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Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Eastern District of New York

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Tuesday, July 24, 2018

Queens Man Pleads Guilty to Attempting to Provide Material Support to ISIS

Defendant Repeatedly Attempted to Travel to the Middle East to Join Terrorist Group and Sent Money Overseas to Fund Another Foreign Fighter's Travel to Join Terrorist Group

Earlier today, Ali Saleh, a U.S. citizen, pleaded guilty at the federal courthouse in Brooklyn to two counts of attempting to provide material support to the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). The proceeding took place before United States District Judge William F. Kuntz, II. When sentenced, Saleh faces up to 35 years' imprisonment.

Richard P. Donoghue, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, John C. Demers, Assistant Attorney General for National Security, William F. Sweeney, Jr., Assistant Director-in-Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation, New York Field Office (FBI), and James P. O'Neill, Commissioner, New York City Police Department (NYPD), announced the guilty plea.

"Ali Saleh attempted to travel to the Middle East to become an ISIS fighter, funded other foreign fighters, posted instructions to make explosive devices and transported explosive materials," stated United States Attorney Donoghue. "The defendant's persistent efforts to aid ISIS were defeated by the outstanding work of law enforcement officers who stopped him before he could do harm. This Office will continue to work closely with the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force in New York to keep our city safe from terrorists and prevent extremists from travelling abroad to join foreign terrorist organizations."

"Saleh was undeterred in his many attempts to travel to join ISIS, and although he failed in these efforts, he turned his attention to assisting others online to join ISIS's murderous mission in Syria," said Assistant Attorney General Demers. "I am grateful to our partners in federal law enforcement and the prosecutors who were able to apprehend and charge Saleh before he could do more damage or harm innocent Americans."

“Ali Saleh was persistent in his efforts to become a foreign fighter, but his persistence did not exceed the diligence of law enforcement,” stated FBI Assistant Director-in-Charge Sweeney. “The defendant went to great lengths to attempt to travel to the Middle East, while funding other foreign fighters in the process. As the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Force continuously strives to protect citizens from potential terrorist threats, today’s plea depicts one of the many efforts to achieve this goal.”

“New Yorkers continue to benefit from the NYPD’s robust counterterrorism capabilities and strong working relationships with our law enforcement partners on the Joint Terrorism Task Force,” stated NYPD Commissioner O’Neill. “Today’s guilty plea shows that in collaboration with the FBI and the Eastern District of New York, our skilled investigators and analysts will stop at nothing to further the critical mission of defending society from acts of terrorism wherever and however, they are being planned.”

According to court filings, Saleh was arrested after repeatedly attempting to travel to the Middle East to become a foreign fighter for ISIS. In 2013 and thereafter, Saleh became interested in the conflict in Syria, swore an oath of allegiance to ISIS and decided to travel to the Middle East in support of ISIS. On August 25, 2014, Saleh stated online, “I’m ready to die for the Caliphate, prison is nothing.” On August 28, 2014, Saleh stated online, “Lets be clear the Muslims in the khilafah [caliphate] need help, the one who is capable to go over and help the Muslims must go and help.” That same day, Saleh made an airline reservation to travel from New York to Turkey, a country bordering Syria. The defendant was ultimately prevented from traveling because his parents took away his passport.

Saleh then redirected his efforts to facilitating others’ support of ISIS. In October 2014, the defendant communicated with an ISIS supporter in Mali through an online messaging platform and sent a wire transfer in the amount of \$500 to fund that person’s travel to Syria. Around the same time period, the defendant communicated with several other individuals in an effort to facilitate their support of ISIS, including known ISIS supporters in the United Kingdom and Australia.

In July 2015, the defendant purchased fireworks containing explosive powder, hid them in a concealed compartment in the trunk of his car, and drove from Indiana towards New York City. The fireworks contained approximately 1,196 grams of low explosive powder, consisting of both pyrotechnic material and black powder. Law enforcement agents located a cellphone belonging to Saleh during the time frame when he acquired the explosive powder and discovered on the phone an electronic pamphlet titled, “Muslim Gangs: The Future of Muslims in the West (Ebook 1: How to Survive in the West).” The pamphlet provided detailed instructions regarding how to create a bomb using explosive powder from fireworks. Saleh posted online the pamphlet’s image of a soda can hand grenade with instructions on how to build an improvised explosive device. When Saleh’s car broke down on the way to New York City, he abandoned it.

Subsequently, on July 24, 2015, the defendant made a reservation to travel from New York to Egypt, a country bordering Libya, and went to JFK International Airport. The defendant was ultimately denied boarding. The defendant subsequently visited three additional international airports in Newark, Philadelphia and Indianapolis, but continued to encounter travel restrictions.

The defendant attempted to circumvent air travel restrictions by taking a train from Cleveland to Canada and flying to the Middle East. After law enforcement intervention, however, the defendant did not board the train and instead returned to New York.

After his encounters with law enforcement, Saleh changed his online social media moniker and expressed his support for ISIS under new usernames. On August 24, 2015, the defendant stated online, "I am a terrorist." On September 1, 2015, the defendant stated online, "If they aren't implementing shariah [Islamic law] grab ur gun and implement shariah and see how fast the world turns against u." That same day, the defendant also stated online, "Akhi [brother] if implementing sharia [Islamic law] is easy do it in ur neighborhood and defend it from kuffar [the infidels] and give bayah [an oath of allegiance] to IS."

The government's case is being handled by the Office's National Security & Cybercrime Section. Assistant United States Attorneys Saritha Komatireddy, Margaret E. Lee and Alexander F. Mindlin are in charge of the prosecution, with assistance provided by Trial Attorneys Lolita Lukose and Jacqueline Barkett of the Justice Department's Counterterrorism Section.

The Defendant:

ALI SALEH
Age: 25
Queens, New York

E.D.N.Y. Docket No. 15-CR-517