



HRSP NEWSLETTER

U.S. Department of Justice, Criminal Division, Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section

February 2022

Pennsylvania Man Charged with Torture

On February 17, a Pennsylvania man was arrested and detained on charges alleging that he tortured a victim in the Kurdistan region of Iraq in 2015. A superseding indictment returned in the Middle District of Pennsylvania charges Ross Roggio, 53, of Stroudsburg, with suffocating a victim with a belt, threatening to cut off one of the victim's fingers, and directing Kurdish soldiers to inflict other severe physical and mental pain and suffering on the victim.

"These charges demonstrate that the Department of Justice will hold U.S. citizens who commit horrendous acts of violence accountable," said Assistant Attorney General Kenneth A. Polite Jr. of the Justice Department's Criminal Division. "The Criminal Division is committed to bringing human rights violators to justice."

"The grand jury charges that the defendant directed and participated in the systematic torture of an employee over the course of 39 days by Kurdish soldiers in Iraq," said U.S. Attorney John C. Gurganus for the Middle District of Pennsylvania. "The grand jury's superseding indictment and the hard work of our law enforcement partners show that such brutality will be exposed and addressed wherever it occurs."

According to the superseding indictment, Roggio was managing a project in 2015 to construct a factory and produce weapons in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. The superseding indictment alleges that one of Roggio's employees raised concerns about the weapons project and, to prevent the employee from interfering with the weapons project, Roggio arranged for Kurdish soldiers to abduct the employee.

The superseding indictment alleges that, while the employee was detained at a Kurdish military compound for approximately 39 days, Roggio led multiple interrogation sessions during which he directed Kurdish soldiers to suffocate the victim with a bag, taser the victim in the groin and other areas of his body, beat the victim with fists and rubber hoses, jump violently on the victim's chest while wearing military boots, and threaten to cut off one of the victim's fingers while applying pressure to the finger with a large cutting tool. The superseding indictment also alleges that on at least one occasion, Roggio wrapped his belt around the victim's neck, yanked the victim off the ground, and suspended him in the air, causing the victim to lose consciousness.

Roggio and the Roggio Consulting Company LLC were charged in a 37-count indictment in 2018 with illegally exporting firearms parts and tools from the United States to Iraq as part of the weapons project in Kurdistan. The superseding indictment adds the torture charges to the previously charged offenses. The superseding indictment additionally charges Roggio with one count of conspiracy to commit torture and one substantive count of torture. Roggio is the second U.S. citizen – and the fourth defendant overall – to be charged with violating the torture statute since the law went into effect in 1994.

If convicted, he faces a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison for each of the torture charges as well as a maximum total statutory penalty of 705 years in prison for the remaining 37 counts. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

The FBI and HSI investigated the torture allegations and were joined in the investigation of the alleged arms export violations by the Department of Commerce, Bureau of Industry and Security, Office of Export Enforcement. The case is being prosecuted by HRSP Trial Attorneys Patrick Jasperse and Christian Levesque, Assistant U.S. Attorneys Todd Hinkley and Jenny Roberts for the Middle District of Pennsylvania, and Trial Attorney Scott Claffee of the National Security Division's Counterintelligence and Export Control Section, with assistance from HRSP Historian Dr. Nadav Samin. The Justice Department's Office of International Affairs and the Pennsylvania State Police also provided valuable assistance.

Members of the public who have information about human rights violators in the United States are urged to contact U.S. law enforcement through the FBI tip line at 1-800-CALL-FBI (800-225-5324) or the HSI tip line at 1-866-DHS-2-ICE, or complete the [FBI online tip form](#) or the [ICE online tip form](#). All are staffed around the clock, and tips may be provided anonymously.

An indictment is merely an allegation, and all defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.