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Man in nuke triggers case ordered released

An Israeli businessman accused of smuggling nuclear weapon triggers to Pakistan could be released while he awaits trial, a federal judge ruled Wednesday

Matt Kelley — Associated Press

Wednesday January 28, 2004



Prosecutors had asked that Asher Karni be held without bail. But U.S. District Court Chief Judge Thomas Hogan allowed him to be released under strict conditions, with Karni agreeing to waive his immunity from extradition from Israel or South Africa, to pay a \$100,000 bond and to be electronically monitored while he stays in Maryland.

Federal agents arrested Karni, 50, on New Year's Day when he arrived for a ski vacation in Colorado. The businessman from South Africa is accused of engineering the transfer of detonation devices called triggered spark gaps to Pakistan.

The triggers can be used to set off nuclear weapons but also to break up kidney stones. Court documents say Karni tried to buy 200 of the devices from a Massachusetts maker to send to Pakistan even after the company told him the deal would require a U.S. export license. Exporting spark gap Pakistan without a license is illegal.

A federal magistrate in Denver had ordered Karni released on \$75,000 bail raised by friends in Cape Town, South Africa, as long as he stayed with a rabbi in Maryland. The government appealed the ruling to Hogan, who is overseeing the criminal case against Karni filed in Washington in December and unsealed after his arrest.

Court records say Karni used a series of front companies and misleading shipping documents to get the devices from a Massachusetts company, have them sent through New Jersey to South Africa, on to the United Arab Emirates and later to Pakistan. What Karni didn't know, a federal officer said in an affidavit, was that authorities had intervened and had the manufacturer sabotage the devices so they couldn't be used.

Pakistani officials told The Associated Press on Wednesday that the country's nuclear scientists rely on the black market to supply Pakistan's nuclear weapons program and spread the technology to countries such as Iran and Libya. The father of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program, Abdul Qadeer Khan, and other nuclear scientists are under investigation for possibly breaking Pakistani law.

Karni's Denver lawyer, Harvey Steinberg, did not return a telephone message left Wednesday.

Hogan ordered Karni to stay at the Hebrew Sheltering Home in suburban Silver Spring, Md., under Rabbi Herzel Kranz's supervision. Karni cannot have a connection to the Internet and must pay for an electronic monitoring device, Hogan ruled.

Karni heads Top-Cape Technology in Cape Town, South Africa, which trades in military and aviation electronic gear.

In his recent statement to federal court, Commerce Department Special Agent James Brigham charged that Karni had an elaborate scheme to try to circumvent U.S. export restrictions to Pakistan and sell the triggers.

Brigham said an anonymous source in South Africa tipped off U.S. authorities and provided shipping details to allow tracking of the devices, plus copies of correspondence to and from Karni.



Asher Karni: Accused of smuggling nuclear weapon triggers to Pakistan, released while he awaits trial although prosecutors had asked that he be held without bail

Spark gaps can be used in machines called lithotripters to break up kidney stones, but even the la hospital would need only a half-dozen or so, experts say. Large orders raise red flags with nuclear experts.

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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