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FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2018


NEW YORK MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO ATTEMPTING TO JOIN ISIS IN YEMEN

WASHINGTON – Mohamed Rafik Naji, 38, of Brooklyn, New York, pleaded guilty today to one count of attempting to provide material support or resources to the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), a designated foreign terrorist organization.

Acting Assistant Attorney General for National Security Edward O’Callaghan, U.S. Attorney Richard P. Donoghue, Assistant Director in Charge William F. Sweeney of the FBI’s New York Field Office and Commissioner James P. O’Neill of the NYPD announced the guilty plea. The plea was accepted by U.S. District Judge Frederic Block.

As detailed in publicly filed court documents, Naji, a lawful permanent resident originally from Yemen, viewed and distributed ISIS propaganda before traveling from New York to Yemen in March 2015 in an effort to join ISIS. While in Yemen, Naji repeatedly tried to travel to areas controlled by ISIS, explaining in emails with an associate in the United States that he was on his fifth attempt to reach ISIS. Naji described traveling through militarized zones and claimed that he and his group had almost been “killed . . . by army.” In addition, he explained that “we have trouble getting in the party” because there were “to[o] many security [g]uards all ova the place” that would “kill us if they find us.” Naji also sent his associate videos that he made in Yemen. In one of the videos that was attached to an email with the subject line “First day on the job,” Naji’s voice can be heard over the sound of automatic weapons saying “I think we’re taking fire.” Naji also sent his associate ISIS propaganda videos. In addition, in an online conversation, Naji proclaimed his allegiance to ISIS stating, “I belong to Islamic state only.”

Following his return to the United States in September 2015, Naji continued to express his support for ISIS and violent jihad. For example, he explained ways to travel to ISIS-controlled territory in Syria by crossing the Turkish border, and how to employ strategies to avoid arrest in Turkey. In July 2016, following the ISIS-inspired terrorist truck attack in Nice, France, Naji discussed how easy it would be to carry out a similar attack in Times Square, explaining that ISIS “want an operation in Times Square” and stating that an ISIS “reconnaissance group . . .



put up scenes of Times Square.” Naji further explained “if there is a truck, I mean a garbage truck and one drives it there to Times Square and crushes them...Times Square day.” He was arrested by members of the New York JTTF in the autumn of 2016. At sentencing, Naji faces a statutory maximum term of 20 years’ imprisonment.

Mr. O’Callaghan and Mr. Donoghue extended their grateful appreciation to the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF), which comprises a number of federal, state and local agencies from the region.

This case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Ian C. Richardson and Melody Wells of the Eastern District of New York, with assistance from Trial Attorney Brian Morgan of the National Security Division’s Counterterrorism Section.

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