIES met with the CI on several occasions in New York City to discuss the details of their weapons deals, including in-depth discussions of

the specifications and prices of various weapons that the defendants could ship into the United States. The Complaint alleges that, in June 2004, at a meeting in New York City, SOLOMONYAN provided the CI with a list of weapons for sale that included RPGs, stinger missiles, AK-47s, and claymore mines. The Complaint also details numerous telephone calls between the defendants discussing the inner workings of their plot to bring weapons into the country. For example, the Complaint alleges that in January 2005, SPIES spoke on the phone with COLPANI about providing the CI with an RPG. According to the Complaint, as recently as late January 2005, SOLOMONYAN discussed importing 200 RPGs from Armenia for sale to the CI.

Most recently, in late February 2005, SOLOMONYAN and SPIES provided the CI with digital photos of military weapons in Armenia that they proposed to import into the U.S. for sale to the CI. The CI was given the name of a Russian website, a user name, and a password in order to access the 17 digital photos of the weapons. These photos, which FBI forensics has determined were taken in late February 2005, included such weapons as two SA-7b Strella Surface to Air Heat Seeking Anti-Aircraft Missiles; a Russian AT-4 Spigot Anti-Tank Guided Missile and Launcher; a 120 mm mortar launcher; Russian 73 mm recoilless anti-tank guns; and fully automatic AK-74 and AKS assault rifles, according to the Complaint.

SOLOMONYAN and SPIES were arrested last night after meeting one last time with the CI to finalize their plans to travel to Eastern Europe to arrange the importation of the military weapons. The FBI arrested them before they could travel outside of the U.S. to obtain the weapons. The FBI is currently working with Armenian and Russian authorities to secure the weapons and to arrest the responsible parties abroad.

According to the Complaint, while SOLOMONYAN and SPIES were actively arranging the importation of the military weapons from Eastern Europe, they also sold machineguns and assault weapons to the CI. Utilizing the services of various weapons traffickers in New York City, Los Angeles, and Florida, the defendants provided the CI with eight weapons and conspired to sell the CI many more. As alleged in the Complaint, each weapon was delivered by the defendants to storage facilities rented by the FBI on the CI's behalf. On several occasions, SOLOMONYAN or SPIES was surveilled delivering the weapons to various storage locations. Of the eight weapons, three were delivered in New York City, three were delivered in Los Angeles, and two were delivered in Fort Lauderdale. The weapons sold to the CI include an SKS fully-automatic assault rifle; a Norinco Model NHM91; an Israel Military Industries Model A Uzi; an Interdynamic Model KG-9; a Norinco AK-47; a Norinco MA-90 Sporter; an AK-47 made by GN Romarm SA/Cugir; and an AK-47, BA 36 0543, Arsenal, as well as

two conversion kits intended to convert both AK-47's into fully-automatic machineguns.

SOLOMONYAN, 26, is an Armenian citizen residing in New York and Los Angeles. SPIES, 33, a South African citizen, resides in New York. KHARABADZE, 52, is Georgian and resides on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. They, along with seven other defendants, will be presented in Manhattan federal court today. COLPANI, 53, and DEMARE, 50, both live in Florida and were arrested there this morning.

Besides SOLOMONYAN, SPIES, COLPANI, and DEMARE, the other defendants charged with weapons trafficking include: DMITRIY VOROBAYCHIK, 28, of New York; NIKOLAI NADIRASHVILI, 25, of New York; LEVON SOLOMONYAN, 24, of Los Angeles; ALLAH MCQUEEN, 23, of New York; RAJAB CHAVIS, 25, of New York; GAREGIN GASPARYAN, 28, of Los Angeles; MICHAEL JIMENEZ, 35, of Los Angeles; SHAWN JONES, 22, of New York; LEVAN CHVELIDZE, 28, of New York; VATO MACHITIDZE, 26, of New York; TIGRAN GEVORGYAN, 21, of Los Angeles; and ARMAND ABRAMIAN, 27, of Los Angeles.

The six individuals arrested in Los Angeles, and the two arrested in Florida, will be presented in their respective federal courts and then brought to New York to face the current charges.

As a result of the various charges in the Complaint, SOLOMONYAN and SPIES each face a maximum penalty of 30 years in

prison. COLPANI and DEMARE face a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison, and KHARABADZE faces a maximum penalty of 5 years in prison. The rest of the 13 defendants charged in the Complaint face a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison.

Mr. KELLEY praised the efforts of the FBI and the NYPD for their handling of this investigation. Mr. KELLEY also expressed his thanks to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement for their assistance in the investigation.

Assistant United States Attorneys BENJAMIN M. LAWSKY and MIRIAM E. ROCAH are in charge of the prosecution.

The charges contained in the Complaint are merely accusations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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