



Damon M. Joseph

- aka Abdullah Ali Yussef
- U.S. citizen
- Resided in Holland, OH
- Age at sentencing: 23



CDSE

Center for Development
of Security Excellence

CASE STUDY

Aiding Terror Group

WHAT HAPPENED

Damon Joseph drew the attention of law enforcement by posting photographs of weapons and various messages in support of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (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 affirmed his support for ISIS and produced propaganda that he believed was to be used for ISIS recruitment efforts.

Over the next few weeks, Joseph told an undercover agent that he wanted to participate in an attack on behalf of ISIS. On December 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 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 area as potential targets and discussed the types of weapons he believed would inflict mass casualties. Joseph gave the undercover agent notes about the firearms he wanted, 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. He stated specifically he wanted to kill a rabbi, wrote the name and address of the synagogue where the attack was to occur, and stated he had conducted research to determine when the Jewish sabbath was so that more people would be present.

On Dec. 7, Joseph met the undercover agent 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 was sentenced to 20 years in prison for attempting to provide material support to ISIS, attempting to commit a hate crime, and for planning an attack on a synagogue in the Toledo, Ohio area.

INDICATORS

Criminal, Violent, or Abusive Conduct – Joseph created a number of videos to be used by ISIS as propaganda aimed to inspire and encourage Islamic “brothers in the West.” He felt it was not safe to be Muslim in the U.S., and for that reason, he carried a weapon at all times, usually an Italian dagger stiletto.

Judgement, Character, and Psychological Conditions – Joseph proclaimed his belief in jihad and destroying the enemies of Islam. He did not “want to be a coward” but was unsure of what he could do. Joseph expressed that seeing how his Islamic brothers and sisters were treated made him more and more convinced every day.

Violent Extremist Mobilization – Joseph expressed his hatred of living in the U.S. He thought about leaving the country all of the time and moving to Europe or Lebanon.

IMPACT

“Today, Damon Joseph was sentenced to 20 years of incarceration and a lifetime term of supervised release for attempting to support ISIS through violent attacks on Jewish congregants, including children, and any first responders who sought to protect and assist them,” said U.S. Attorney Bridget M. Brennan of 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 in an effort to support a foreign terrorist organization.”

“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 will now serve time behind bars 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.”

ADDITIONAL INFO

On September 12, 2018, an undercover agent sent a private message to Joseph through one of Joseph’s social media accounts and inquired as to whether Joseph was a revert. Joseph replied that he was. The agent then asked whether Joseph was on the “haqq,” after having seen a post of Joseph’s mentioning “Sheikh Anwar” (Anwar Al-Awlaki). “Haqq” is the Arabic word for truth. Joseph replied that he was and was looking for a brother to guide him. Then the agent asked Joseph whether he was a “Khilafah” supporter. Joseph replied that he supported “the Khalifa 100%.” “Khilafah” (or Caliphate) is a general leadership over all Muslims in the world. Its responsibility is to implement the laws of the Islamic system and convey the Islamic message to the rest of the world. In June 2014, ISIS emir Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi proclaimed the creation of the Caliphate (Khilafah). Thus, “Khilafah supporter” refers to one who supports ISIS. The agent then asked Joseph if he was a man of talk or action. Joseph responded, “It seems a lot of brothers and sisters don’t even believe in sharia. There are too many men of talk.” Joseph asked if the agent was a member of “any groups” where “you all communicate,” meaning an alternate social media application. Joseph indicated he used two other social media applications. Joseph sent his contact information to UC-1 for one of his alternate social media applications.

Questions to consider:

- Do you know of someone who espouses extremist beliefs? Have they ever spoken of taking action on these beliefs? If so, did you report them? Would you if it happens in the future?
- How can your organization proactively address the threat posed by potentially violent extremists?

Resources for further exploration:

- Suspicious Activity Reporting Aid (https://www.cdse.edu/Portals/124/Documents/jobaids/ci/SAR_Indicators.pdf)
- Homegrown Violent Extremist Mobilization Indicators Job Aid ([Homegrown Violent Extremist Mobilization Indicators \(cdse.edu\)](https://www.cdse.edu/Portals/124/Documents/jobaids/ci/HVEM_Indicators.pdf))
- FBI Monograph: Making Prevention a Reality (<https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/making-prevention-a-reality.pdf>)

Supporting Through Reporting!

Contact the appropriate POC to report any observed potential risk indicators:

Name: _____ Agency/Department: _____
Title: Supervisor/Security Officer/ITP Senior Official/ITP Manager