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District of New Jersey

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Somerset County Man Charged With Attempts To Provide Material Support To Hamas, Making False Statements, And Making Threat Against Pro-Israel Supporters

Also Discussed Bombing Trump Tower and Israeli Embassy in New York

<https://www.justice.gov/usao-nj/pr/somerset-county-man-charged-attempts-provide-material-support-hamas-making-false>

NEWARK, N.J. – A Somerset County, New Jersey, man was arrested today for attempting to provide material support to Hamas, lying on his application to enlist in the U.S. Army, and making a threat against pro-Israel supporters, U.S. Attorney Craig Carpenito, Assistant Attorney General John C. Demers of the U.S. Department of Justice's National Security Division, FBI-Newark Special Agent in Charge Gregory W. Ehrie and FBI Assistant Director for Counterterrorism Michael McGarrity announced.

Jonathan Xie, 20, of Basking Ridge, New Jersey, was arrested this morning and is charged by complaint with two counts of attempting to provide material support to a designated terrorist organization, two counts of making false statements, and one count of transmitting a threat in interstate commerce. He is scheduled to appear this afternoon before U.S. Magistrate Judge Mark Falk in Newark federal court.

"Homegrown violent extremists like Xie are a serious threat to national security," U.S. Attorney Carpenito said. "The actions that he took and planned to take made that threat both clear and present, and we commend our law enforcement partners for working closely with us to stop him before he could carry out his plans to commit violence on American soil. We will continue to do everything in our power to safeguard our country and its citizens from the threat of terrorism, whether that threat comes from abroad or – as here – from within."

"The FBI remains vigilant in its efforts to protect the public from those who support terrorist groups and ideologies," Special Agent in Charge Ehrie said. "Thanks to the hard work and determination of our agents and their law enforcement partners on the Joint Terrorism Task Force, this defendant's further support to terrorism was disrupted and a threat to the safety of our community was averted. This case also illustrates the value of public awareness and participation. When you report suspicious activity, you become a force multiplier in the mission to keep America safe."

"The FBI is committed to stopping anyone who attempts to assist terrorist organizations or who threatens to commit acts of violence in our communities," said Assistant Director McGarrity, FBI Assistant Director for Counterterrorism. "The threat from homegrown violent extremists who self-radicalize remains persistent. While more Americans may be familiar with ISIS, we take seriously those who wish to help any designated terrorist organization. I commend the hard work of the Newark Joint Terrorism Task Force on this case."

According to documents filed in this case and statements made in court:

In April 2019, Xie appeared in an Instagram Live video wearing a black ski mask and stated that he was against Zionism and the neo-liberal establishment. When asked by another participant in the video if he would go to Gaza and join Hamas, Xie stated “yes, If I could find a way.” Later in the video, Xie displayed a Hamas flag and retrieved a handgun. He then stated “I’m gonna go to the [expletive] pro-Israel march and I’m going to shoot everybody.” In subsequent Instagram posts, Xie stated, “I want to shoot the pro-israel demonstrators . . . you can get a gun and shoot your way through or use a vehicle and ram people . . . all you need is a gun or vehicle to go on a rampage . . . I do not care if security forces come after me, they will have to put a bullet in my head to stop me.”

In December 2018, Xie sent \$100 via Moneygram to an individual in Gaza who Xie believed to be a member of the Al-Qassam Brigades – a faction of Hamas that has conducted attacks, to include suicide bombings against civilian targets inside Israel. At approximately the same time that Xie sent the money, he posted on his Instagram account “Just donated \$100 to Hamas. Pretty sure it was illegal but I don’t give a damn.” In April 2019, Xie sent a link to a website for the Al-Qassam Brigades to an FBI employee who was acting online in an undercover capacity. Xie described the website as a “Hamas” website and stated he had previously sent a donation to the group. Xie then sent screenshots of the website to the undercover employee and demonstrated how to use a new feature on the website that allows donations to be sent via Bitcoin. On or about April 26, 2019, Xie sent a donation of approximately \$20 in Bitcoin (including transaction fees) via the website as a test to see whether the Bitcoin feature worked.

In February 2019, Xie stated that he wanted to join the U.S. Army “to learn how to kill... So I can use that knowledge.” He stated “Idk [I don’t know] if I pass the training...If I should do lone wolf.That is why I have to learn military techniques from the Army . . . ” Consistent with his plan to join the U.S. Army, Xie completed Security Clearance Application for National Security Positions in February 2019. He answered “no” to the question “Have you EVER associated with anyone involved in activities to further terrorism?” An error occurred in processing Xie’s application and Xie was required to complete the application a second time approximately ten days later. He again answered “no” to the question.

The investigation revealed additional social media accounts for Xie, including a YouTube account which contained, among other things, a playlist containing videos, many of which advocated or propagandized Soldiers for Allah, the war in Syria, Hezbollah (a foreign terrorist organization), and the Houthi movement in Yemen, as well as support for Bashar al Assad, Saddam Hussein, and North Korea.

Around April 20, 2019, FBI surveillance observed Xie outside of the Trump Tower building in New York City. Shortly thereafter, according to Instagram records, Xie posted two photos to his Instagram account: One with the words “I want to bomb Trump Tower” imposed over the building image and the other with the words “[S]hould I bomb Trump Tower,” a “Yes/No” poll, and an emoji of a bomb imposed over the Trump Tower building image. Xie subsequently posted on Instagram, “Okay, so I went to NYC today and passed by Trump Tower and then I started laughing hysterically . . . shit I forgot to visit the Israeli embassy in NYC . . . i want to bomb this place along with trump tower.”

U.S. Attorney Carpenito credited special agents of the FBI and task force officers of the Joint Terrorism Task Force, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Gregory W. Ehrie in Newark; and the U.S. Department of Defense, Army Counterintelligence, 902d Military Intelligence Group, with the investigation leading to today’s arrest. He also thanks the U.S. Secret Service for its assistance with the case.

Each count of attempt to provide material support to a designated terrorist organization carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. Each count of making false statements related to international and domestic terrorism carries a maximum penalty of eight years in prison

and a \$250,000 fine. The count of transmitting a threat in interstate commerce carries a penalty of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Joyce M. Malliet of the U.S. Attorney's Office National Security Unit and Trial Attorney Bridget Behling of the U.S. Department of Justice's Counterterrorism Section of the National Security Division.

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