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## Former Marine suing Iran



Amir Hekmati, a former U.S. Marine, is suing Iran for damages for the torture he endured. | AP Photo

By **NAHAL TOOSI**

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A former U.S. Marine who was held prisoner in Iran for more than four years is suing the Islamist-led country, seeking damages for torture he endured while in custody, his lawyers announced Monday.

Amir Hekmati, an Iranian-American from Michigan, was convicted on vague espionage charges after being taken into custody while on a visit to Iran. He and three other Americans of Iranian descent were released earlier this year as part of a prisoner swap negotiated between Iranian officials and the Obama administration.

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The lawsuit has been filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, and it seeks economic, compensatory and punitive damages from a country that does not have diplomatic ties with the United States and is unlikely to recognize any court ruling against it.

According to a news release, the complaint maintains that “Iran’s despicable behavior was outside the scope of immunity provided by the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act (FSIA) and therefore subjects Iran to suit in the United States.” It says that Hekmati was subject to beatings, sleep deprivation, forced drugging and psychological abuse.

“Iran’s treatment of Amir Hekmati was utterly contemptible,” his attorney, Scott Gilbert, said in a statement. “Amir can never be adequately compensated

for his suffering. ... Our intention, with the filing of this lawsuit, is to attempt to provide at least some measure of justice for Amir and his family.”

Hekmati was in the Marines from 2001 to 2005 as an infantry rifleman and translator, serving in Iraq, according to the news release. He went to Iran to visit his grandmother in the summer of 2011, and was taken into custody just a few days before he was scheduled to return to the United States.

Iran doesn't recognize dual nationality, so it treated Hekmati as an Iranian citizen. Because of the lack of diplomatic relations with Iran, U.S. officials had no real access to him. But at the same time that American leaders were urging Iran to free Hekmati and other Americans, they were negotiating a nuclear deal with the Islamic Republic.

The [release](#) of Hekmati and the other imprisoned Iranian-Americans came in mid-January, around the same time the nuclear deal was declared formally implemented, although U.S. officials insisted the matters were kept on separate tracks. At least two other Iranian-Americans, Siamak Namazi and his father, Baquer, are believed to still be in Iranian custody. A retired FBI agent, Robert Levinson, was also last seen in Iran, though officials there deny holding him.

Filing lawsuits against foreign governments is a tricky issue in the United States, but there are some exceptions when it comes to terrorism. Last month, in a move that angered Tehran, the Supreme Court [upheld a law](#) that allowed victims of Iranian-sponsored terrorism to collect some \$2 billion worth of seized Iranian assets.

**FILED UNDER:** IRAN, AMIR MIRZAEI HEKMATI, IRAN NUCLEAR AGREEMENT

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