



# Department of Justice

Acting United States Attorney Brian J. Stretch  
Northern District of California

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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**FORMER SILK ROAD TASK FORCE AGENT SENTENCED TO 78 MONTHS IN PRISON FOR EXTORTION, MONEY LAUNDERING, AND OBSTRUCTION**

*Ex-DEA Agent Used Undercover Status to Pocket More than \$700,000 in Bitcoin, Strike Movie Deal with Twentieth Century Fox*

SAN FRANCISCO –Carl M. Force was sentenced to 78 months in prison today for extortion, money laundering, and obstruction of justice announced Acting U.S. Attorney Brian J. Stretch, Assistant Attorney General Leslie R. Caldwell, Chief Richard Weber of the IRS-Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI), Special Agent in Charge David J. Johnson of FBI's San Francisco Division, Special Agent in Charge Michael P. Tompkins of the Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General's Washington, D.C. Field Office and Special Agent in Charge James E. Ward of the Department of Homeland Security's Office of the Inspector General. The sentence follows a guilty plea in which Force admitted to using his position as an undercover agent with the Drug Enforcement Administration to steal digital currency during a federal investigation.

Force, 46, of Baltimore, had been a Special Agent with the DEA for 15 years. Between 2012 and 2014, he was assigned to the Baltimore Silk Road Task Force, a multi-agency group investigating illegal activity on the Silk Road. Force was the lead undercover agent in communication with Ross Ulbricht, a/k/a "Dread Pirate Roberts," who ran the Silk Road from the Northern District of California. On July 1, 2015, Force pleaded guilty to charges that he used his position during that investigation to steal money during the investigation and then took steps to cover up his wrongdoing.

“The prosecution and conviction of Mr. Force illustrates that the public and law enforcement alike are subject to the same rules,” said Acting U.S. Attorney Brian J. Stretch. “The vast majority of the men and women in this country who are entrusted to enforce the law to do so honorably, skillfully, and in a manner that instills confidence and trust in government. Mr. Force has dishonored that majority and has today received a just punishment for his criminal conduct.”

“Law enforcement officials receive certain powers from the government so they can defend the rights of people and prevent wrong doing,” said FBI Special Agent In Charge David J. Johnson. “When individuals working in an official capacity violate the trust of their communities by abusing that power, they undermine the hard work of the entire law enforcement community. The FBI will continue to prioritize corruption investigations and hold those who abuse the public's trust accountable.”

“Through a series of complex transactions the defendant stole bitcoins worth hundreds of thousands of dollars,” said Thomas McMahan, Acting Special Agent in Charge, IRS Criminal Investigation. “The defendant’s crimes began with creating fictitious personas. He then stole bitcoins that he received in his official capacity and deposited them into his own personal accounts. This case is an excellent example of the financial expertise of our special agents. Through the analysis of both the block chain and data from the Silk Road servers, we were able to trace the flow of funds, which eventually led to the defendant.”

In his plea agreement, Force admitted to being on Ulbricht’s payroll in a variety of ways while assigned to investigate Ulbricht and the Silk Road. For example, Force used his official undercover persona, “Nob,” to get Ulbricht to send bitcoin payments in exchange for information, including “insider” law enforcement information; ironically, Force duped Ulbricht into making payments in part by claiming Nob had access to a corrupt government employee. Then, rather than disclose Ulbricht’s payments or turn them over to the government, Force lied on official reports and stole the funds. Force liquidated the digital currency into dollars and had the funds deposited into his own bank account in order to convert the funds to his own personal use. Further, Force also created other unofficial and fictitious personas that he used to extort payment from Ulbricht. For example, Force convinced Ulbricht he was “French Maid” named Carla Sophia who was willing to sell inside law enforcement information about the government’s investigation into the Silk Road in exchange for approximately \$100,000 worth of bitcoin. Ulbricht ultimately made the payment and Force, again, stole the funds.

Ulbricht and the government were not the only targets of Force’s scheme: Force also admitted in the plea agreement that he extorted “R.P.,” a California resident. R.P. maintained a digital currency balance with CoinMKT, a California digital currency exchange. Force directed CoinMKT to seize R.P.’s funds despite there being no legal basis to do so. Force then pocketed those sums belonging to R.P., once again transferring them to his own personal digital currency exchange and subsequently converting them to dollars using his personal bank account.

Force also admitted to abusing his position by engaging in a wide array of outside activities without permission while he was a federal agent, all designed to enrich himself. For example, in March 2014, while still employed as a DEA agent, Force entered into a movie contract with Twentieth Century Fox Film Studios related to a movie deal concerning the government's investigation into the Silk Road. The movie deal called for up to \$240,000 in payments to Force. Further, Force also moonlighted as a de facto compliance officer for CoinMKT, the same digital currency exchange involved with Force's attempt to extort R.P. Force offered to help CoinMKT investigate its customers by using his position as a federal agent and his access to government databases. In addition, Force sent an unauthorized but official Justice Department subpoena to Venmo, a mobile payments company, directing them to unfreeze his own personal account. When Venmo did not comply, Force wrote to another agent suggesting a criminal seizure directed at Venmo's accounts.

With the proceeds of his criminal activities, Force engaged in a series of complicated transactions, using the bitcoin block chain and several different accounts, all designed to conceal the true source and nature of the proceeds. In today's plea agreement, Force also admitted he obstructed justice by interfering both with the evidence in the Baltimore case against Ulbricht, and with the San Francisco case into his own illegal acts. For example, Force admitted lying to federal prosecutors and investigators when he, among other things, denied ever using the moniker, "French Maid." In his agreement with the government, Force has agreed to ask the Judge to impose sentencing enhancements for this obstruction. On June 22, 2015, Force was charged in a three-count information with money laundering with predicates of wire fraud and theft of government property, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1956(a)(1)(A) and (B); obstruction of justice, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1512(c)(2); and extortion under color of official right, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1951. On July 1, 2015, Force pleaded guilty to all counts.

The Honorable Richard Seeborg, U.S. District Judge in San Francisco, handed down the sentence. Judge Seeborg also sentenced Force to a three year period of supervised release and ordered restitution of \$340,000.

Force is one of two federal agents to be charged with illegal activity in connection with the investigation into the Silk Road. Shaun W. Bridges, 32, of Laurel, Maryland, was a Special Agent with the U.S. Secret Service who also was assigned to the Baltimore Silk Road Task Force. Bridges was charged in a two-count information on June 16, 2015 with money laundering with a predicate of wire fraud, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1957, and obstruction of justice, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1512(c)(2), related to his diversion of over \$800,000 in digital currency to which he gained control as part of the Silk Road investigation. In his plea agreement scheduled to be entered before Judge Seeborg on August 31, 2015, Bridges has admitted to the conduct with which he was charged.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Kathryn Haun and William Frentzen of the Northern District of California and Trial Attorney Richard B. Evans of the Criminal Division's Public Integrity Section, with the assistance of San Francisco Legal Assistant Daniel Charlier-Smith, Christine Tian and Lance Libatique. Assistant U.S. Attorney Arvon Perteet assisted with Asset Forfeiture aspects of the case. The case was investigated by the FBI's San Francisco Division, the IRS-CI's San Francisco Division, the Department of

Justice Office of the Inspector General and the Department of Homeland Security Office of the Inspector General in Washington D.C. The prosecution team is also thankful for the assistance of the following components for their support throughout the investigation of this case: IRS Criminal Investigation – New York Field Office, HSI’s Chicago/O’Hare Division, the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of New York, the Department of Justice’s Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section, the U.S. Embassy in Slovenia, and the FBI Legal Attaché Office in Tokyo, Japan.

**Further Information:**

Case #: 15-319 RS

A copy of this press release will be placed on the U.S. Attorney's Office's website at [www.usdoj.gov/usao/can](http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/can).

Electronic court filings and further procedural and docket information are available at <https://ecf.cand.uscourts.gov/cgi-bin/login.pl>.

Judges' calendars with schedules for upcoming court hearings can be viewed on the court's website at [www.cand.uscourts.gov](http://www.cand.uscourts.gov).

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