

U.S. Department of Justice

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For Release;

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Division Director
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco
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Emily M. Sweeney, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Ohio, Richard A. Rawlins, Division Director for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms (ATF) and Robert R. Reid, Chief of Police, Bedford, Ohio Police Department today announced that a five-count indictment was unsealed, charging Mourad Topalian, age 56, of 29 Lyman Circle, Beachwood, Ohio.

Topalian is charged in Count 1 of the indictment with conspiracy to transport explosives, to transport and store stolen explosives, to transport explosives with the intent to intimidate others and to damage property, to maliciously damage property by means of explosives, to make false statements, to possess a machine gun, and to possess a firearm with an obliterated serial number (in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 371).

In addition, Topalian is charged with one count each of; concealing and storing stolen explosives (in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Sections 842(h) and 2), improper storage of explosives (in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Sections 642(j) and 2), possession of machine guns (in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Sections 922(o) and 2), and possession of firearms with obliterated serial numbers (in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Sections 922(k) and 2).

If convicted, Topalian faces a maximum penalty of ten years imprisonment and/or a \$250,000 fine on the concealment of explosives and possession of machine gun counts, five years imprisonment and/or a \$250,000 fine on the conspiracy count and on the possession of firearms with an obliterated aerial number count, and one year imprisonment and/or a \$100,000 fine on the storage of explosives count.

The indictment alleges that, from mid-1976 through September 13, 1996, Topalian conspired with other individuals to acquire, steal, transport, and store explosives and firearms, including fully automatic weapons and
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firearms with obliterated serial numbers, for the purpose of using and attempting to use them to commit certain acts in order to bring attention to their cause, the Armenian Genocide of 1915. According to the indictment, Topalian and others stored more than 100 pounds of high explosives in a rented public storage facility in Bedford, Ohio, that was located within 400 feet of a children's day care center and within 300 feet of Interstate 271. The explosives and firearms were safely recovered from the storage facility on September 13, 1996.

Mrs. Sweeney complimented the investigative efforts of Cleveland-based ATF agents and the officers of the Bedford Police Department: "Their determination, cooperation and diligent investigative work led to the return of this indictment. All the participants are to be commended."

Mr. Rawlins said: "Mr. Topalian's indictment and arrest by ATF agents caps a three year ATF investigation into numerous bombing incidents in the United States along with alleged violations of federal weapons and explosives laws that span twenty years. ATF agents, teamed with local, state, and other federal law enforcement agencies are at the forefront of the struggle to prevent violence."

Rawlins also said: "In 1996, Bedford Police and ATF agents discovered a large quantity of high explosives stashed in a public storage facility. Those responsible created an enormous danger to the people that live and work in the immediate area of this hidden stash."

"The safety of my community is a top priority," said Chief Reid. "Thanks to the hard work by officers of the Bedford Police Department, ATF agents and the other agencies that have provided assistance, that safety has been maintained."

This case was presented to the grand jury and is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Thomas J. Gruscinski.

An indictment is only a charge and is not evidence of guilt. A defendant is entitled to a fair trial in which it will be the government's burden to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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