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Defense Department Linguist Sentenced to 23 Years in Prison for Transmitting Highly Sensitive Classified National Defense Information to Aid a Foreign Government

Mariam Taha Thompson, 62, formerly of Rochester, Minnesota, was sentenced today to 23 years in prison for delivering classified national defense information to aid a foreign government. As part of her March 26 guilty plea, Thompson admitted that she believed that the classified national defense information that she was passing to a Lebanese national would be provided to Lebanese Hezbollah, a designated foreign terrorist organization.

“Thompson’s sentence reflects the seriousness of her violation of the trust of the American people, of the human sources she jeopardized and of the troops who worked at her side as friends and colleagues,” said Assistant Attorney General John C. Demers for the Justice Department’s National Security Division. “That Thompson passed our nation’s sensitive secrets to someone whom she knew had ties to Lebanese Hezbollah made her betrayal all the more serious. Thompson’s sentence should stand as a clear warning to all clearance holders that violations of their oath to this country will not be taken lightly, especially when they put lives at risk.”

“The defendant’s decision to aid a foreign terrorist organization was a betrayal that endangered the lives of the very American men and women on the battlefield who had served beside her for more than a decade,” said Acting U.S. Attorney Channing D. Phillips for the District of Columbia. “Let today’s sentence serve notice that there are serious consequences for anyone who betrays this country by compromising national defense information.”

“This case should serve as a clear reminder to all of those entrusted with national defense information that unilaterally disclosing such information for personal gain, or that of others, is not selfless or heroic; it is criminal,” said Assistant Director Alan E. Kohler, Jr. of the FBI’s Counterintelligence Division. “By knowingly distributing classified information that would be passed onto a designated foreign terrorist organization, Mariam Thompson put our national defense in danger. The men and women of the FBI will continue to work tirelessly to defeat hostile intelligence activities targeting the United States and to hold those who assist our adversaries accountable.”

“Thompson was entrusted with highly sensitive information, and she chose to betray her country by providing classified defense information to a foreign terrorist organization,” said Assistant Director in Charge Steven M. D’Antuono of the FBI Washington Field Office. “Today’s significant sentencing shows the dedicated work of the FBI, the U.S. Intelligence Community and our global partners to work swiftly and diligently to safeguard our national security information and hold accountable those who break our nation’s trust.”

According to court documents, Thompson worked as a contract linguist at an overseas U.S. military facility where she was entrusted with a Top-Secret government security clearance. Thompson admitted that, beginning in 2017, she started communicating with her unindicted co-conspirator using a video-chat feature on a secure text and voice messaging application. Over time, Thompson developed a romantic interest in her co-conspirator. Thompson learned that the unindicted co-conspirator had a family member who was in the Lebanese Ministry of the Interior and that the unindicted co-conspirator claimed to have received a ring from Hassan Nasrallah, the secretary-general of Lebanese Hezbollah.

In December 2019, while Thompson was assigned to a Special Operations Task Force facility in Iraq, the United States launched a series of airstrikes in Iraq targeting Kata'ib Hezbollah, an Iranian-backed foreign terrorist organization. These airstrikes culminated in a Jan. 3, 2020, strike that resulted in the death of Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force commander Qasem Suleimani, as well as the founder of Kata'ib Hezbollah, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

Following Suleimani's death, the unindicted co-conspirator began asking Thompson to provide "them" with information about the human assets who had helped the United States to target Suleimani. Thompson admitted that she understood "them" to be Lebanese Hezbollah, including an unnamed high-ranking military commander.

After receiving this request for information in early January 2020, Thompson began accessing dozens of files concerning human intelligence sources, including true names, personal identification data, background information and photographs of the human assets, as well as operational cables detailing information the assets provided to the U.S. government. Thompson used several techniques to pass this information on to the unindicted co-conspirator, who told her that his contacts were pleased with the information and that the Lebanese Hezbollah military commander wanted to meet Thompson when she came to Lebanon.

When she was arrested by the FBI on Feb. 27, 2020, Thompson had used her access to classified national defense information to provide her co-conspirator with the identities of at least eight clandestine human assets; at least 10 U.S. targets; and multiple tactics, techniques and procedures. Thompson intended and had reason to believe that this classified national defense information would be used to the injury of the United States and to the advantage of Lebanese Hezbollah.

Today's sentencing was the result of the significant cooperation between law enforcement, the Department of Defense and the intelligence community in the successful resolution of this investigation led by the FBI Washington Field Office.

National Security Division Trial Attorneys Jennifer Kennedy Gellie of the Counterintelligence and Export Control Section and Jennifer Levy of the Counterterrorism Section, and Special Assistant U.S. Attorney John Cummings for the District of Columbia prosecuted the case.

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