

 An official website of the United States government [Here's how you know](#)

JUSTICE NEWS

Department of Justice

Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, November 9, 2022

Man Sentenced to More Than 17 Years in Prison for Attempting to Provide Material Support to ISIS

Defendant Plotted a Terrorist Attack Targeting a Pittsburgh Church

A Pennsylvania man was sentenced yesterday to 208 months, more than 17 years, in federal prison, followed by a lifetime of supervised release, for attempting to provide material support to the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, aka ISIS, a designated foreign terrorist organization.

Mustafa Mousab Alowemer, 24, of Pittsburgh, pleaded guilty in the Western District of Pennsylvania on Sept. 16, 2021 to one count of attempting to provide material support to ISIS in connection with his plan to attack a church in Pittsburgh.

“Alowemer admitted to planning a deadly bombing of a Pittsburgh church in the name of ISIS,” said Assistant Attorney General Matthew G. Olsen of the Justice Department’s National Security Division. “The National Security Division was created to protect the nation from terrorist threats and we remain vigilant against those who would plot violent attacks on U.S. soil in furtherance of an extreme ideology.”

“The defendant’s plan to bomb a Pittsburgh church and risk death or injury to residents in the area in the name of ISIS was thwarted by the extraordinary work of the Pittsburgh Joint Terrorism Task Force,” said U.S. Attorney Cindy K. Chung for the Western District of Pennsylvania. “Our office will continue to hold accountable individuals who threaten the safety of our communities.”

“I want to commend the great work of our Joint Terrorism Task Force, and that of their partners and sources, in successfully thwarting a planned terrorist attack in the name of ISIS,” said Assistant Director Robert R. Wells of the FBI’s Counterterrorism Division. “Alowemer’s plan to conduct an attack at a church in Pittsburgh and inspire other ISIS supporters in the United States was unsuccessful thanks to the efforts of law enforcement officials at both the federal and state level. This sentencing demonstrates the commitment we share with our partners to pursuing justice against those who violate our laws and seek to harm innocents in our communities.”

According to court documents, Alowemer plotted to bomb a church located on the north side of Pittsburgh using an explosive device. His stated motivation to conduct such an attack was to support the cause of ISIS and to inspire other ISIS supporters in the United States to join together and commit similar acts in the name of ISIS. Alowemer also targeted the church, which he described as a “Nigerian Christian” church, to “take revenge for our [ISIS] brothers in Nigeria.” Alowemer was aware that numerous people in the proximity of the church could be killed by the

explosion.

In furtherance of the plot to bomb the church, in May 2019, Alowemer distributed multiple instructional documents related to the construction and use of explosives and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) to an individual Alowemer believed to be a fellow ISIS supporter, but who was in fact an FBI employee. Alowemer distributed these documents with the intent that the information be used in the assembly of a destructive device and in furtherance of conducting an attack in support of ISIS. In or around June 2019, Alowemer purchased several items, including nails and acetone (nail polish remover), with the belief that they were necessary to assemble a destructive device and with the intention they be used to construct the explosives that would be detonated in the vicinity of the church.

Between April 16 and June 11, Alowemer met four times in person with an FBI Undercover Employee (UCE) and/or an FBI Confidential Human Source (CHS). At the June 11 meeting with the UCE and CHS, Alowemer provided additional details about the bomb plot and provided the materials, including boxes of nails, he had purchased for construction of the device. Alowemer provided printed copies of detailed Google satellite maps, which included hand-written markings identifying the church and routes of arrival and escape. Alowemer also wrote and provided a 10-point handwritten plan outlining details related to his plot to personally deliver explosives in a backpack. Alowemer expressed a desire to meet one more time to conduct planning and coordination prior to carrying out the attempted bombing in July 2019. That meeting was later scheduled for June 19 in the Pittsburgh area, at which time Alowemer was arrested.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Soo C. Song for the Western District of Pennsylvania and Trial Attorneys Brenda Sue Thornton and S. Elisa Poteat of the National Security Division's Counterterrorism Section are prosecuting this case on behalf of the government.

The FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force members who were directly involved in this investigation include: FBI, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS), Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), IRS – Criminal Investigation, U.S. Secret Service, U.S. Postal Inspection Service, Pennsylvania State Police, Allegheny County Police Department, Pittsburgh Bureau of Police, Allegheny County Port Authority Police, Allegheny County Probation, University of Pittsburgh Police Department and UPMC Police Security.

Topic(s):

Counterterrorism
National Security

Component(s):

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
National Security Division (NSD)
USAO - Pennsylvania, Western

Press Release Number:

22-1203

Updated November 9, 2022