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Federal Jury Convicts New Jersey Man of Terrorism Offenses Relating to His Attempted Murder of Salman Rushdie

WASHINGTON — A federal jury has convicted Hadi Matar, 28, of Fairview, New Jersey, of attempting to provide material support to Hizballah, a designated foreign terrorist organization, engaging in an act of terrorism transcending national boundaries, and providing material support to terrorists.

“Matar spent more than a year immersing himself in Hizballah’s violent ideology and preparing to act on a fatwa issued by Iran’s Ayatollahs calling for Mr. Rushdie’s murder,” said Assistant Attorney General for National Security John A. Eisenberg. “His brutal attack on Mr. Rushdie during a peaceful speaking event is a chilling reminder of the global reach of Iranian terrorism. With today’s verdict, justice has been done, and Matar will pay for his crimes.”

“Hadi Matar, who was born and raised in the United States, chose to align his values with the terroristic values of the leaders of Iran, which often promote violence, and in this case, the call for murder,” said U.S. Attorney Michael DiGiacomo for the Western District of New York. “The defendant spent months planning and preparing to carry out what he hoped would be the execution of Salman Rushdie and possibly follow in the footsteps of martyrs he admired. Instead, his attempted act of terror failed, and Salman Rushdie survived, thanks to courageous members of the public and law enforcement, who saved Rushdie and captured Matar.”

“This was not an impulsive act; Matar conducted a violent attack in support of a designated foreign terrorist organization and wanted to carry out a fatwa against the victim,” said Assistant Director Jarod Brown of the FBI’s Counterterrorism Division. “With today’s verdict, this assailant will pay the price of engaging in terrorism. The FBI and our partners are committed to bringing terrorists and all who support them to justice.”

On Aug. 12, 2022, Matar attempted to murder author Salman Rushdie in an effort to carry out a fatwa calling for Rushdie's execution because of a novel published by Rushdie in 1988. That fatwa was issued in 1989 by the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ruhollah Khomeini; reaffirmed in 2017 by the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei; and endorsed in a 2006 speech by Hizballah's Secretary General, Hassan Nasrallah.

According to evidence presented by the government, Matar spent over a year researching the fatwa, including its continuing validity, before deciding to carry it out while Rushdie spoke at the Chautauqua Institution in Mayville, NY. Prior to the attack, Matar discussed the fatwa — and Hizballah's endorsement of the fatwa — with individuals located in Iran, Australia, and Canada. He also created videos about the fatwa, with titles such as "Rushdie_Fatwa 2.0" and "Rushdie_Fatwa 1.6," which combined videos about the fatwa with video of Hassan Nasrallah endorsing the fatwa in 2006.

Matar surrounded himself with symbols of Hizballah martyrs before the attack. He traveled to the Chautauqua Institution using the name "Hassan Mughniyeh," and carried a false driver's license bearing the same name. Matar's false name contained the first name of Hassan Nasrallah, Hizballah's Secretary General, and the last name of Imad Mughniyeh, the former head of Hizballah's External Security Organization, who was responsible for planning a number of Hizballah's terrorist attacks. On the morning of the attack, Matar visited a website run by Hizballah and took screenshots of Hizballah martyrs who had died in the month of August.

Matar faces a maximum penalty of life in prison when sentenced on Nov. 3 before U.S. District Judge Richard J. Arcara, who presided over the trial.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Timothy C. Lynch and Charles M. Kruly for the Western District of New York and Trial Attorney Jennifer Burke of the National Security Division's Counterterrorism Section prosecuted the case. The case was investigated by the Buffalo Office of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent-in-Charge Allen D. Davis, II, and the New York State Police, under the direction of Major Amie Feroletto. Additional assistance was provided by the Newark, NJ, office of the FBI and the Bergen County Prosecutor's Office.

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