

Rising Star: Covington's Nikhil Gore

By Ryan Harroff

Law360 (August 9, 2024, 2:03 PM EDT) -- Nikhil Gore of Covington & Burling LLP has fought for Ukraine, its military and its businesses throughout Russia's war and shut down a startup's purportedly insincere "David and Goliath" suit against an international air carrier in Singapore, earning him a spot among the international arbitration attorneys under age 40 honored by Law360 as Rising Stars.

His biggest case:

Of all of the major international arbitrations Gore has worked on, he told Law360 that his recent work arguing multiple law-of-the-sea cases for Ukraine against the Russian Federation have stuck out above the rest.

With Gore's help, Ukraine has won multiple disputes before international arbitrators over the country's servicemen and naval vessels that Russia detained in the Black Sea, including a major ruling requiring the release of 24 servicemen and three vessels in what was only the 26th case heard by the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

Gore is still working with Ukraine as it prepares for a merits hearing in 2025 after successfully keeping the case alive past Russia's jurisdictional arguments, which he said was a complicated argument in itself.

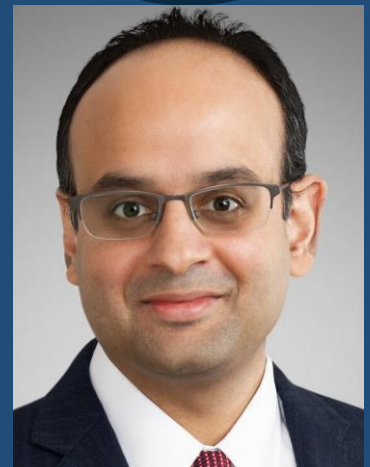
"It was challenging both intellectually, because many of those issues have never been briefed before, and also just in terms of having the responsibility of taking a position on those issues on behalf of a state," Gore said. "It's an intense and challenging diplomatic context and we were making sure we were saying things the way our client believed them and in a way that aligned with their policy preferences, not just in the case, but more broadly."

What motivates him:

As he takes on difficult and complicated international disputes, Gore said he manages to stay motivated in large part thanks to the way Covington

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Covington

Nikhil Gore

Age: 38

Home base: Washington

Position: Partner

Law school: Harvard Law School

First job after law school: Clerk for Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts Judge Barbara A. Lenk, now retired.

approaches the practice of law. Gore said he appreciates that the firm allows its attorneys the "time and space" needed to properly handle cases, adding that the culture of stability is helpful when facing turbulent cases.

"Some of these cases, like the unresolved Ukraine matters, they are stressful," Gore said. "They can be, you know, emotional at times. But we've had very stable, strong teams within Covington."

Why he's an international arbitration attorney:

Gore said he initially got into international arbitration somewhat randomly after moving back to the United States following a year in Singapore, where he had worked for another firm as a mergers and acquisitions associate.

He said he knew he did not want to stick with mergers and acquisitions and discovered an interest in international arbitration when he was assigned to a case in the field at Covington.

"These cases are large, and they're fun," Gore said. "They last many years, often. We get to know the client well, you get to know their business well, you get to know the issues well. They are very carefully and substantially briefed. And so there's, you know, the opportunity to do some really good, interesting work product."

His most interesting recent case:

In a fight with a moving company over a business partnership that an international air carrier found dissatisfactory, Gore helped the carrier fight off an emergency proceeding that the other firm initiated in the Singapore International Arbitration Centre seeking to keep the relationship going.

The moving company was a startup and portrayed the issue as a large air carrier kicking a smaller firm, but Gore argued for hours at a hearing and convinced the arbitrator that far from being a small firm getting left out to dry by his client, the start-up was actually just trying to get a quick payout.

"What can be challenging about some of these commercial cases when you are representing large institutional players is that it's very easy for the other side to try to come up with some sort of David and Goliath narrative," Gore said, later adding, "What was interesting ... about this case is that we were able to turn the narrative on its head in a very expedited period of time."

His proudest moment as an attorney:

Gore said that often the proud moments in his legal career come from small moments with his clients, like getting to tell them they finally won a given dispute.

Recently, he said he was proud of fighting on behalf of Ukrainian energy firm JSC DTEK Krymenergo at The Hague over the company's expropriation by Russia in 2015 during the country's unlawful annexation of the Crimean peninsula. Gore successfully won the company around \$270 million from Russia.

"It was not the highest profile case we've done adverse to Russia," Gore said. "But, demonstrating that a private company could persevere against Russia's delay tactics and its attempt to stall and to argue that the assets expropriated were valueless, and to be able to secure that \$270 million award where I was the lead partner in the damages case, that was a proud moment."

--As told to Ryan Harroff. Editing by Michael Watanabe.

Law360's Rising Stars are attorneys under 40 whose legal accomplishments belie their age. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2024 Rising Stars winners after reviewing nearly 1,200 submissions. Attorneys had to be under 40 as of April 30, 2024, to be eligible for this year's award. This interview has been edited and condensed.

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