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Southern District of New York*

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**ARMS TRAFFICKERS FOUND GUILTY IN PLOTS TO SMUGGLE
SHOULDER-FIRED SURFACE-TO-AIR MISSILES, ROCKET-
PROPELLED GRENADES, AND OTHER MILITARY WEAPONS**

MICHAEL J. GARCIA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that ARTUR SOLOMONYAN, CHRISTIAAN DEWET SPIES, and IOSEB KHARABADZE, were found guilty by jury verdict rendered today of plotting to smuggle shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles ("SAMs"), rocket-propelled grenades ("RPGs"), anti-tank guided missiles, and other high-powered military weapons into the United States for sale. SOLOMONYAN and SPIES, as well as three other defendants, DMITRIY VOROBEYCHIK, NIKOLAI NADIRASHVILI and LEVAN CHVELIDZE, were also found guilty of illegally trafficking in machine guns and other assault weapons. As shown by the evidence at trial:

From December 2003 to March 15, 2005, SOLOMONYAN, SPIES, and KHARABADZE brokered a deal to import RPGs, SAMs, anti-tank missile systems, and other military weapons from Eastern Europe into the United States, for sale to a confidential informant ("CI") posing as an arms trafficker. SOLOMONYAN and SPIES met with the CI in New York City on several occasions to discuss the details of their weapons deal, including in-depth review of the specifications and prices of various weapons that the defendants could ship. In June 2004, at a meeting in New York City, SOLOMONYAN and SPIES provided the CI with a price list of weapons provided earlier that day by KHARABADZE - a list that included RPGs, Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, AK-47s, and claymore mines. In February 2005, SOLOMONYAN and SPIES provided the CI with digital photographs of military weapons in Armenia that they proposed to import into the United States for the CI. These photographs, which Federal Bureau of Investigation forensics determined were taken in late February 2005, included such weapons as: Surface-to-Air Heat Seeking Anti-Aircraft Missiles, an Anti-Tank Guided Missile and Launcher, a mortar

launcher, recoilless anti-tank guns, and fully automatic AK-74 and AK-47 assault rifles.

The FBI arrested the defendants before any of them could travel outside of the United States to obtain these weapons.

In addition, while SOLOMONYAN and SPIES were arranging to import the military weapons from Eastern Europe, they, along with VOROBEYCHIK, NADIRASHVILI, and CHVELIDZE, also sold the CI one machine gun and seven other assault weapons. The assault weapons included a Norinco Model NHM91 semi-automatic assault rifle, an Israel Military Industries Model A Uzi, an Interdynamic Model KG-9 or "TEC-9" semi-automatic assault pistol, a Norinco MAC-90 Sporter semi-automatic assault rifle, three AK-47s, and two conversion kits intended to convert AK-47s into fully-automatic machine guns. The defendants delivered the weapons to various storage facilities rented by the FBI in New York City, Los Angeles, and Fort Lauderdale.

SOLOMONYAN and SPIES each face a maximum penalty of 50 years in prison. KHARABADZE faces a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison, and VOROBEYCHIK, NADIRASHVILI, and CHVELIDZE each face a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison. NADIRASHVILI was acquitted of interstate travel in furtherance of unlicensed firearms dealing, but convicted of two other firearm trafficking counts.

The defendants are scheduled to be sentenced by U.S. District Judge RICHARD J. HOLWELL on December 14, 2007.

Prior to today's verdicts, twelve other related defendants were convicted of firearms trafficking offenses in connection with this investigation.

Mr. GARCIA praised the work of the FBI and the NYPD in their handling of this investigation. Mr. GARCIA also expressed his thanks to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement for their efforts.

Assistant United States Attorneys CHRISTOPHER P. CONNIFF, MARC P. BERGER, and DAVID B. MASSEY are in charge of the prosecution.

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