



Department of Justice

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TWO CALIFORNIA MEN CONVICTED OF CONSPIRING TO JOIN ISIL

WASHINGTON – A federal jury today convicted two Orange County, California, men – one of whom attempted to travel to the Middle East to join the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a designated foreign terrorist organization – of conspiring to provide material support to ISIL.

The verdict was announced by Assistant Attorney General for National Security John P. Carlin, U.S. Attorney Eileen M. Decker of the Central District of California and Assistant Director in Charge Deirdre Fike of the FBI's Los Angeles Field Office.

Nader Elhuzayel, 25, and Muhanad Badawi, 25, both of Anaheim, California, were convicted today in U.S. District Court for the Central District of California following a two-week trial. Elhuzayel was found guilty of attempting to provide material support and Badawi was found guilty of aiding and abetting the attempt to provide material support to ISIL.

“Foreign terrorist fighters have traveled from countries around the world to join ISIL and are responsible for some of the most despicable acts of violence committed by the terrorist organization,” said Assistant Attorney General Carlin. “ISIL depends on these travelers as a significant part of its fighting force. Stopping Americans from engaging in terrorist activity on behalf of ISIL here or abroad will remain one of the highest priorities of the National Security Division.”

“These two defendants betrayed their country and sought to join ISIL, a terrorist organization dedicated to brutally murdering innocent people,” said U.S. Attorney Decker. “The FBI and the Orange County Joint Terrorism Task Force did outstanding work in investigating and apprehending these men before their plans could be completed. The fine work of law enforcement undoubtedly saved lives, both in the United States and abroad.”

“These convictions are a message to those who aim to travel to take up arms with ISIL and to those who support them – the FBI and our partners are determined to thwart your efforts,” said Assistant Director in Charge Fike. “The JTTF’s proactive identification of these subjects and disruption of a terrorist conspiracy is a coup in the fight against the scourge of ISIL. At trial, the jury heard evidence that Mr. Badawi also encouraged other associates to support ISIL and participate in violent jihad. This is a reminder that our work is not done and the public must remain steadfast and report suspicious behavior, whether that behavior is carried out in person or online.”

In addition to the terrorism-related counts, Elhuzayel was found guilty of 26 counts of bank fraud and Badawi was found guilty of one count of federal financial aid fraud.

Both men were arrested on May 21, 2015, when Elhuzayel attempted to board a plane at Los Angeles International Airport to travel to Turkey to join ISIL. Badawi had purchased for Elhuzayel a one-way ticket to Israel with a layover in Istanbul.

Badawi and Elhuzayel used social media to discuss ISIL and terrorist attacks, expressed a desire to die as martyrs and made arrangements for Elhuzayel to leave the United States to join ISIL. In recorded conversations, Badawi and Elhuzayel discussed “how it would be a blessing to fight for the cause of Allah, and to die in the battlefield.”

The evidence at trial also showed that Badawi had a Facebook account, on which he made posts that supported ISIL and violence aimed at non-Muslims, and he said he intended to join the terrorist organization. Elhuzayel also had a Facebook account and used the ISIL flag as his profile picture. According to court documents, on Oct. 21, 2014, Badawi made a video of Elhuzayel in which Elhuzayel swore allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of ISIL, and pledged to travel to Syria to be an ISIL fighter.

Elhuzayel was convicted of obtaining cash through a scheme to defraud three different banks by depositing stolen checks into his personal checking accounts and then withdrawing cash at branch offices and ATMs in Orange County. The money generated from the bank fraud was to finance his travel to Syria to join ISIL.

Badawi was convicted of using his federal financial aid to purchase a plane ticket for Elhuzayel to travel to Turkey.

U.S. District Judge David O. Carter of the Central District of California scheduled Elhuzayel’s sentencing hearing for Sept. 19, 2016, and Badawi’s sentencing hearing for Sept. 26, 2016.

At the time of sentencing, Elhuzayel will face a statutory maximum sentence of 30 years in prison on each bank fraud count, Badawi faces a statutory maximum sentence of five years in prison on the financial aid fraud count and both men each face a statutory maximum sentence of 15 years in prison on each material support count.

Both men have been held in federal custody without bond since their arrests.

The investigation in this case was conducted by the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force in Orange County, which includes the following agencies: the Anaheim Police Department; the California Highway Patrol; the Orange County Sheriff's Department; the Orange County Intelligence Assessment Center; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations; the U.S. Secret Service; IRS-Criminal Investigation; the City of Orange, California, Police Department; the Irvine, California, Police Department; the Naval Criminal Investigative Service; and the Orange County Regional Computer Forensics Laboratory. The Department of Education's Office of Inspector General provided substantial assistance in the investigation.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Judith A. Heinz, Deirdre Z. Eliot and Julius J. Nam of the Central District of California, with assistance from Trial Attorney Michael Dittoe of the National Security Division's Counterterrorism Section.

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