

## **MEGAHED ARREST LOOKS VINDICTIVE**

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### **Body**

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Three days after having their heads handed to them in the case against Youssef **Megahed**, federal authorities on Monday **arrested** the former Tampa college student on secretive immigration charges. Whether this amounts to more than sour grapes for having lost a flimsy case on explosives charges against **Megahed** remains to be seen. It surely **looks vindictive**. Immigration officials, at the very least, need to publicly explain why **Megahed's arrest** was so compelling it justified whisking him off the street.

**Megahed** was shopping with his father Monday at a Tampa Wal-Mart when his lawyer phoned and summoned the 23-year-old to his office. The pair left the store immediately and headed to the parking lot, where seven unmarked cars flanked the store entrance. Samir **Megahed** said agents surrounded them. One shoved paperwork in his face while others grabbed his son. The elder **Megahed** stood in the car's way and insisted his son be allowed to see his lawyer, but the men ushered him out of the way. The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency, in a statement later Monday, said **Megahed**, an Egyptian national and legal permanent resident of the United States, was **arrested** on civil immigration charges and placed into "removal proceedings," code for deportation.

**Megahed** was **arrested** three days after a federal jury in Tampa acquitted him of explosives charges in a high-profile case that raised the specter of terrorism. In 2007, **Megahed** and Ahmed Mohamed, a fellow University of South Florida student, were **arrested** in South Carolina after a traffic stop led authorities to the car trunk, where they found PVC pipes stuffed with a mixture of potassium nitrate and sugar.

Mohamed pleaded guilty in December to providing material support to terrorists and drew 15 years in a plea deal. But the evidence against him was more incriminating. A YouTube video showed him demonstrating how to turn a remote-controlled toy into a detonator. **Megahed** insisted he didn't know the PVC pipes were in the trunk (his fingerprints were not on them). And experts who testified could not come to a conclusion as to the danger of the potassium nitrate mixture.

The prosecution of **Megahed** was hardly a rush job. Jurors sat through a 2-1/2 week trial that drew 36 witnesses and more than 100 pieces of evidence. They deliberated for 21 hours before finding **Megahed** not guilty. It is hard to imagine what evidence immigration officials have that rises beyond that which has already been dismissed by the jury. While federal officials say double jeopardy does not apply - as immigration proceedings are civil and not criminal in nature - that, at least to **Megahed** and his family, is a difference without a distinction. What is the basis for holding him and challenging his residency if the acts that brought him to the government's attention have been found guiltless by a jury?

**Megahed's** family and the Tampa chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations called Tuesday for U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder to intervene. Holder recently threw out the government's ethics case against former Alaska Sen. Ted Stevens, citing prosecutorial misconduct. Unless more is revealed quickly, the **Megahed** case **looks** ripe for Holder's review.

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## Graphic

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PHOTO, DANIEL WALLACE, Times: Youssef **Megahed**, center, outside court in Tampa after his acquittal Friday on explosives charges. He was **arrested** Monday on immigration charges.

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