

# U.S. judge orders Iran to pay \$63 million to ex-Marine tortured, imprisoned four years

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By **Spencer S. Hsu** September 29

A U.S. judge Friday ordered the government of Iran to pay \$63 million in damages to Amir Hekmati, a former U.S. Marine who alleged Iranian captors tortured and held him prisoner for 4-1/2 years from 2011 to 2016.

Hekmati, 33, an Iranian-American from Michigan, was freed in January 2016 by Iran as part of a prisoner exchange along with [Washington Post](#) reporter Jason Rezaian, Christian minister Saeed Abedini, and another American, Nosratollah Khosravi-Roodsari.

U.S. District Judge Ellen S. Huvelle of Washington granted a default judgment against the Islamic Republic of Iran, which as its custom did not respond to Hekmati's lawsuit in May 2016 for damages. The judgment was split 50-50 between punitive and compensatory damages for pain, suffering and economic loss.

"No award ever could fully compensate Amir Hekmati for the cruel and inhuman treatment he endured over five years at the hands of his brutal Iranian captors," Hekmati's attorney, Scott D. Gilbert of Washington, said in a statement. "But this brings Amir and his family another step closer to closure and ultimately, we all hope, to being able to move on with their lives. As for the Iranian government, this well documented opinion shines a spotlight on who they really are. And they will pay for that."

Hekmati, a dual U.S.-Iranian national born in the United States, worked in Iraq and Afghanistan as a cultural analyst and adviser for U.S. defense contractors and at the time of his arrest in August 2011 was making his first trip to Iran to visit relatives before starting graduate school at the University of Michigan.

Hekmati said he was held in extreme solitary confinement, beaten, threatened, and deprived of food and sanitary conditions, consistent with its treatment of U.S.-Iranian citizens held under false pretenses. Hekmati said he was offered immediate release in exchange for making a false confession of espionage — in what he said he was told was an internal training video — that was used to support a death sentence that eventually was reduced to 10 years imprisonment.

“Hekmati was the victim of torture” for the purpose of eliciting a false confession, Huvelle wrote in a 34-page opinion. Iran’s “conduct was truly horrific and it caused substantial and permanent harm. In addition, defendant’s conduct is part of a long-standing pattern and policy, making the need for deterrence clear,” Huvelle wrote.

At least four other American citizens are imprisoned in Iran at this time, and President Trump on Sept. 21 called for their release. Hekmati was released in a prisoner swap when the Iran-U. S. nuclear deal took effect.

Collecting judgments from Iran has been a struggle for more than 1,000 Americans who have successfully sued under an exception for state-sponsored terrorism in the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act. The act generally bars U.S. individuals from suing foreign governments. However, the U.S. Supreme Court in 2016 upheld the award of \$2 billion in frozen Iranian funds to families of victims of those killed or injured in the 1983 bombing of a U.S. Marine Corps barracks in Beirut and other attacks blamed on Iran.

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