

Taiwanese faces US smuggling charges

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A 40-year-old Taiwanese has been charged with illegally smuggling US-made military items to Iran for use in its missile program.

Chen Yi-lan, also known as Kevin Chen, was arrested in Guam and is now on his way to Miami, Florida, for trial.

If convicted, he could be jailed for 20 years and fined US\$1 million.

It is alleged that Chen shipped the items — P200 turbine engines, MIL-S-8516 sealing compound, glass-to-metal pin seals and circular hermetic connectors — to Taiwan and Hong Kong from where they were sent on to Iran.

All of the items involved are known as “dual use” goods because they can also be used to build missiles and military drones — the pilotless aircraft increasingly employed in non-conventional warfare.

US Attorney Jeffrey Sloman said: “Iran has been designated a state sponsor of terrorism and remains subject to US, United Nations and European Union economic sanctions and export controls because of its continued involvement in terrorism and its nuclear weapons ambitions. The dual use items allegedly exported in this case could easily be used in missile development and other military components.”

Anthony Mangione, special agent in charge of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, said: “This case will send a message to those individuals who attempt to profit by illegally supplying improper dual-use technology to other countries.”

Chen first fell under suspicion when he failed to fully complete forms that should have named the end-user for detonators he wanted to export through a California company.

An investigation is alleged to have shown that Chen’s customers were not in Taiwan and Hong Kong but were in fact known front companies that acquire Western technology for Iran’s missile program.

P200 turbine engines are designed for use as model airplane engines but can also be used to operate unmanned aerial vehicles such as military drones.

MIL-S-8516 sealing compound is used for sealing low-voltage electrical connectors against moisture and corrosion and is designed to military specifications with numerous applications in weapons manufacture.

Glass-to-metal pin seals are used in thermal imaging devices and weapons systems and the circular hermetic connectors were built to military specifications for use in “defense, industrial and petrochemical applications.”

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The complaint affidavit said: "Customers in Iran sent orders to Chen for specific US-manufactured goods. Chen then requested quotes, usually by e-mail from US businesses and made arrangements for the sale and shipment of the goods to one of several freight forwarders in Hong Kong and Taiwan."

"Once in Hong Kong or Taiwan, the goods were then shipped to Iran," the affidavit said.

No other details were given, but a statement released on Thursday by the US Justice Department said: "Chen was arrested in Guam on the outstanding arrest warrant from the Southern District of Florida."

"This morning, Chen appeared before a Magistrate Judge in Guam for his initial appearance. At the initial appearance, Chen waived removal, was taken into custody and was ordered to appear in the Southern District of Florida," it added.

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