



The United States Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 19, 2019

SYRIAN MAN ARRESTED ON TERRORISM CHARGES AFTER PLANNING ATTACK ON CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Complaint Alleges Syrian Man Plotted Attacks in the Name of ISIS

WASHINGTON – Mustafa Mousab Alowemer, 21, a resident of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was arrested today based on a federal complaint charging him with one count of attempting to provide material support and resources to the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), a designated foreign terrorist organization, and two counts of distributing information relating to an explosive, destructive device, or weapon of mass destruction in relation to his plan to attack a church in Pittsburgh.

The announcement was made by Assistant Attorney General for National Security John C. Demers, U.S. Attorney Scott W. Brady for the Western District of Pennsylvania, Assistant Director Michael McGarrity of the FBI's Counterterrorism Division and Special Agent in Charge Robert Jones of the FBI's Pittsburgh Division.

"Targeting places of worship is beyond the pale, no matter what the motivation," said Assistant Attorney General Demers. "The defendant is alleged to have plotted just such an attack of a church in Pittsburgh in the name of ISIS. The National Security Division and our partners will continue our efforts to identify and bring to justice individuals in our country who seek to commit violence on behalf of ISIS and other terrorist organizations. I want to thank the agents, analysts, and prosecutors who are responsible for this investigation."

"Our top priority is protecting the citizens of western Pennsylvania," said U.S. Attorney Brady. "Every day investigators and prosecutors work tirelessly behind the scenes to disrupt terrorist activity and keep our community safe. While the public does not always see the results of the hard work of these dedicated men and women, this case is a visible demonstration of our commitment to rooting out terrorists and bringing them to justice."

“Court documents show Mustafa Alowemer planned to attack a church in the name of ISIS, which could have killed or injured many people. Fortunately, his plans were foiled by the full force of the FBI Pittsburgh Joint Terrorism Task Force,” said Assistant Director McGarrity. “The FBI takes threats to churches and other religious institutions extremely seriously and will use all our resources to stop potential terrorist attacks against them.”

“We will use every resource available to identify potential violent actors and protect the public,” said Special Agent in Charge Jones. “Our Joint Terrorism Task Force is dedicated to identifying and bringing to justice those individuals who provide material support to foreign terrorist organizations, promote violent extremism and threaten our national security. The invaluable partnerships the FBI Pittsburgh JTTF has with our federal state and local partners allow us to work tirelessly to protect Americans from terrorism.”

According to an affidavit filed in U.S. District Court in Pittsburgh:

The FBI Pittsburgh JTTF investigation of Mustafa Mousab Alowemer (Alowemer) revealed that Alowemer plotted to bomb a church located on the North Side of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (the Church), using a weapon of mass destruction (i.e., an explosive device). According to Alowemer, his motivation to detonate a device at the Church was to support the cause of ISIS and to inspire other ISIS supporters in the United States to join together and commit similar acts in the name of ISIS. Alowemer also targeted the Church in order to “take revenge for our [ISIS] brothers in Nigeria.” Alowemer was aware that numerous people in or around the Church could be killed by the explosion.

According to the complaint and information provided to the FBI by the Department of Homeland Security, Alowemer was born in Daraa, Syria, and was admitted to the United States as a refugee on Aug. 1, 2016.

In furtherance of the plot to bomb the Church, in May 2019, Alowemer distributed multiple instructional documents related to the construction and use of explosives and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) to an individual Alowemer believed to be a fellow ISIS supporter, but who was in fact an FBI employee. Alowemer distributed these documents with the intent that the information be used in the assembly of a destructive device and in furtherance of conducting an attack in support of ISIS. In or around June 2019, Alowemer purchased several items with the belief that they were necessary to assemble a destructive device and with the intention that they be used to construct the explosives that would be detonated in the vicinity of the Church.

In planning the attack, Alowemer used multiple social networking and mobile messenger applications to communicate with an individual whom he believed to be a fellow ISIS supporter. During his communications, Alowemer stated his support for ISIS, and his desire to answer the call for jihad or travel to conduct jihad. Alowemer also distributed propaganda materials, offered to provide potential targets in the Pittsburgh area, requested a weapon with a silencer, and recorded a video of himself

pledging an oath of allegiance to the leader of ISIS, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi.

Between April 16 and June 11, Alowemer met four times in person with an FBI Undercover Employee (UCE) and/or an FBI Confidential Human Source (CHS). At the June 11 meeting with the UCE and CHS, Alowemer provided additional details about the bomb plot and provided the materials he had purchased for construction of the device. Alowemer provided two printed copies of detailed Google satellite maps, which included hand-written markings identifying the Church and routes of arrival and escape. Alowemer also wrote and provided a 10-point handwritten plan (“Confirmation of this operation”) outlining details related to his plot to personally deliver explosives in a backpack. Alowemer expressed a desire to meet one more time to conduct planning and coordination prior to carrying out the attempted bombing in July 2019. That meeting was later scheduled for June 19 in the Pittsburgh area.

A charge is merely an allegation, and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

Members of the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Force who were directly involved in this investigation include: FBI, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement(ICE)/U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services(USCIS)/Homeland Security Investigations(HSI), Internal Revenue Service – Criminal Investigation, United States Secret Service, United States Postal Inspection Service, Pennsylvania State Police, Allegheny County Police Department, Pittsburgh Bureau of Police, Allegheny County Port Authority Police, Allegheny County Probation, University of Pittsburgh Police Department, and UPMC Police Security.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Soo C. Song of the Western District of Pennsylvania and Trial Attorney Brenda Sue Thornton of the National Security Division’s Counterterrorism Section.

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