



The United States Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FRIDAY, JUNE 14, 2019

NEW YORK MAN SENTENCED TO 20 YEARS IN PRISON FOR ATTEMPTING TO JOIN ISIS IN YEMEN

WASHINGTON – Earlier today in federal court in Brooklyn, Mohamed Rafik Naji was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment to be followed by five years supervised release by United States District Judge Frederic Block for attempting to provide material support or resources to the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), a foreign terrorist organization. Naji pleaded guilty to the charge in February 2018.

Assistant Attorney General for National Security John C. Demers, U.S. Attorney Richard P. Donoghue for the Eastern District of New York, Assistant Director-in-Charge William F. Sweeney, Jr. of the FBI's New York Field Office and Commissioner James P. O'Neill of the New York City Police Department (NYPD) announced the sentence.

“Time and again, the United States has brought to justice those who have traveled from here to try and fight for ISIS,” said Assistant Attorney General Demers. “This is just what Naji did. Today’s sentence holds him accountable for his crime and I want to thank the agents, analysts, and prosecutors who are responsible for this result.”

“With today’s sentence, Naji has been held accountable for trying to enter a foreign war zone and join ISIS’ murderous cause,” said United States Attorney Donoghue. “This Office, together with the FBI, the NYPD and all the members of the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force will take every step necessary to incapacitate terrorists like Naji and protect the American people. I commend the Task Force for its outstanding work in this case.”

“Extremists like Mr. Naji believe murdering innocent people advances their political agendas,” said FBI Assistant Director-in-Charge Sweeney. “In the end, Mr. Naji, like many others before him, find the only thing their actions lead to is a different vantage point from which to watch the world pass by – through the steel bars of a federal prison. Mr. Naji will remember today as sentencing day, nothing more. Working day

in and day out with our partners on the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force, safeguards have been put in place to secure Times Square and other popular attractions so any would be terrorist will find it extremely difficult to carry out their plans. Our unified goal is to remain proactive and prevent acts before they occur, and once again I would like to thank all of those who ensure our safety.”

“This case is a reminder that New York City remains the top target for terrorism in the U.S.,” said NYPD Commissioner O’Neill. “The NYPD and its partners in law enforcement will never relent in the fight against terror. I want to thank the dedicated members of the JTTF who worked on this investigation to keep our City safe and the prosecutors from the Eastern District of New York.”

By late 2014, Naji had become a committed supporter of ISIS’s murderous cause as he repeatedly promoted and distributed ISIS propaganda with violent themes and messages on social media. In March 2015, Naji traveled from New York to Yemen in an effort to join ISIS. Naji also used social media to advise another person he could travel to join ISIS, but unbeknownst to Naji, that individual was a confidential source of information for the government (the CS). In an online conversation with the CS, 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. In July 2016, following the ISIS-inspired terrorist truck attack in Nice, France, that killed scores of innocent civilians, Naji told the CS how easy it would be to carry out a similar attack in Times Square, explaining that ISIS “want[s] 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.”

Naji has been incarcerated since his arrest in Brooklyn in November 2016.

The government’s case is being handled by the Office’s National Security and Cybercrime Section. Assistant United States Attorney Ian C. Richardson is in charge of the prosecution, with assistance from Trial Attorney Jacqueline L. Barkett of the National Security Division’s Counterterrorism Section.

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