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Update: Smuggler Previously Convicted of Aircraft Export Control Violations; Disguised Company as Larger Operation

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This is an update to an [ISIS report](#) on an alleged illicit procurement scheme run by Mac Aviation, a company located in County Sligo, Ireland. John Mooney reported in the Irish *Sunday Times* on October 18, 2009 important new information about the company's methods of plying its suspicious trade. Thomas McGuinn, 72, the owner of Mac Aviation, his son Sean, 40, and another person assumed to be an employee were indicted by the United States in July 2008 for illegally selling U.S. made aircraft equipment to Iran.¹ The two McGuinns face twenty-five counts of conspiracy and export control violations for allegedly brokering sales and arranging shipments of the controlled equipment. The Iranian entities that ordered and received the equipment are affiliated with Iran's military aviation projects and sanctioned by the United States for their involvement in procuring items for the nuclear and ballistic missile programs.

Mac Aviation has had a long history of suspicious sales, some of which are now being investigated by several European countries, Canada, Malaysia, and Nigeria. *The Sunday Times* revealed that U.S. authorities arrested Thomas McGuinn in Florida in 1994 for illegally selling U.S.-made night vision goggles to Iran.² McGuinn subsequently pled guilty; the court sentenced him to time served in jail while he awaited trial and three years' probation. This conviction apparently did not deter him from continuing illicit business in Ireland. According to the *Sunday Times*, the company has reportedly generated as much as €40 million worth of deals involving engines, bolts, and vanes for military helicopters and jet fighters using Malaysian, African, and European companies as fronts.³

¹ John Mooney, "U.S. Links Sligo to €40m Iran Arms Web," *The Sunday Times* of Ireland, October 18, 2009. <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/ireland/article6879300.ece>

² Ibid.

³ John Mooney, "U.S. Cites Irish Firm in €40m Iran Scam," *The Sunday Times* of Ireland, October 18, 2009. <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/ireland/article6879647.ece>

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The Sunday Times uncovered new information about the *modus operandi* of these Irish traders. One of the more surprising revelations is the effort of this small family business to deceive suppliers by making the company look far larger. McGuinn and his son have run their company from Thomas McGuinn's small home in a rural section of county Sligo in western Ireland. Using limited resources, including a simple fax machine, two-line phone, and computer, they generated large profits through carefully procuring equipment using a variety of fronts. The company created fictitious employees to lend an appearance to its customers that it is a large operation with many employees. The employee "Sean Byrne," was later determined to be fictitious despite his inclusion in the U.S. indictment. This deception apparently fooled major suppliers, such as Rolls Royce (from which Mac Aviation illegally procured and sold helicopter engines to Iran). When an official from Rolls Royce visited the company, he was reportedly speechless because he had thought it was a global operation that employed hundreds of people.⁴

Extradition of the McGuinns from Ireland to stand trial for their alleged violations of U.S. law is not certain because the alleged violations of U.S. export laws are not covered in Ireland's extradition treaty with the United States. Mac Aviation may be under investigation, however, by the government of Ireland for transacting with Iranian banks through Irish financial institutions.

This new information shows that two individuals operating with minimal resources were able to run a trading company dealing in millions of dollars worth of illegal aircraft part sales to Iran and possibly other countries. Trading companies involved in the business of smuggling can operate more effectively by disguising themselves as larger operations to their customers. This case raises the possibility that Ireland might host illicit nuclear and other military trading schemes. The Irish government should be wary of potential smugglers operating on its soil.

⁴ Mooney, "U.S. Links Sligo."