

# Maltese arms dealer charged with violating Libya sanctions

Five charged in court on Friday

National Libya Crime

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One of two military-grade vessels used in violation of international sanctions. Inset: Arms dealer James Fenech.

A Maltese arms dealer has been charged with breaching EU sanctions on Libya.

James Fenech, 41, allegedly used two military-grade Rigid Hull Inflatable Boats (RHIBs) to circumvent international sanctions and transport private contractors out of war-torn Libya without notifying the authorities.

A mysterious Malta-registered boat found in the harbour of Zewetina, Libya, some 150 kilometres south of Benghazi, last August had raised suspicion that it was being used to sneak people in and out of the country, prompting the Libyan authorities to launch an investigation.

At the time, Libyan news sites had wrongly reported that the boat belonged to the Armed Forces of Malta, while some sections of the Libya press had speculated that it could have been used to ferry special forces or intelligence teams into the region.

On Friday afternoon, five Maltese men, Fenech and four men, aged 63, 47, 45 and 44, believed to have manned that vessel and

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another identical to it, were all charged in court in Valletta with sanctions busting.

According to the prosecution, Fenech had entered into a contractual agreement with a United Arab Emirates company to shuttle personnel in and out of Libya. This was allegedly done without authorisation from the relevant authorities.

In a statement on Saturday, police superintendent George Cremona, responsible for the counter terrorism unit, said the investigation was also looking into possible money laundering.

An attachment order on financial information has been requested, as well as letters rogatory sent to overseas jurisdictions.

A request to freeze assets linked to Fenech has also been issued and accepted by the courts, the police said.

### **RHIBs abandoned at sea**

Fenech insists that the contract was for "emergency evacuation", however *Times of Malta* is informed that investigators believe the incident is more likely linked to private military contractors who were believed to have been monitoring a shipment of weapons into Libya. Police investigations into this are ongoing.

Sources said one of the two RHIBs had to be abandoned at sea after it developed engine problems. Upon arrival, those on board were temporarily detained because they did not have the necessary paperwork.

Investigators established that the boats belonged to Sovereign Charterers, a vessel chartering company based in Malta.

Sovereign Charters forms part of a web of companies held under the umbrella, Unified Global Services Group, owned by Fenech.

Fenech's Fieldsports Ltd is an arms dealing company that supplies military and tactical equipment to the highest bidder.

### **Links to an infamous US militia operator**

The company had once partnered with infamous former US private militia operator Erik Prince, in a venture that was reportedly set to produce and sell ammunition.

A 2007 report by the European Parliament had found that Malta had, at the time, been the operational base for Prince's private militia company, formerly known as Blackwater.

Prince is himself no stranger to controversy. According to [Politico](#), the US' Justice Department is currently reviewing allegations that Prince had misled Congress during its investigation of Russian interference in the 2016 US election

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