



Department of Justice

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MISSOURI MAN CHARGED WITH ATTEMPTING TO PROVIDE MATERIAL SUPPORT TO ISIS

WASHINGTON – Robert Lorenzo Hester, Jr., 25, of Jefferson City, Missouri, was charged in a criminal complaint with attempting to provide material support to the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), a designated foreign terrorist organization. Hester was charged in federal court based on his role in making preparations to launch a terrorist attack with persons he believed were associated with ISIS, who were actually undercover law enforcement personnel.

The announcement was made by Acting Assistant Attorney General for National Security Mary B. McCord, U.S. Attorney Tammy Dickinson for the Western District of Missouri and Special Agent in Charge Eric Jackson of the FBI’s Kansas City Field Office.

“As alleged in the complaint, Robert Lorenzo Hester, Jr. attempted to provide material support to ISIS by participating in what he believed would be a deadly attack committed in the name of the foreign terrorist organization,” said Acting Assistant Attorney General McCord. “Countering terrorist threats remains the highest priority of the National Security Division, and we will continue our efforts to identify and hold accountable those who seek to commit acts of terrorism within our borders.”

“First on social media, then during face-to-face meetings with an undercover FBI employee, this defendant repeatedly expressed his intent to engage in acts of violent jihad against the United States,” said U.S. Attorney Dickson. “He believed he was part of an ISIS-sponsored terrorist attack that would result in the deaths and injuries of many innocent victims. He readily participated in the preparations for an attack, provided materials and resources for an attack and voiced his intent to carry out an attack. I commend the FBI for protecting the public from a security threat.”

“Terrorism knows no demographic boundaries and remains the FBI’s top priority,” said Special Agent in Charge Jackson. “The arrest of Hester is the culmination of an extensive FBI investigation and demonstrates the challenges law enforcement faces in identifying individuals intent on causing harm.”

Hester, who remains in federal custody, was arrested on February 17, when he arrived at an arranged meeting with an undercover law enforcement employee. The criminal complaint was signed on Sunday and made public today, when Hester made his initial court appearance.

According to an affidavit filed in support of the criminal complaint, throughout the investigation, Hester expressed his interest in and exhibited his willingness to commit violence in support of ISIS – and he attempted to provide material support to ISIS by assisting in what he believed would be a murderous terrorist bombing and gunfire attack committed in the name of the foreign terrorist organization.

Hester is a U.S. citizen who was born in Missouri. He was enlisted in the U.S. Army for less than a year, receiving a general discharge from service in mid-2013.

FBI agents undertook a review of Hester’s publicly available posts on multiple social media accounts in September 2016. On Oct. 3, 2016, Hester was arrested by the Columbia, Missouri, Police Department in an unrelated case and remained in state custody until he was released on bond on Oct. 13, 2016. His bond conditions included electronic monitoring. While Hester was being monitored, FBI undercover employees maintained regular contact with him via an encrypted messaging app and text messages, and met with him on several occasions.

On January 24, Hester pleaded guilty in state court to property damage and unlawful use of a weapon and was released on his own recognizance. Hester was no longer on electronic monitoring after that date. FBI undercover personnel continued to meet in person with Hester and communicate with him electronically.

Hester agreed to meet again with an FBI undercover employee on February 17. When Hester arrived for that meeting, he was arrested. Hester was the sole subject of this undercover investigation.

Undercover Investigation

According to the affidavit, the investigation began when the FBI became aware (through multiple confidential sources) of Hester’s social media posts, in which he expressed animus towards the U.S. and suggested an adherence to radical Islamic ideology and a propensity for violence. Hester used several online aliases, including “Mohammed Junaid Al Amreeki,” “Junaid Muhammad,” “Rabbani Junaid Muhammad,” “Rami Talib” and “Ali Talib Muhammad.”

On Oct. 3, 2016, Hester was arrested by Columbia police officers after an incident in the parking lot of a grocery store. Hester, who appeared to be in an argument with his wife, threw a folded pocket knife through a plate-glass window near the entrance of the store. When store employees confronted Hester, he assumed an aggressive stance and forcefully placed his hand into the diaper bag he was carrying in a manner that appeared to be reaching for a weapon. Police officers later recovered a 9mm handgun from the diaper bag. Hester was in custody until Oct. 13, 2016, when he was released on bond and placed on electronic monitoring.

On Oct. 15, 2016, two days after Hester’s release on bond, an FBI employee using an undercover identity contacted Hester by private message. The FBI employee had accepted a friend request from Hester the day before Hester was arrested for the grocery store incident. They continued to communicate via social media, text and an encrypted messaging app, the affidavit says, during which Hester presented himself as a security threat, stating, for example,

that the U.S. government should be “overthrown,” and suggesting “hitting” the government “hard,” while noting that it would not be “a one man job.” Hester identified categories of potential targets for attack and said he wanted a “global jihad.” Hester stated that he was trying to find like-minded people to help. When the undercover employee mentioned “brothers,” Hester said he wanted to meet them.

Hester then established that he would act on the statements he made online. In early November 2016, the affidavit says, Hester made arrangements with the undercover employee – whom he never met in person – to meet with “one of the brothers.” The undercover employee arranged this meeting with another undercover FBI employee.

During a January 31 meeting, the undercover employee provided Hester with a list of items to purchase, including 9-volt batteries, duct tape, copper wire and roofing nails. The undercover employee implied that these items would be used to make bombs, the affidavit says, stating that those materials are needed “to make ... things ... to bring some kind of destruction.” Hester allegedly responded by stating: “I’m just ready to help. I’m ready to help any way I can.” When the undercover employee stated that what they were planning was “going to bring them to their knees ... and then they gonna know to fear Allah,” Hester expressed his anticipation by stating: “I can’t wait. I can’t wait.”

Hester and the undercover employee agreed to meet again at Hester’s residence the next day. When the undercover employee arrived, the affidavit says, Hester gave him the items he had purchased. The undercover employee told Hester they were planning something “10 times more” than the Boston Marathon bombing, and Hester expressed his approval. The undercover employee told Hester that they were planning on “killing a lot of people.” The undercover employee told Hester that he could “walk away,” the affidavit says, but Hester said, “I’m down.” The undercover employee told Hester they were going to “wage all kinda war,” and Hester again expressed his approval.

The undercover employee then pulled back blankets in the back of the SUV to show Hester three AK-47 style rifles and two .45-caliber handguns. The undercover employee told Hester that, while they had plenty of firearms, they needed more ammunition. Hester stated that he could not purchase ammunition because of his state charges, but that he had a friend that could get ammunition for him. Hester stated that he would have money to purchase ammunition after he received his tax refund and after he was paid in a couple of weeks.

The undercover employee also opened a backpack, which contained pieces of pipe with end caps attached in the manner of pipe bombs, along with cord-like safety fuse, stating, “these are bombs right here.” The undercover employee explained that the duct tape Hester provided would be used to tape the bombs together, which Hester acknowledged, and that the nails Hester provided would “cut peoples’ heads off.” Hester responded: “Oh yeah. I know,” indicating that he understood the nails were to be used as shrapnel for bombs.

The undercover employee stated that they had more backpacks that they were going to put in different locations. Hester acknowledged that he understood, and stated that they had to be smarter than the Boston Marathon bombers. Hester again confirmed that he was “down,” the

affidavit says, and that he understood they had to “lay low” and act in a manner to avoid detection.

The undercover employee stated that they were going to “strike fear in all these infidel hearts,” and Hester responded that he agreed and that he was ready.

According to the affidavit, Hester contacted the first undercover employee via text message on February 2, and indicated he would “have some more stuff ... in a couple of weeks when I get paid.” Hester asked the undercover employee, “When you talk to the brother again let him know I’ll have some more gifts in a couple of weeks.”

On February 4, 6, 7, 11 and 16 Hester communicated with an undercover employee via an encrypted messaging app. Hester said that he was excited, that he was “happy to be part” of it, and that it was “time they answer for their atrocities.” Hester predicted that it was “going to be a good day for Muslims worldwide.” Hester asked how the “party plan” was coming along and reiterated that he would get more “supplies.” The undercover employee told Hester that the “party” would take place on Presidents’ Day and that the targets of the operation would include busses, trains and a train station in Kansas City. Hester said, according to the affidavit, that it felt “good to help strike back at the true terrorist.”

On February 17, Hester met again with the second undercover employee and brought two additional boxes of roofing nails. Hester accompanied the undercover employee to a nearby storage facility, where the two examined the security cameras. Hester was arrested shortly thereafter.

The charge contained in this complaint and the assertions in the supporting affidavit are simply an accusation, and not evidence of guilt. A defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty in a court of law.

This case was investigated by the FBI and is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Brian P. Casey and David Raskin, with the assistance of Trial Attorney Jennifer Levy of the National Security Division’s Counterterrorism Section.

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