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American Citizen Convicted of Providing Material Support to ISIS that Resulted in Death and Related Offenses

Defendant Became a Sniper and Weapons Instructor for the Foreign Terrorist Organization, and Fought in Multiple Battles in Syria

A federal jury yesterday convicted Ruslan Maratovich Asainov, 46, a U.S. citizen and former resident of Bay Ridge, New York, of all five counts of an indictment charging him with conspiracy to provide material support to ISIS; providing material support to ISIS in the form of personnel, training, expert advice and assistance; receipt of military-type training from ISIS; and obstruction of justice. The jury also found that the defendant's provision of material support to ISIS resulted in the death of one or more persons. The verdict followed a two-week trial before U.S. District Judge Nicholas G. Garaufis.

"Mr. Asainov, a US citizen, traveled abroad to kill and train others to kill on behalf of ISIS. Now, he is being held accountable," said Assistant Attorney General for National Security Matthew G. Olsen. "Part of the National Security Division's core mission is to protect Americans from terrorist organizations who would do them harm and we will bring to justice all those who would try."

"As proven at trial, Asainov was a member of ISIS who was so committed to the terrorist organization's evil cause that he abandoned his young family here in Brooklyn, New York, to make an extraordinary journey to the battlefield in Syria where he became a lethal sniper and trained many others to kill their adversaries, and even after being captured still pledged his allegiance to ISIS' murderous path," said U.S. Attorney Breon Peace for the Eastern District of New York. "There is no place in a civilized world for the defendant's bloody campaign of death and destruction. Today's verdict in an American courtroom is a victory for our system of justice, and against ISIS and those like the defendant who are committed to murdering innocent people here in the United States and abroad."

"The defendant in this case fought for ISIS and also trained many others how to kill for that terrorist organization," said Assistant Director Robert R. Wells of the FBI's Counterterrorism Division. "This verdict demonstrates the FBI and our partners will use all of our legally available tools to hold accountable anyone who assists ISIS or other terrorist groups."

As proven at trial, between December 2013 and March 2019, Asainov provided and conspired to provide material support and resources in the form of personnel, including himself and others, training, and expert advice and assistance, to a foreign terrorist organization, namely ISIS, knowing that ISIS was a designated foreign terrorist organization that had engaged in terrorist activity and terrorism. Asainov also received military-type training from ISIS, in violation of federal law.

Asainov converted to Islam in 2009 and subsequently became increasingly interested in Islamic extremism. By the fall of 2013, he was consuming radical Islamic content online. He abruptly dropped out of classes at the Borough of Manhattan Community College in September 2013 and began making preparations to travel to Syria to wage violent jihad.

On Dec. 24, 2013, Asainov abandoned his wife and daughter in Brooklyn, and traveled on a one-way ticket from New York to Istanbul, Turkey, to obtain entry into Syria.

Over the course of approximately five years fighting on behalf of ISIS, Asainov fought in numerous battles against ISIS enemies, including engagements at Kobani; Tabqa; Raqqa; Dayr Az Zawr; up to and including ISIS's last stand in Syria at Baghouz in March 2019. Asainov received training in how to use automatic rifles, machine guns and rocket propelled grenades. In Tabqa, in mid-2014, he volunteered to train as a sniper. Over time, Asainov became a sniper trainer or "emir" on behalf of ISIS, estimating that he taught nearly 100 students. A former U.S. Navy SEAL scout sniper testified that the defendant's self-described sniper training course was consistent with what the former SEAL would expect to be taught in a sniper training program.

From Syria, the defendant attempted to recruit another individual to travel from the United States to Syria to fight for ISIS, and sought to obtain funds to purchase a scope for his rifle from the same person. The defendant also told his estranged spouse that he was fighting on behalf of ISIS, described by him in a recorded January 2015 voicemail as "the most atrocious terrorist organization in the world that ever existed." Asainov's wife testified that he sent her a photograph of three dead fighters, one of whom was wearing a patch that stated "Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham," i.e., ISIS, in Arabic script.

Asainov was captured in Syria after ISIS's last stand at Baghouz, near the Syria-Iraq border. Just before his capture, Asainov discarded his rifle and destroyed his cell phone.

Asainov admitted to agents from the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force that he had fought in numerous battles on behalf of ISIS as a warrior and sniper, serving in several different *katibas* or ISIS fighting brigades. In recorded phone calls to his mother from facilities operated by the Bureau of Prisons (BOP), the defendant told her that he was carrying out Allah's orders when he waged jihad and killed for ISIS, that he intended to return to waging jihad if released and that he would fight until he "meet[s] Allah," i.e., until his death. In September 2020, staff at a BOP facility confiscated a makeshift ISIS flag affixed to Asainov's cell wall. The defendant had filled in an 8.5" x 11" sheet of paper with black ink and Arabic writing in the design of the ISIS flag.

When sentenced, Asainov faces up to life in prison. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

The Justice Department's Office of International Affairs, the FBI's Legal Attachés abroad and foreign authorities in multiple countries on multiple continents provided critical assistance in this case. The Bosnian and Herzegovinian authorities, and the FBI Legal Attaché Office in Sarajevo provided extraordinary assistance in the investigation and prosecution. The Ministry of Justice for the Republic of Finland, the Stuttgart Police Department and Federal Office of Justice in the Federal Republic of Germany, the Department of Justice & Constitutional Development in the Republic of South Africa, and the Prosecutor General's Office in Ukraine, and the FBI's Legal Attaché Offices in or responsible for those countries provided valuable assistance in the investigation.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Douglas M. Pravda, Saritha Komatireddy, J. Matthew Haggans, Nicholas J. Moscow and Nina C. Gupta for the Eastern District of New York are prosecuting the case, with assistance provided by Trial Attorney Jennifer Levy of the National Security Division's Counterterrorism Section and Paralegal Specialists Mary Clare McMahon and Wayne Colon.

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