



Department of Justice

BRIDGET M. BRENNAN

ACTING UNITED STATES ATTORNEY FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF OHIO

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Daniel Ball
Daniel.Ball@usdoj.gov
(216) 622-3921

Ohio Man Pleads Guilty to Providing Material Support to ISIS and Attempting to Commit an Attack at a Toledo-Area Synagogue

TOLEDO, Ohio – Acting U.S. Attorney Bridget M. Brennan announced today that Damon M. Joseph, aka Abdullah Ali Yusuf, 23, of Holland, Ohio, pleaded guilty today to attempting to provide material support to the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, aka ISIS, and attempting to commit a hate crime, for planning an attack on a synagogue in the Toledo, Ohio area.

“Damon Joseph was inspired by ISIS’ call to violence and hate,” said Assistant Attorney General John C. Demers for the Justice Department’s National Security Division. “He planned to target innocents at a Toledo-area synagogue based on their religion and hoping that it would lead to the deaths of many and spread fear. His actions would have been an assault on the liberties and respect for humanity we hold so dear. We will continue to make every effort to prevent such attacks from occurring. I commend the agents, analysts, and prosecutors who identified the threat posed by this defendant and took action to protect the public from his plans.”

“The defendant’s attempt to cause significant harm to members of the Toledo, Ohio, Jewish community constitutes both a federal hate crime and an act of domestic terrorism,” said Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Pamela S. Karlan of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division. “The Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division will continue to vigorously investigate and prosecute individuals who use violence to attack our religious communities.”

“This investigation highlights the continued threat of violence to our communities posed by ISIS-inspired terrorists – in this case, at a place of worship. With today’s plea, we will be one step closer to seeing justice served,” said Acting Assistant Director Patrick Reddan, Jr. of the FBI’s Counterterrorism Division. “I’m grateful for our partnerships with faith-based communities and with our law enforcement partners on the JTTF for their work on this case, which ultimately prevented this plot from becoming a tragedy.”

“Today, Damon Joseph pleaded guilty for attempting to support ISIS through violent attacks on Jewish congregants while they worshipped,” said Acting U.S. Attorney Bridget M. Brennan for the Northern District of Ohio. “It is difficult to conceive of a more heinous plot, let alone reconcile that this plot involved violating our country’s solemn obligation to protect the civil rights of every person as a means of supporting a foreign terrorist organization. We will continue to root out and bring to justice those who support terrorists and those who seek to violate the civil rights of our families, friends and neighbors.”

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“In a matter of months, Damon Joseph progressed from a self-radicalized, virtual jihadist to planning an actual attack on fellow Americans,” said Special Agent in Charge Eric B. Smith of the FBI’s Cleveland Field Office. “Mr. Joseph has now accepted responsibility for his actions. In the name of ISIS, Joseph planned a mass-casualty attack against citizens simply wanting to attend their desired houses of worship, which were two Toledo-area synagogues. Joseph's terroristic actions are antithetical to a just and free society, and he will serve a lengthy sentence as a result. The FBI would like to remind the public to remain vigilant so we can continue to thwart these types of threats together.”

In 2018, Joseph drew the attention of law enforcement by posting photographs of weapons and various messages in support of ISIS on his social media accounts, as well as a photograph originally distributed by the media wing of ISIS.

Beginning in September 2018, Joseph engaged in a series of online conversations with several undercover FBI agents where he repeatedly stated and affirmed his support for ISIS and produced propaganda he believed was to be used for ISIS recruitment efforts.

Over the next few weeks, Joseph stated to an undercover agent that he wanted to participate in an attack on behalf of ISIS. On Dec. 2, 2018, Joseph forwarded a document to the agent that laid out his plans for such an attack on “Jews who support state of Israel.” Joseph then stated that he did not necessarily see this as “a martyrdom operation” as his plan accounted for an escape and potential combat with law enforcement.

On Dec. 4, Joseph met with an undercover FBI agent and discussed conducting a mass shooting at a synagogue. Joseph identified two synagogues in the greater Toledo as potential targets and discussed the types of weapons he believed would inflict mass casualties. Joseph made written notes about the firearms he wanted and provided them to the undercover agent, stating he wanted AR 15s, AK 47, Glock handguns, and ammunition.

On Dec. 6, Joseph again met with an undercover agent to discuss his plans. Joseph stated specifically that he wanted to kill a rabbi and wrote the name and address of the synagogue where the attack was to occur and stated that he had conducted research to determine when the Jewish sabbath was so that more people would be present.

Later that day, the undercover agent told Joseph that he had purchased rifles for the attack. The two met on Dec. 7 at a predetermined location, where Joseph took possession of a black duffel bag containing two semi-automatic rifles, which had been rendered inoperable by law enforcement officers so that they posed no danger to the public. Joseph was then arrested.

Joseph is scheduled to be sentenced on Tuesday, September 14, 2021 at 11 a.m. and faces a maximum sentence of life in prison. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

The FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Force, comprised of over 50 federal, state and local law enforcement agencies, are investigating the case.

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Assistant U.S. Attorneys Michelle Baeppler and Jerome Teresinski of the Northern District of Ohio and Trial Attorneys Alexandra Hughes and Joshua Champagne of the National Security Division's Counterterrorism Section, as well as AeJean Cha of the Civil Rights Division are prosecuting the case.

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