

New Jersey Man Charged with Conspiracy to Provide Material Support to ISIL and Witness Tampering

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WASHINGTON—A Hudson County, New Jersey, man was arrested today on charges of conspiring to provide material support to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a designated foreign terrorist organization, and aiding and abetting an attempt to do so, announced Assistant Attorney General for National Security John P. Carlin, U.S. Attorney Paul J. Fishman of the District of New Jersey and Special Agent in Charge Richard M. Frankel of the FBI's Newark, New Jersey, Division.

Alaa Saadeh, 23, of West New York, New Jersey, was arrested early this morning at his home. He is charged in a complaint with conspiring with other individuals in New Jersey and New York to provide services and personnel to ISIL, aiding and abetting an attempt to provide services and personnel to ISIL and attempting to persuade a witness to lie to the FBI. The defendant is scheduled to make his initial appearance at 2:30 p.m. today before U.S. Magistrate Judge Cathy L. Waldor of the District of New Jersey.

According to documents filed in this case:

The FBI and the Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) have been investigating a group of individuals from New York and New Jersey who have allegedly conspired to provide material support to ISIL. Co-Conspirator 1 (CC-1) is Saadeh's brother and was a resident of Rutherford, New Jersey, until departing the United States on May 5, 2015, allegedly to join ISIL. Co-Conspirator 2 (CC-2) was a resident of Queens, New York, until he was arrested on June 13, 2015, in New York on terrorism charges. Samuel Rahamin Topaz was a resident of Fort Lee, New Jersey, until he was arrested on June 17, 2015, in New Jersey and charged with conspiring to provide services and personnel to ISIL.

On May 5, 2015, CC-1 attempted to travel from New Jersey to the Middle East, via John F. Kennedy International Airport, allegedly in order to join ISIL. CC-1 was accompanied to JFK by Saadeh and CC-2. On the way to the airport, CC-1 stated that he, Saadeh, CC-2 and Topaz had plans to reunite overseas within a few weeks.

After CC-1's departure, and despite learning from CC-1's family that he had been arrested in Jordan on suspicion of supporting ISIL, Saadeh, CC-2 and Topaz continued to discuss their plan to travel overseas to join ISIL. Electronic communications later recovered from Topaz's phone corroborated their plans. On May 21, 2015, Saadeh and Topaz discussed that they needed to "lay low" and refrain from taking action in furtherance of the conspiracy to provide material support to ISIL that might be detected by law enforcement. Saadeh and Topaz also discussed needing to meet in person to discuss "hijra." Topaz later told members of the JTTF that he and his conspirators used the term "hijra" (often spelled "hijrah") to refer to traveling overseas to join ISIL. The next day, Saadeh told another individual that he suspected that CC-2 or Topaz had "snitched" on CC-1 and caused his arrest overseas, and that, if true, Saadeh thought he would have to "kill someone."

In recorded conversations with an informant, Saadeh revealed his support for ISIL, including the terrorist organization's use of beheadings and mass killings to impose its violent agenda. Saadeh also stated that he planned to travel overseas with CC-2 "at some point." Saadeh further stated that he knew CC-1 planned to travel to join ISIL before CC-1 departed the United States, and that he bought CC-1's airline ticket despite knowing this. The investigation revealed that Saadeh provided CC-1 transportation and removed a SIM card from CC-1's phone in an apparent effort to hide incriminating communications and other data.

In June, after becoming aware that he was under FBI surveillance, Saadeh directed an individual in New Jersey not to tell the FBI about CC-1's support for ISIL or CC-1's plans to travel to Syria and Iraq to join ISIL. Saadeh instructed the individual to "play dumb" and be "honest up to a point," but to be sure not to tell the FBI anything about ISIL.

Each count in the complaint carries a maximum potential penalty of 20 years in prison and a fine of \$250,000.

The case is being investigated by the FBI and JTTF. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys L. Judson Welle, Dennis C. Carletta and Francisco J. Navarro of the District of New Jersey, with the assistance of Trial Attorney Robert Sander of the National Security Division's Counterterrorism Section.

The charge and allegations contained in the complaint are merely accusations, and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.