

Turkish man in Waukesha County jail is a threat to national security, prosecutors say

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(Photo: Federal court records)

A Turkish businessman held in the Waukesha County Jail since December desperately wants to be out to help his lawyer fight charges he illegally sold Wisconsin boat engines to the Iranian navy.

Resit Tavan's attorney argues Tavan has no criminal record and is trying to bring his wife and three children to Milwaukee to live in an apartment near the federal courthouse, where he'd also wear a GPS tracking device.

If his family makes it here, and Turkish consulate officials can assure the United States it won't help Tavan abscond, a federal magistrate may reconsider an earlier decision to deny Tavan's release.

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"As a family man, Tavan would not jeopardize the safety of his wife and children by attempting to flee," his attorney wrote in a motion for release.



Resit Tavan, his wife, Arzu, and their two sons. They also have an older daughter. (Photo: Federal court files)

Federal prosecutors strongly disagree. They oppose Tavan's release on any kind of conditions, saying his transfer of powerful outboard engines and other Wisconsin-made marine equipment to the Iranian navy affected national security. If he were able to get back to Turkey, he could not be extradited, they say.

"The government recognizes that pretrial release is often the norm, but this is not a normal case," Assistant U.S. Attorney Paul Kanter wrote.

The question isn't whether he's personally dangerous, they argue, but whether his supplying equipment to a hostile nation makes him a danger to American troops in the Gulf Region.

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Prosecutors also question Tavan's family devotion, noting that he even sought asylum in Romania, where he was arrested in June, to avoid facing the charges here.

"His actions bespeak a man wishing to avoid the substantial penalties for the crimes that there is overwhelming evidence he committed," Kanter wrote.

RELATED: [Turk charged with illegally trafficking Wisconsin products to the Iranian navy. \(/story/news/crime/2017/12/11/turkish-business-owner-charge-importing-wisconsin-products-iranian-navappears-milwaukee-federal-cour/942016001/\)](#)

Tavan's separation since June, when he was first arrested in Romania, has been extremely hard on his family members, who suffer "severe depression and anxiety" and a lack of support, his attorney wrote.

Tavan, 40, his company The Ramor Group and a manager there, Fulya Oguzturk, 54, are charged with conspiracy to illegally export to Iran, smuggling and money laundering. His attorney has said Tavan denies any knowledge that engines and equipment he imported to Turkey would ever wind up with the Iranian navy, in violation of embargoes in effect at the time.

According to the indictment, the defendants failed to obtain the special licenses needed to get around trade embargoes against Iran in place since 1995. Instead, they negotiated the export of the engines and generators to Turkey, then re-exported to Iran.

In 2013, Tavan signed an agreement to buy two Germantown-based [Seven Marine 557 outboard engines](#), (<http://www.seven-marine.com/>) worth more than \$100,000 each, through a commercial brokerage, representing that the engines would be used in Turkey.

The indictment also describes the sale of [Kohler Marine generators](#), (<http://www.kohlerpower.com/marine/sectionfront.htm?sectionNumber=13461>) in 2015 intended for use on an Iranian boat designed to include covert missile launching tubes.

The other export, also in 2015, involved marine power propulsion equipment from [Arneson](#), (<http://new.arneson-industries.com/>) a subsidiary of Racine-based Twin Disc.

In all, Ramor Group sent more than \$312,000 from Turkey to the U.S. companies, according to the indictment.

"The aforementioned charges are not as serious as they sound," his attorney, Nejla Lane, wrote. "Tavan simply got caught up in a misunderstanding and the charges relate to imports from his business.

"Tavan's business had a wide and varied scope. This scope includes food import and export, construction, tourism, real estate transactions, just to mention a few areas."

Lane calls the government's case weak and based on hearsay and materials translated from multiple languages.

But because the case has been designated complex, there is no imminent trial deadline and Tavan, who she said speaks only minimal English, could spend a very long time in jail awaiting trial.

She cited the case of Marcus Hutchins, a British computer security expert who has been allowed to live in a Los Angeles-area apartment where he can assist with his defense in a federal malware case charged in Milwaukee federal court.

The government countered that Hutchins had already been living and working in the U.S., and had already shown he would appear in court and follow many other conditions.

RELATED: [Celebrity hacker MalwareTech awaits Milwaukee trial on a California beach \(/story/news/crime/2017/11/24/celebrity-hacker-malwaretech-awaits-milwaukee-trial-california-beach/883278001/\)](#)

The government says Tavan has nothing but motive to flee since he has absolutely no connection to the U.S. and may lose his business in Turkey if he can't get back to operate it.

His re-export of the American marine equipment to Iran violated the International Emergency Economic Powers Act and the Iranian Transactions and Sanctions Regulations, according to the charges.

According to a criminal complaint, Tavan's company, Ramor, bought the Seven Marine outboards through a Virginia broker in 2013 and affirmed they would be used only in Turkey and not transferred to a sanctioned nation.

Seven officials told the FBI that fall that it usually installs all its engines sold in Europe and the Middle East, but that Ramor never provided details about the location and use of the engines, despite claimed problems and Seven's repeated offers to send its technicians to fix them.

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