

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Monday, November 21, 2016

Brooklyn Man Arrested For Attempting To Provide Material Support To ISIL

Defendant Traveled to Yemen in an Attempt to Join Foreign Terrorist Organization

A criminal complaint was unsealed today in federal court in the Eastern District of New York charging Mohamed Rafik Naji with attempting to provide material support to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a foreign terrorist organization. Naji was arrested earlier today at his home in Brooklyn, New York, and his initial appearance is scheduled for this afternoon before U.S. Magistrate Judge Robert M. Levy at the U.S. Courthouse, 225 Cadman Plaza East, Brooklyn, New York.

The charges were announced by U.S. Attorney Robert L. Capers of the Eastern District of New York, Acting Assistant Attorney General for National Security Mary B. McCord, Assistant Director in Charge William F. Sweeney of the New York Field Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and James P. O'Neill, Commissioner, New York City Police Department (NYPD).

As set forth in court documents, Naji is a 37-year-old legal permanent resident of the United States. Beginning in December 2014, through social media posts, Naji expressed his support of ISIL by, among other posts, sharing a video of an ISIL leader advocating violence against civilian targets. According to the complaint, in March 2015, Naji travelled from New York to Yemen in an effort to join ISIL's ranks. While in Yemen, Naji persistently tried to travel to areas controlled by ISIL. In emails to an associate in the United States, Naji explained that he was on his fifth try to reach ISIL controlled territory. He also sent his associate media files with sounds of gunfire and claimed to have been almost killed by the "army." Following these email exchanges, Naji instructed his associate to "erase all ur messages," "even from your trash."

While in Yemen, Naji engaged in online conversations with a confidential source. During those conversations, Naji instructed the confidential source that in order to join "dawlat islam" he should travel to Hadramout, an area in southern Yemen. In one of the online conversations with the confidential source Naji proclaimed his allegiance to ISIL stating, "I belong to Islamic state only," according to the complaint.

Naji returned to the United States in September 2015. Since his return, he has continued to express his support for ISIL and violent jihad. Following the deadly attack in Nice, France in July 2016, Naji expressed support for a similar attack in Times Square.

"As alleged, the defendant was persistent in his efforts to join ISIL and support its terrorist objectives," stated U.S. Attorney Capers. "We will continue to identify and prosecute individuals like Naji who seek to empower our nation's enemies and endanger our citizens and partners around the world." Mr. Capers extended his grateful appreciation to the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force, which comprises a number of federal, state and local agencies from the region.

"As we alleged in our complaint today, Naji has shown continued support to ISIL, beginning in 2014 with social media posts and ultimately traveling to Yemen in March 2015 where he claimed his



allegiance to ISIL stating, 'I belong to Islamic state only.' He continued to express support for ISIL and violent jihad upon his return in the US months later. Terrorism threats, like Naji, are only mitigated through the joint efforts of law enforcement to protect our communities," said FBI Assistant Director in Charge Sweeney.

"As alleged, the defendant expressed a devotion to join ISIL through both conversation and social media, traveling to Yemen in an effort to join their ranks," said Police Commissioner O'Neill. "Detectives and agents on the Joint Terrorism Task Force uncovered the alleged terrorist objectives of the defendant. I want to commend their work in continually protecting New York City, and our nation, from those who seek to harm us."

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

The government's case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Melody Wells and Ian Richardson of the National Security & Cybercrime Section of the U.S Attorney's Office, with assistance from Brian Morgan of the National Security Division's Counterterrorism Section.

The Defendant:

MOHAMED RAFIK NAJI

Age: 37

Brooklyn, New York

E.D.N.Y. Docket No. 16-M-1049

Topic(s):

Counterterrorism

Cyber Crime

National Security