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HIBZALLAH OPERATIVE SENTENCED TO 40 YEARS IN PRISON FOR COVERT TERRORIST ACTIVITIES ON BEHALF OF HIBZALLAH'S ISLAMIC JIHAD ORGANIZATION

Ali Kourani Was Trained by Hizballah's External Terrorist Operations Component and Gathered Intelligence in New York City in Support of Attack-Planning Efforts

WASHINGTON – The Department of Justice today announced that Ali Kourani, 35, was sentenced to 40 years in prison based on terrorism, sanctions, and immigration convictions arising from Kourani's illicit work as an operative for the Islamic Jihad Organization, Hizballah's external attack-planning component.

“While living in the United States, Kourani served as an operative of Hizballah in order to help the foreign terrorist organization prepare for potential future attacks against the United States. With today's sentence, he is being held accountable for his crimes,” said Assistant Attorney General for National Security John C. Demers. “The evidence at trial showed that Kourani searched for suppliers who could provide weapons for such attacks, identified people who could be recruited or targeted for violence, and gathered information about and conducted surveillance of potential targets within our country. Such covert activities conducted on U.S. soil are a clear threat to our national security and I applaud the agents, analysts, and prosecutors who are responsible for this investigation and prosecution.”

“Ali Kourani was recruited, trained, and deployed by Hizballah's Islamic Jihad Organization to plan and execute acts of terrorism around New York City. After spending years conducting surveillance on the City's critical infrastructure, federal

buildings, international airports, and even daycare centers, he is now the first Islamic Jihad Organization operative to be convicted and sentenced for his crimes against the United States,” said U.S. Attorney Geoffrey S. Berman for the Southern District of New York. “The lengthy prison term imposed today on Kourani sends an important message to Hizballah and the Islamic Jihad Organization: If you are caught planning harm against this City and its residents, you will face justice and be held accountable.”

“Ali Kourani’s arrest was a reminder to us all that New York City and its surrounding areas remain primary targets for those looking to conduct a violent attack against our way of life,” said FBI Assistant Director William F. Sweeney Jr. “His sentencing today, however, is also a reminder of the many successes of our FBI JTTFs nationwide, and their never-ending determination to disrupt the plans of those working to harm us.”

“This sentencing is another example of the dedicated work of the New York Joint Terrorism Task Force and the close partnership with the U.S. Attorney’s Office, Southern District, to combat terror and hold accountable those who seek to support and promote terrorist groups,” said Police Commissioner Dermot F. Shea. “I thank the NYPD investigators and our law enforcement partners whose hard work brought Mr. Kourani to justice.”

As reflected in the criminal Complaint, Indictment, court filings, and evidence presented at trial:

Hizballah is a Lebanon-based Shia Islamic organization with political, social, and terrorist components that was founded in the 1980s with support from Iran. Since Hizballah’s formation, the organization has been responsible for numerous terrorist attacks that have killed hundreds, including United States citizens and military personnel. In 1997, the U.S. Department of State designated Hizballah a Foreign Terrorist Organization, pursuant to Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, and it remains so designated today. In 2010, State Department officials described Hizballah as the most technically capable terrorist group in the world, and a continued security threat to the United States.

The Islamic Jihad Organization (IJO), which is also known as the External Security Organization and “910,” is a highly compartmentalized component of Hizballah responsible for the planning, preparation, and execution of intelligence, counterintelligence, and terrorist activities on behalf of Hizballah outside of Lebanon. In July 2012, an IJO operative detonated explosives on a bus transporting Israeli tourists in the vicinity of an airport in Burgas, Bulgaria, killing six people and injuring 32 others. Law enforcement authorities have disrupted several other IJO attack-planning operations around the world, including the arrest of an IJO operative surveilling Israeli targets in Cyprus in 2012, the seizure of bomb-making precursor chemicals in Thailand in 2012, including chemicals manufactured by a medical devices company based in Guangzhou, China (Guangzhou Company-1), and a similar

seizure of chemicals manufactured by Guangzhou Company-1 in Cyprus in May 2015 in connection with the arrest of another IJO operative.

Kourani, who was born in Lebanon, attended Hizballah-sponsored weapons training in Lebanon in 2000 when he was approximately 16 years old. After lawfully entering the United States in 2003, Kourani obtained a Bachelor of Science in biomedical engineering in 2009, and a Master of Business Administration in 2013.

Kourani and certain of his relatives were in Lebanon during the summer 2006 conflict between Israel and Hizballah, when a residence belonging to his family was destroyed. At some point by 2008, IJO recruited Kourani to its ranks. In August 2008, Kourani submitted an application for naturalization in the United States in which he falsely claimed, among other things, that he was not affiliated with a terrorist organization. In April 2009, Kourani became a naturalized citizen and was issued a United States passport. Despite claiming in his passport application that he had no travel plans, Kourani traveled to Guangzhou, China – the location of Guangzhou Company-1 – on May 3, 2009. The purpose of the trip was to develop relationships that the IJO could rely on to obtain ammonium nitrate to be used as an explosive precursor chemical.

IJO assigned Kourani an IJO handler, or mentor, responsible for providing him with taskings, debriefings, and arranging training. Kourani sometimes communicated with his handler using coded email communications, including messages sent by the handler that informed Kourani of the need to return to Lebanon. In order to establish contact with his handler when Kourani returned to Lebanon, Kourani called a telephone number associated with a pager (the IJO Pager) and provided a code that he understood was specific to him. After contacting the IJO Pager, the handler would contact Kourani to set up an in-person meeting by calling a phone belonging to one of Kourani's relatives. The IJO also provided Kourani with additional training in tradecraft, weapons, and tactics. In 2011, for example, Kourani attended a weapons training camp in the vicinity of Birkat Jabrur, Lebanon, where he used a rocket-propelled grenade launcher, an AK-47 assault rifle, an MP5 submachine gun, a PKS machine gun (a Russian-made belt-fed weapon) and a Glock pistol.

Based on other taskings from IJO personnel, which IJO personnel conveyed during periodic in-person meetings when Kourani returned to Lebanon, Kourani conducted operations, which he understood to be aimed at preparing for potential future Hizballah attacks. These covert activities included searching for weapons suppliers in the United States who could provide firearms to support IJO operations; identifying individuals affiliated with the Israeli Defense Force whom the IJO could either recruit or target for violence; gathering information regarding operations and security at airports in the United States and elsewhere, including JFK International Airport in New York; and surveilling U.S. military and law enforcement facilities in New York City, including the federal building at 26 Federal Plaza in Manhattan. Kourani transmitted some of the products of his surveillance and intelligence-gathering efforts back to IJO personnel in Lebanon using digital storage media.

In addition to the prison term, Kourani was also sentenced to five years supervised release.

Assistant Attorney General Demers and Mr. Berman praised the outstanding efforts of the FBI's New York Joint Terrorism Task Force, which principally consists of agents from the FBI and detectives from the New York City Police Department.

This prosecution is being handled by the Office's Terrorism and International Narcotics Unit. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Amanda L. Houle and Emil J. Bove III are in charge of the case, with assistance from Trial Attorney Bridget Behling of the Counterterrorism Section.

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