

Scientist gave Israelis secrets, court told; Maryland man made claim to undercover FBI agent, prosecutors say

The Washington Post - Washington, D.C.

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Date:

Oct 30, 2009

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Section:

A SECTION

Text Word Count:

504

A Chevy Chase scientist accused of attempted espionage told an undercover FBI agent that he gave classified information to an aerospace company owned by the Israeli government, federal prosecutors said Thursday.

Stewart D. Nozette, 52, was arrested Oct. 19 on charges of selling government secrets to an FBI agent posing as an Israeli intelligence operative. But prosecutors said Nozette claimed that in the past he had "communicated classified information" to the foreign company while working as a consultant.

"In his mind, he committed actual espionage," Assistant U.S. Attorney Anthony Asuncion said during a hearing in the District's federal court.

The U.S. attorney's office did not provide further details in court or say whether it had investigated Nozette's claim. A spokesman said he could not comment.

John Kiyonaga, Nozette's attorney, told the judge that his client had worked openly for the Israeli company and stressed that there is "nothing illegal" about working for a foreign government. Kiyonaga also emphasized that the Justice Department has said the Israeli government has not been accused of wrongdoing.

Nozette, who has worked as a contractor for NASA and the Defense Department, was ordered held without bond until his trial after a judge determined that he was a flight risk. Prosecutors said he was motivated by greed and had asked for \$2 million for his secrets, according to court documents.

A video secretly recorded Oct. 19, when Nozette and an undercover FBI agent met at the Mayflower hotel, shows the scientist kicking back on a couch as the pair discuss his plans. Nozette, who joked and laughed during the eight-minute recording, which was played in court, said he had made a "career choice" to become a spy and planned to leave the United States and live abroad under a false name. He wondered whether Israel would "give me up" if he fled there and said Singapore was a good choice because he did not think it had an extradition agreement with the United States.

"I like the idea of setting up an alias," Nozette said. "And I like the escape route to have a place outside the country."

Nozette met twice with the agent in recent weeks and exchanged sensitive information for \$11,000 via a U.S. post office box in the District, authorities have said.

Nozette's trouble with the law began before the latest charges. He pleaded guilty in January to overbilling the U.S. government by about \$265,000 and faced at least two years in prison. Authorities have said Nozette told a colleague that he planned to flee to India or Israel if the government sought to put him in jail for fraud. He told the co-worker that he planned to share everything he knew with officials of those governments.

That colleague told federal authorities about Nozette's statements. By September, federal agents had launched their undercover sting.

Prosecutors said Nozette is a grave threat because of the years he spent working on sensitive government projects. "The defendant is himself a walking safety deposit box of classified information," Asuncion said.

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