



THE UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**NEW YORK MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO ATTEMPTING TO
PROVIDE MATERIAL SUPPORT TO ISIS AND PASSPORT
FRAUD**

WASHINGTON – Sajmir Alimehmeti, aka, Abdul Qawii, 24, of the Bronx, New York, pleaded guilty today to attempting to provide material support to the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), a designated foreign terrorist organization, and to committing passport fraud in order to facilitate an act of international terrorism. Alimehmeti pleaded guilty today to a Superseding Indictment in Manhattan federal court before U.S. District Judge Paul A. Engelmayer.

Acting Assistant Attorney General for National Security Edward C. O’Callaghan and U.S. Attorney Geoffrey S. Berman for the Southern District of New York made the announcement.

According to the allegations in the Superseding Indictment and the Complaint filed in this case, statements made during the plea proceeding, and other documents filed in the public record:

In October 2014, Alimehmeti attempted to enter the United Kingdom but was denied entry after U.K. authorities found camouflage clothing and nunchucks in his luggage. About two months later, in December 2014, Alimehmeti was again denied entry into the United Kingdom, this time after U.K. authorities found that his cellphone contained images of ISIS flags. Further forensic examination of the contents of the cellphone and Alimehmeti’s laptop computer showed numerous indicia of Alimehmeti’s support for ISIS, including a photograph of Alimehmeti with an ISIS flag in the background, images of ISIS fighters in the Middle East, a photograph of Alimehmeti making a gesture of support for ISIS, various files relating to jihad and martyrdom, and electronic communications in which Alimehmeti assisted another ISIS supporter in efforts to travel to Syria to join ISIS by providing contact information for an ISIS affiliate who could facilitate the travel.

After returning to the United States, Alimehmeti continued to support ISIS. Among other things, Alimehmeti displayed an ISIS flag in his apartment in the Bronx and, in the course of recorded meetings with undercover law enforcement employees, Alimehmeti played multiple pro-ISIS propaganda videos on his computer and cellphone, including videos of ISIS fighters decapitating prisoners, and also indicated that he was interested in radicalizing other individuals in the Bronx

area. Alimehmeti also made repeated purchases of combat knives and other military-type equipment, including masks, handcuffs, a pocket chainsaw, a wire pocket saw and a rucksack designed for tactical combat, which he stockpiled at his apartment in the Bronx.

In October 2015, Alimehmeti applied for a U.S. passport, falsely claiming in the application that his previous passport had been lost. Alimehmeti later told an undercover law enforcement employee that his prior passport – which Alimehmeti showed to the undercover law enforcement officer – had not been lost and, instead, that he was applying for a new passport because he believed the rejection stamps in his existing passport resulting from his attempted entries into the United Kingdom would make it difficult to travel. Alimehmeti further conveyed to undercover law enforcement personnel that he was seeking the new passport, without rejection stamps, to facilitate his travel overseas to join and fight for ISIS.

In May 2016, Alimehmeti attempted to assist an individual who was purportedly traveling from New York to Syria to train and fight with ISIS but who was actually an undercover law enforcement employee (UC). On May 17, 2016, Alimehmeti met with the UC in Manhattan. The UC had purportedly arrived in New York earlier that day on a bus and was en route to John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK Airport) to take an overseas flight later that night.

Alimehmeti agreed to help the UC with several tasks prior to the UC's purported travel. Alimehmeti assisted the UC by locating stores so the UC could purchase supplies to use while traveling to, and fighting with, ISIS, including a cellphone, boots, a compass, a bag, and a flashlight, among other items. Alimehmeti also gave the UC advice on which items to purchase and on the use of different kinds of encrypted communications services, including the service that Alimehmeti stated was currently being used by fellow ISIS supporters, whom Alimehmeti referred to as "the brothers." Alimehmeti also downloaded three encrypted communications applications on the UC's newly purchased cellphone for use by the UC.

Further, Alimehmeti assisted the UC in traveling from Manhattan to a hotel in Queens, so the UC could purportedly meet with an individual who was preparing travel documents that the UC would use to travel to Syria to join ISIS. Alimehmeti gave the UC a piece of paper with his name and contact information, so the UC could provide that information to the purported document facilitator. Alimehmeti explained that he also wanted to travel to Syria and join ISIS, stating "I'm ready to . . . go with you man . . . you know I would. I'm done with this place." After leaving the hotel in Queens, Alimehmeti brought the UC to JFK Airport, via public transportation, so the UC could begin the purported journey to ISIS. Within days of seeking to facilitate the UC's travel to join ISIS, Alimehmeti indicated during a call to his brother in Albania that that he had learned of a new way to obtain a passport for his own travel (referring to the UC's purported document facilitator), and that a "friend of mine" (referring to the UC) had "just [done] it two days ago."

Following Alimehmeti's arrest on the charges in this case in May 2016, the FBI executed a search of Alimehmeti's Bronx apartment pursuant to a judicially authorized search warrant. The FBI's search of Alimehmeti's apartment resulted in the seizure of, among other evidence, the following: (i) a laptop computer and a cellphone belonging to Alimehmeti that contain an array of materials further demonstrating his allegiance to ISIS and terrorist ideology, including images of the ISIS flag, photographs of Alimehmeti with an ISIS flag and making gestures supportive of ISIS, images of ISIS fighters overseas, and propaganda videos promoting and glorifying ISIS, including videos depicting ISIS fighters engaging in combat and beheading prisoners; (ii) a collection of combat knives and other military-type equipment that Alimehmeti had purchased and stored at his apartment, as discussed above; and (iii) an ISIS flag that was displayed on a wall in the apartment.

Alimehmeti faces a maximum sentenced of 20 years in prison for attempting to provide material support or resources to a designated foreign terrorist organization, and a maximum sentence of 25 years in prison for making a false statement in an application for a U.S. passport with the intent to induce the issuance of a passport to facilitate an act of international terrorism. The maximum potential sentences are prescribed by Congress and are provided here for informational purposes only, as any sentencing of the defendant will be determined by a judge. Sentencing is scheduled for June 7, before Judge Engelmayer.

Mr. O'Callaghan and Mr. Berman praised the outstanding efforts of the FBI's New York Joint Terrorism Task Force, which principally consists of agents from the FBI and detectives from the NYPD, and the NYPD's Intelligence Division. Substantial assistance was also provided by the Department of Justice's Office of International Affairs, the Albania State Police, and the Metropolitan Police Service's Counter Terrorism Command of London, United Kingdom.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Emil J. Bove III, George D. Turner and Brendan F. Quigley of the Southern District of New York are in charge of the prosecution, with assistance from Trial Attorneys Joseph Attias and Kiersten Korczynski of the National Security Division's Counterterrorism Section.

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