

November 15, 2018

This file includes five documents.

1. John Mueller, "What Happened to the Islamic State Foreign Fighters That Had Returned to Europe?" nationalinterest.org, November 5, 2018
2. Rukmini Callimachi, "ISIS Attacks in West Drop Sharply, but Threat Remains High," nytimes.com, September 12, 2018 (highlighted and notated)
3. Thomas Hegghammer, "Europe to Terrorists: It's No More Monsieur Nice Guy: Long seen as weak, the continent in recent years has hardened its defenses against jihadists," wsj.com, October 7, 2018 (highlighted)

The following two documents relate to the Bahnasawy case in Canada that figures so prominently in the New York Times article.

4. Stewart Bell and Brian Hill, "He plotted to bomb Times Square for ISIS. Records show he's mentally ill. Is he a terrorist?" globalnews.ca, June 20, 2018 (highlighted)
5. Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs, "Charges Unsealed Against Three Men for Plotting to Carry out Terrorist Attacks in New York City for ISIS in the Summer of 2016," October 6, 2017 (highlighted)



What Happened to the Islamic State Foreign Fighters That Had Returned to Europe?



November 5, 2018 *Topic:* Security *Region:* Europe *Tags:* Europe, Counter Terrorism, Islamic State, Refugee Crisis

After all the alarm that Europe had been infiltrated by ISIS-supporters that were hell-bent on violence, where are they?

by John Mueller



he media tend to be poor on covering things that don't happen. The example, a puzzle over whatever happened to all those members of Islamic State, or ISIS, who, trained in the Middle East, had returned to Europe and were poised to commit terrorist mayhem there.

None, it appears, have shown up.

Alarm about the danger was raised in many quarters, but taking pride of place may well be an article by Rukmini Callimachi in the New York Times on August 3, 2016, about “a global network of killers” that ISIS had created and empowered.

It featured a huge picture on its front page of a German petty criminal who had joined Islamic State in Syria and then defected because, he said, he was put off by all the violence. The accompanying story covered most of the top half of the front page and then bled over to fill up two pages in the interior.

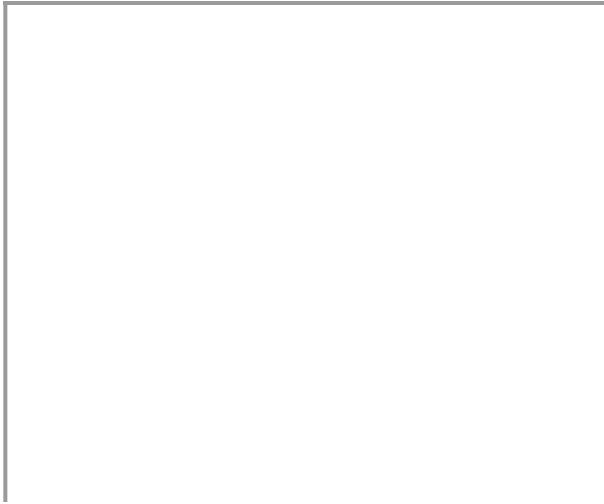
In a jailhouse interview, our thug eagerly and with seeming authority asserted that many ISIS fighters had returned to Europe and were poised to commit terrorist mayhem: “They have loads of people...hundreds definitely... living in European countries and waiting for commands to attack the European people.” The article also included confirmation of this claim by intelligence and defense officials who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Since then, as far as I can see, none of those hundreds of European “foot soldiers” (as the article calls them) have sprung into action. There had been attacks in Paris and Brussels by such returnees in the year previous to the article. And there have been some ISIS-related attacks in Europe since the article was published, but these have mostly been carried out by people who have simply been inspired by the group, and none has been by a returnee. Could there be an explanation for this remarkable non-event?

Last August, on the second anniversary of the article, I posed that query to a guy I know at the Times and suggested that perhaps a follow-up story might

be appropriate. He thought it was a good idea, and sent it over to the foreign desk for consideration.

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On September 12, the Times published an article, once again by Rukmini Callimachi, that may have been in response to my suggestion. It is entitled, “Why a ‘Dramatic Dip’ in ISIS Attacks in the West Is Scant Comfort.”

However, it entirely ignores the issue of the returnees. Instead there is a catalog, from sources exclusively deep within the estimable terrorism

industry, about “Islamic State attacks” overwhelmingly perpetrated or planned by people who had no connection to ISIS except maybe an inspirational one. There is, for example, a lot of ink about a Canadian teen who is not only a nutcase, but suicidal and a long-time drug addict, and, according to his mother, was not on “antipsychotic medication” (as the article says), but refusing to take it.

The article does acknowledge that the number of terrorist attacks in Europe is down, but it alarmingly adds that the number of terrorism arrests (which it calls “attempted attacks”) in Europe was up. It concludes this means that “while the Islamic State’s capacity may have been diminished, its effort has not.” And it argues that the difference “is that law enforcement is increasingly foiling the plots.”

The number of terrorism arrests has gone up or stayed high, then, not because the terrorist or proto-terrorist pool is so deep or has expanded, but because the police in Europe have put far more effort into the quest. In particular, they are getting particularly good at trolling the internet where many hapless ISIS inspirees, like the Canadian teen, and other proto-terrorists bloviate, foolishly advertising their intentions on social media and in chat rooms inhabited by the police from the comfort of their cubicles. As the article notes, “Law enforcement agencies have increasingly been able to infiltrate this online universe, analysts say, sometimes lurking in the Islamic State’s chat rooms on Telegram, the encrypted messaging platform that is the group’s preferred medium.”

That is, the police are therefore probably not so much “getting better at stopping” plots as getting better at finding (and facilitating) embryonic plots to stop—ones that, earlier, would likely have never led to much but that would not have been uncovered.

Meanwhile, the mystery about the returnee non-event remains. Is it possible that returnees, or at least returnees bent on violence, don’t exist?

John Mueller is a political scientist at Ohio State University and a senior fellow at the Cato Institute.

Image: Reuters

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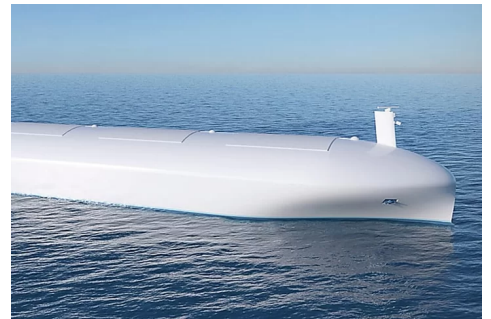
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Auto Overload

ISIS Attacks in West Drop Sharply, but Threat Remains High

By Rukmini Callimachi

Sept. 12, 2018

The attacks seemed to come one after another: 130 dead on the floor of the Bataclan concert hall and on the streets of Paris. Eighty-six mowed down on Nice's historic promenade. Twenty-two people, many of them teenage girls, killed at an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester.

Since the lightning rise of the Islamic State in 2014, law enforcement has scrambled to stop an endless array of plots. It is only now, more than four years after Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared his caliphate, that the cadence has finally slowed.

includes attacks that were only inspired by ISIS

Islamic State attacks in the West fell steeply in 2018 compared with the previous four years, the first time the number has fallen since 2014. But the number of attempted attacks remained steady, suggesting that the group remains committed to carrying out catastrophic harm.

finding and creating plots to foil

The difference, analysts say, is that law enforcement is increasingly foiling the plots.

The Islamic State remains the world's deadliest terrorist organization, and its attacks are on the rise in places like Afghanistan and Iraq. But in the West, not only has the number of attacks plummeted, but the devastation inflicted by each has also declined.



Mourners on the streets of Paris after 130 people were killed in an Islamic State attack in 2015.

Tomas Munita for The New York Times

[The fight to retake the last vestige of the Islamic State's caliphate in Iraq and Syria has begun.]

most were inspired by ISIS, not "carried out" by the group

The Islamic State carried out 14 successful attacks in Europe and North America in 2015, 22 in 2016 and 27 in 2017, according to data collected by George Washington University's Program on Extremism. But in the first eight months of this year, it only carried out four.

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"It's an absolutely dramatic dip," said the program's director, Lorenzo Vidino.

The scale of attacks has also fallen. The largest toll in a single attack fell from 130 in 2015, to 86 in 2016, to 22 at the pop concert in Manchester in 2017. So far in 2018, the worst single-day toll was in the aisles of a supermarket in Trèbes, France, where a man acting in the name of the Islamic State gunned down three people in March.

The Islamic State, also known as ISIS, has lost 99 percent of the land it once held in Iraq and Syria, and the fight to evict it from the last vestige started this week. Some analysts have linked the drop in activity to the loss of territory.

plots

But the number of attempted attacks in Europe has remained unchanged, according to data collected by the Center for the Analysis of Terrorism in Paris. That data suggests that while the Islamic State's capacity may have been diminished, its effort has not.

suggests rather that police have gotten better and have put far more effort into finding plotters



A jihadist loyal to the Islamic State killed 86 people in Nice in 2016 by plowing through a crowd in a 19-ton truck. Bullet holes riddled the truck's windshield. Andrew Testa for The New York Times

“We are able to conclude that there is no correlation between their military setbacks and the loss of territory and the intensity of the threat,” said Jean-Charles Brisard, the director of the Paris-based center. “Even if the Islamic State is losing both militarily and in terms of terrain, the ideology of ISIS remains present in the hearts of individuals who want to harm us.”

According to the center’s database, the Islamic State carried out 15 attacks last year in the 28 countries of the European Union. But another 47 plots were intercepted in the planning stages or thwarted during the execution. In 2016, there were 14 successful attacks while 40 were thwarted.

For the first part of 2018, the data collected by Mr. Brisard indicates that the number of foiled attacks has remained steady.

Facing intense public pressure to stop the attacks, Western law enforcement agencies have raised their game. Bill Roggio, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies in Washington, said several advances had made them better at hunting terrorists: “Closer monitoring of social media. Better understanding of the networks. And better coordination with other countries.”

Police are looking much harder, and likely finding (and facilitating) embryonic plots that, earlier, would likely have never led to much but would not have been uncovered



The Islamic State's leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, declared a caliphate in 2014 and set off a spree of terrorist attacks around the world.

Electronic surveillance has been crucial.

Most of the attacks in 2016 and 2017 were carried out by people who were introduced to the Islamic State online and whose only connection to the group was a Wi-Fi signal. In a growing number of instances, they were directed by one of the group's cyber-coaches — men based in Syria, Libya, Afghanistan and beyond — who guided them from the planning to the execution of a plot.

Law enforcement agencies have increasingly been able to infiltrate this online universe, analysts say, sometimes lurking in the Islamic State's chat rooms on Telegram, the encrypted messaging platform that is the group's preferred medium.

not clear Kuffars actually was a "member"

In 2016, a Toronto teenager, Abdulrahman El Bahnasawy, used the app to make contact with an Islamic State member who went by the screen name Kill Kuffars, meaning infidels. In a series of feverish chats, the two made plans to meet in New York City with the aim of carrying out a "Paris- or Brussels-like terrorist attack," federal authorities said.

Mr. Bahnasawy recruited a third accomplice in the New York area, whom he also met on an encrypted app, and shipped 40 pounds of hydrogen peroxide, the raw ingredient used to make the explosive TATP, to the accomplice's home address. They researched renting a cabin in the woods to assemble the bomb and swapped maps of the New York subway, with arrows indicating where the explosives should be placed.

was he?

An **Islamic State suicide bomber** killed 22 people, many of them teenage girls, at an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester, England, in 2017.

Dave Thompson/Getty Images

traveled to US with his parents
on a family vacation trip

But the New York accomplice was an undercover F.B.I. agent. Mr. Bahnasawy was arrested, days after his 18th birthday, in a hotel parking lot just before reaching the city.

With each arrest, the authorities seize the suspects' cellphones and electronics, download their contacts and study their chats, turning one arrest into an opportunity to roll up an entire network. For more than a year after Mr. Bahnasawy's arrest, the authorities kept his imprisonment secret in an effort not to tip off Kill Kuffars. Kill Kuffars, a 19-year-old American living in Pakistan whose real name is Talha Haroon, was eventually arrested.

"network" = people talking to
those in US were FBI

As terrorist attacks have declined, arrests have soared. In 2014, there were 395 terrorism-related arrests in Europe. In 2016 and 2017 there were more than 700, according to data collected by Kacper Rekawek, who heads the defense and security program at Globsec, a Slovakia-based research institute.

In the United States, more than half of the 77 people charged with Islamic State-related crimes in recent years involved investigations using an undercover informer, according to Seamus Hughes, the deputy director of the Program on Extremism.

The increased arrests have led to pushback from civil liberties groups and accusations of entrapment. Mr. Bahnasawy's family insists that the F.B.I. manipulated him into carrying out acts he would not have done on his own, pointing out that he has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder and was taking antipsychotic medication at the time of his arrest.

mother says he was NOT taking it because it made him fat

Whatever their flaws, the successes in Europe and North America have not been replicated elsewhere.

In Afghanistan, Islamic State attacks are on the rise, while in Southeast Asia and West Africa, the authorities are struggling to contain the group, according to Mr. Roggio. In Syria and Iraq, despite the loss of territory, the Islamic State still has tens of thousands of members, according to estimates by the United Nations and the Pentagon's inspector general, and attacks have increased in three Iraqi provinces.

And although successful attacks are down in Europe, recently foiled plots show that the group has come dangerously close to carrying out a sophisticated mass killing.

can't do mass killing with a poison

In Cologne, Germany, in June, biochemical experts wearing protective suits seized 84 milligrams of ricin from a Tunisian man who had been communicating with the Islamic State on Telegram. He is believed to be the first jihadist in the West to produce the highly toxic biological agent, according to a report by the West Point Combating Terrorism Center, but may not be the last.

Biochemical experts raided an apartment in Cologne, Germany, in June, seizing 84 milligrams of ricin from a Tunisian man who had been communicating with the Islamic State. Thilo Schmuelgen/Reuters

A dose of ricin the size of a grain of salt can kill an adult.

The Islamic State encourages followers to use less sophisticated weapons as well — a knife, a car, **even a rock** — which makes thwarting terrorist attacks a relentless exercise in surveillance.

Alagie Touray, a 21-year-old Gambian, washed up on Italy's shore last year and was offered a room in a refugee center in Pozzuoli. With the stipend of 77 euros, around \$90, from the Italian government, he bought a new Samsung phone and installed the Telegram app. At a table in the refugee center's lunchroom, he recorded and uploaded a video pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

He sent the video to an Islamic State handler in Libya, who instructed him "to get a car and use it to drive it into people," according to the transcript of a preliminary investigation hearing before the Naples District Court.

The plot began to unravel when Italian authorities received a tip that the video's author could be in Naples, said Claudio Galzerano, director for counterterrorism at the Central Directorate of Italy's Prevention Police.

They homed in on the refugee center, matching the furnishings in the cafeteria with the background in the video. Then they found Mr. Touray, and spent several days following him to determine whether he was alone or part of a broader network.

Ten days after recording the video, Mr. Touray was arrested while leaving a mosque in the nearby town of Licola.

During questioning, he insisted that the pledge was a "joke" and that he didn't even known how to drive.

However, investigators point to the WhatsApp message he sent a friend in Gambia two days after he uploaded his oath.

"Don't forget to pray for me," he said. "I'm on a mission."

Elisabetta Povoledo contributed reporting.

LEAVE A COMMENT

the following is an article from the Wall Street Journal about the much stepped-up efforts by European police

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OPINION | COMMENTARY

Europe to Terrorists: It's No More Monsieur Nice Guy

Long seen as weak, the continent in recent years has hardened its defenses against jihadists.

By Thomas Hegghammer

Oct. 7, 2018 6:22 p.m. ET



Policemen in Grande Synthe, France, Oct. 2. PHOTO: PHILIPPE HUGUEN/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

Jihadist terrorism until recently had Europe on the defensive. Now the continent is getting tough and fighting the threat with measures that would have been unthinkable six or seven years ago.

The old notion that Europe is weak on terrorism gained traction in the mid-2010s. Between 2015 and 2017, some 350 people were killed by jihadists across Europe. Terrorism rose to the top of polls of public concerns, and criticism of European counterterrorism capabilities grew explicit. A PBS “Frontline” investigation into the 2016 Brussels attacks revealed “a scale of dysfunction remarkable in the annals of modern counterterrorism.” Many wondered if Europe was up to the task of defending itself.

But the continent stepped up in a way that many observers, including me, didn’t foresee. European countries poured money into counterterrorism and improved intelligence sharing. They also initiated a qualitative overhaul involving radical new measures that had previously been considered politically off-limits.

Preventing citizens from going off to places like Syria to fight was once considered legally difficult. Many European law-enforcement agencies now

prosecute anyone merely planning to go abroad to join a jihadist group. Jihadist recruitment organizations proliferated in Northern Europe until the early 2010s because authorities struggled to pin them to crimes. Around 2013, however, governments started cracking down. Firebrand clerics also found themselves treated more severely. Britain extradited the London-based sheikh Abu Qatada to Jordan in 2013 and shipped the hard-line Finsbury Park Mosque Imam Abu Hamza to the U.S., where he was sentenced to life in prison in 2015.

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Censorship of extremist internet material, once seen as both unfeasible and authoritarian, is now common and has significantly reduced the availability of jihadist propaganda. A new European Union law imposes fines on internet companies that fail to remove extremist material within 60 minutes. The censorship may not be limited to digital materials. This year a European Parliament special committee recommended that member countries “ban and remove all religious literature within their territory that incites to violent and terrorist acts.”

France passed a law in 2017 making it easier to shut down radical mosques. Austria closed seven mosques and deported 60 imams this year. Italy has deported 313 extremists since 2015. Britain stripped more than 100 suspected Islamist militants of their citizenship in 2017. These measures come on top of a substantial increase in terrorism-related arrests and convictions across the continent.

Last but not least is the increased willingness to use military force against jihadist groups outside Europe. The anti-Islamic State coalition deployed to Iraq in 2014 had a large European component, and some countries have sent special forces to Iraq to detain or kill their own citizens fighting alongside Islamic State.

These new practices have been accompanied by more-aggressive rhetoric, reminiscent of the Bush administration after 9/11. In his speech after the Paris attacks in November 2015, then-President François Hollande declared that “France is at war,” and in 2017 Foreign Minister Florence Parly said: “If jihadists die in the fighting, then I’d say it’s for the best.”

This hardening of European attitudes toward terrorism didn’t happen overnight. It’s part of a longer trend that began after 9/11 and accelerated starting in 2012, when European foreign fighters started going to Syria in large numbers. We should not exaggerate its repressive character. Torture and other egregious practices aren’t on the table, and the hard measures have been accompanied by many soft programs to prevent and mitigate violent extremism. The hardening is also uneven, with France adopting a tougher approach than countries like Sweden. Still, the changes are substantial and amount to a paradigm shift in European counterterrorism.

It’s still early, but the new approach appears to be working. There are fewer European jihadists fighting on foreign battlefields. Domestic attacks and casualties are substantially down in 2018—not because plotting has decreased, but because authorities are foiling more attempts. For the longer term, the main challenge will be preventing militants who come out of prison from regrouping.

Europe’s struggle with jihadism is far from over. The new, more muscular approach poses serious questions about civil liberties, minority rights and

radicalization in prisons. But Europe can no longer be described as soft on terrorism.

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Mr. Hegghammer is a senior research fellow at The Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI) and author of “Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979.”

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Canada

<https://globalnews.ca/news/4274935/canadian-isis-plot-new-york/>

He plotted to bomb Times Square for ISIS. Records show he's mentally ill. Is he a terrorist?

By Stewart Bell and Brian Hill
June 20th, 2018

arrest: May 21, 2016

To Khadiga Metwally, the medical records spread across her kitchen table are more than a chronicle of her son's history of **addiction and mental illness**; they are proof he is not a terrorist.

Abdulrahman El Bahnasawy, a 20-year-old Canadian, faces a possible life sentence when he appears in a New York courtroom as early as next month for plotting a 2016 bombing at Times Square for the so-called Islamic State.

But his mother insists the case is not what it seems.

WATCH: Is Canadian man a terrorist or suffering from mental illness?

"Actually, it's not a terrorist case, it's a mental illness problem," Metwally said in an interview at her home in an Oakville, Ont. suburb.

"We have all the reports that confirm that my son was sick."

Those reports describe **brain damage, bipolar disorder, obsessiveness and drug use beginning at age 14 that led to "huffing" — inhaling air fresheners, bug spray and anything else he could get his hands on.**

In many ways, El Bahnasawy's story is familiar: a youth radicalizes online and decides to kill in the name of ISIS. But medical records from four countries obtained by Global News make it more complicated.

The documents
are an
unprecedented
and intimate look
at the psyche of a
young man who
plotted mass
killings in the
West under the
guidance of ISIS.

And they raise complicated questions.

To what extent does mental health explain the actions of some terrorists? Should terrorists with a history of mental illness be treated differently? Is a person with a mental illness, who engages in terrorism, still a terrorist?



Abdulrahman El Bahnasawy (right) with parents Osama El Bahnasawy (centre) and Khdiga Metwally.

The teen addict

“Abdulrahman has an extensive history of mental health problems and poor function, dating back to childhood,” according to a report by New York psychologist Katherine Porterfield, who reviewed El Bahnasawy’s medical files, met his family and spent 50 hours with him over nine months in 2017.

The medical records date back to the day he was born. In the delivery room in Kuwait City, his mother had a severe uterine rupture. The baby was delivered “swiftly,” according to the hospital report, but the traumatic birth may have deprived the infant of oxygen, possibly causing brain damage.

WATCH: Parents of Canadian caught in ISIS terror probe describe son’s history of mental illness and drug addiction

El Bahnasawy **did not speak until he was four**, according to Porterfield’s report for the U.S. legal defence team. He was an average student, “described as an anxious, hyperactive, and inattentive child.”

“His most consistent trait was his tendency to fixate or obsess about certain topics or interests,” Porterfield wrote. The solar system, soccer, computers and atheism all monopolized his attention during stages of his childhood. And once he tried marijuana, it became the latest of his all-encompassing obsessions.

He began “incessantly” talking about it. He researched how to grow it and droned on about how much he loved it. He argued with his parents about its benefits. “He essentially showed no interest in any other activities,” the psychologist wrote.

To get him away from what they saw as Canada’s “permissive society,” and hoping he would benefit from being closer to relatives, his parents returned the family to Kuwait. But even in the conservative Gulf state, El Bahnasawy had no trouble finding drugs.

He became addicted to chemical inhalants. When using them, he would hear a man’s voice that he thought came to him over radio waves. “He became one of my only friends and every time I wanted to talk to him I would get high and he was always there,” El Bahnasawy wrote in a letter to the judge hearing his case.



Abdulrahman El Bahnasawy at a mental hospital in Kuwait City.

His parents got him into a Kuwait City hospital, where he was diagnosed with substance addiction and depression. To discourage him from relapsing, his father Osama El Bahnasawy videotaped him shaking from withdrawal.

WATCH: Canadian teen in NYC terror plot suffered withdrawal symptoms in hospital, father says

He stayed for 40 days.

But as soon as he got out, he went right back to drugs.

The family returned to Toronto and, after El Bahnasawy disclosed multiple suicide attempts and thoughts of throwing himself off the apartment balcony, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) admitted him.

CAMH records list the substances he had used: heroin, cannabis, LSD, mescaline, amphetamines, crack and ecstasy, among others. His files indicate he “did well” at the

facility. But when he was discharged, he returned to drugs.

The family next tried a private addiction clinic in Alexandria, Egypt. The Alriyada Hospital thought the underlying problem was bipolar disorder, along with “fits of obsession together with psychotic symptoms,” records show. After seven months, he came out in June 2015, finally off drugs.

El Bahnasawy was 17 when he returned to Toronto and he knew nobody. The medication he was taking seemed to work but it made him gain weight and he stopped taking it. His mother tried slipping it into meals but he found out.



Although he hadn't previously identified as a Muslim, El

Abdulrahman El Bahnasawy spent much of his adolescence in hospitals.

Bahnasawy rediscovered the faith after his parents forced him to attend a Mississauga Islamic school, which they felt would not tolerate drug use.

But like everything else, he took it to the extreme. He dropped out of school and did nothing but sit in his room exploring violent jihadist Internet content and chatting online with ISIS supporters.

“Much as he had done with drugs, Abdulrahman put all of his energy and focus into this activity online, even speaking compulsively to his parents and sister about his new beliefs,” Porterfield wrote.

The Plot

In the fall of 2015, ISIS members in Syria were desperately trying to launch attacks in Western countries. Abu Saad al-Sudani was one of them. U.S. prosecutors called him a “high-level ISIS recruiter and attack planner” active in plotting terrorism in the U.S., Canada and Britain.

Alone in his bedroom in suburban Ontario, El Bahnasawy, began to correspond with al-Sudani. He told al-Sudani he wanted to join ISIS. Al-Sudani said El Bahnasawy would need to prove himself first, so he bought cellphones and collected \$500, which he sent to a list of names and addresses al-Sudani had provided.

Having passed his initiation, El-Bahnasawy was encouraged by al-Sudani to help ISIS achieve its ultimate fantasy: an attack on U.S. soil. The target was to be New York City, and the killings were to take place in June or July 2016, to coincide with the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.



Abdulrahman El Bahnasawy at Toronto's Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

A U.S. citizen living in Pakistan named Talha Haroon joined the attack plot and they agreed the operation would involve bombings and mass shootings at a concert venue or the subway, prosecutors alleged. Then a third plotter joined in, a U.S.-based member of the ISIS online network.

The conspirators "repeatedly declared their allegiance to ISIS" and said they wanted their attack to be like those in Paris and Brussels, prosecutors said. El Bahnasawy said he wanted to carry out the next 9/11.

"These Americans need an attack," he wrote.

To prepare for the big day, El Bahnasawy bought bomb-making materials and components in Ontario, including 40 pounds of hydrogen peroxide, and shipped them to his U.S. contact.

On May 1, 2016, he sent the U.S.-based conspirator images and maps of the New York subway system that showed the routes the attackers would take and the subway lines they would strike, the prosecutors said.

Needing more money to see the operation through, El Bahnasawy consulted al-Sudani, who put him in touch with "The Doctor," a Philippine citizen named Russell Salic, who allegedly wired \$423 on May 11, 2016.



In the final weeks, El Bahnasawy made plans to travel to New York, using his

"My son is sick," Khadiga Metwally said of her son Abdulrahman El Bahnasawy.

parents as decoys. He told his U.S. contact he would be arriving "under the guise" of a family vacation. "I will be masked behind my parents back," he wrote.

The day before the road trip, Haroon wrote that Times Square would be the perfect target. "We have to make an ocean out of their blood," he wrote, "scar them for life knowing the soldiers of Allah are everywhere."

The attack was to be a suicide mission, which Porterfield thought was telling. In her report, the psychologist said the hopelessness El Bahnasawy felt about beating addiction had led him to contemplate suicide. And the messaging of the extremist community offered him a path to that end.

"It is my clinical opinion that, below the surface of his submission to Islam and embrace of enslavement to the law of Allah there lurked a self-destructiveness," she wrote.

"Essentially, Abdulrahman was engaged in a fantasy, the ultimate ending of which was his own destruction. As frightening as his ideas were, they can best be understood as psychological in nature — the terribly misguided thinking of a depressed young person who could not beat addiction."

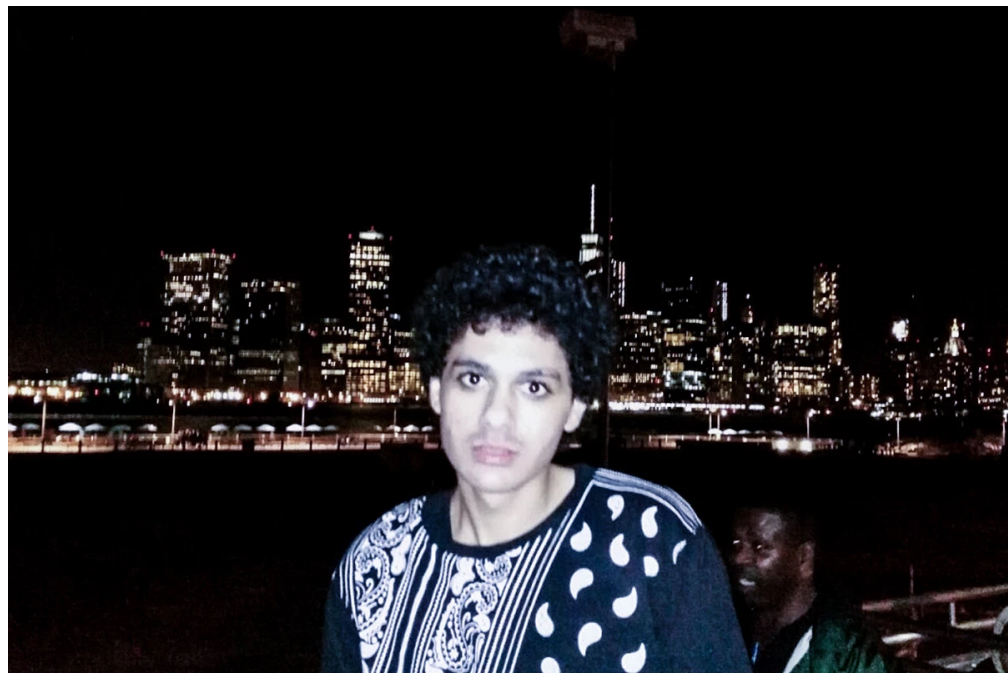
The Road Trip

The holiday in New York was

planned for the Victoria Day long weekend. Osama said he felt it would be good for the family and there was reason to celebrate.

After months of being turned away by psychiatrists who either did not treat bipolar disorder or weren't taking new patients, they had finally found a doctor for their son. The

appointment was set for the Tuesday after the long weekend. El Bahnasawy had also agreed to go back to school.



Abdulrahman El Bahnasawy posed in front of the New York City skyline, Oct. 16, 2015.

WATCH: Family vacation upended when FBI arrests son over ISIS terror plot

They had no trouble crossing the border and saw nothing out of the ordinary on the drive. They got to the hotel in Cranford, New Jersey at about 10 p.m. and pulled into the parking lot.

That was when three cars surrounded them.

"We thought they were gangs. We didn't know what was going on," Osama said. "They said, 'No, no, no, we are the FBI,' and they showed us their cards."

They searched the car and took the 18-year-old away.

The Prisoner

The family was in the courtroom the next day when El Bahnasawy was indicted. Metwally said they were all crying so much she had trouble hearing the seven counts of terrorism being read into the court record.

Like many before him, El Bahnasawy had been brought down by an undercover counter-terrorism operation. The U.S.-based co-conspirator was actually an FBI informant. All their conversations had been monitored.

That October, El Bahnasawy phoned home to say he was on his way to court to plead guilty. Metwally said she begged him not to do it. "I was like screaming, crying, and he was like, 'Mom, calm down.'"

Although records show a U.S. Bureau of Prisons doctor had assessed El Bahnasawy as having "unspecified schizophrenia and other psychotic disorder," the judge found him "competent and capable" of pleading guilty.

"In the spring of 2016, I agreed with others to carry out an attack in Times Square, to support ISIL," he said in his plea. "Specifically, we agreed to try to set off a bomb in Times Square. I used the Internet and sent materials through the mail in furtherance of the conspiracy, and I also travelled from Canada to the United States."

"Was one of the targets of your activities, intended targets, the New York City subway system?" the judge asked.

"Yes," El Bahnasawy said.

His mother doesn't think he was aware of the consequences of his guilty plea. She believes he only did it because he was scared, not taking his medication and wanted to get out of solitary confinement, where he had been sent for drug use and writing pro-ISIS graffiti on his cell wall.

WATCH: Parents of Canadian ISIS plotter say he was under pressure to plead guilty

Metwally doesn't believe he would have gone through with an attack. She believes he needed mental health treatment, not an undercover investigation and prosecution.

She blames the FBI for what she sees as the entrapment of a sick youth. She blames the RCMP, which cooperated with the investigation, for not intervening before her son left Canada.

"I think my son is a victim," Osama added. "By ISIS, this guy Sudani, by the FBI agent and by the RCMP."

The RCMP declined to comment on the case.

In court filings, the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, Geoffrey Berman, dismissed the notion the undercover agent lured El Bahnasawy, saying the plot was already well underway when it was infiltrated by the FBI.

Nor was El Bahnasawy the "weak-willed and vulnerable victim" the defence made him out to be, Berman said, rejecting a reduced sentence on mental health grounds and noting that El

Bahnasawy was not using drugs during the time of the plot.

He said that during the investigation, the FBI was unaware of El Bahnasawy's medical history, but said mental illness and addiction did not explain or justify what he did.

"Indeed, it is likely that such potential mental instabilities only heightened the threat that El Bahnasawy posed to this country," Berman wrote.

"El Bahnasawy may be polite, soft-spoken, and articulate, but make no mistake — behind that veil is a dangerous and calculating man who displayed a knowing, willing, and steadfast desire to kill."

His parents intend to be at the courthouse for the sentencing.

Originally scheduled for June 27, it was adjourned last Friday until July or September.

Depending on how it goes, El Bahnasawy may never leave prison. They don't believe the life sentence sought by U.S.

prosecutors is appropriate.



"I think my son is a victim," Osama El Bahnasawy said of his son, pictured.

"Of course not," Metwally said.

"Whatever intention, whatever happened, my son is sick and he was manipulated in a very cruel, unfair way."

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Charges Unsealed Against Three Men for Plotting to Carry out Terrorist Attacks in New York City for ISIS in the Summer of 2016

The Planned Attacks, Thwarted by Law Enforcement, Included the Detonation of Explosive Devices in Times Square and the New York City Subway System

Acting Assistant Attorney General for National Security Dana J. Boente, Acting U.S. Attorney Joon H. Kim for the Southern District of New York, Assistant Director in Charge William F. Sweeney Jr. of the FBI's New York Field Office, Assistant Director in Charge Danny Kennedy of the FBI's Los Angeles Field Office, Special Agent in Charge Calvin A. Shivers of the FBI's Denver Field Office and Commissioner James P. O'Neill of the NYPD, announced the Court's unsealing of federal terrorism charges against three men alleged to have plotted attacks on New York City during the summer of 2016 in support of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), which were thwarted by law enforcement. All three men have been arrested, and one has pleaded guilty.

The defendants are: Abdulrahman El Bahnasawy, a 19-year-old Canadian citizen; Talha Haroon, a 19-year-old U.S. citizen residing in Pakistan; and Russell Salic, a 37-year-old Philippine citizen. Communicating through Internet messaging applications, these three men allegedly plotted to conduct bombings and shootings in heavily populated areas of New York City during the Islamic holy month of Ramadhan in 2016, all in the name of ISIS (the NYC Attacks). El Bahnasawy purchased bomb-making materials and helped secure a cabin within driving distance of New York City to use for building the explosive devices and staging the NYC Attacks. Haroon allegedly made plans to travel from Pakistan to New York City to join El Bahnasawy in carrying out the attacks, and traveled within Pakistan to meet with explosives experts in furtherance of the plot. And as El Bahnasawy and Haroon prepared to execute the NYC Attacks, Salic allegedly wired money from the Philippines to the United States to help fund the terrorist operation.

- The planned attacks included detonating bombs in Times Square and the New York City subway system and shooting civilians at specific concert venues.
- Law enforcement – the FBI and the NYPD – successfully thwarted this terrorist plot. An undercover FBI agent (the UC) convinced the defendants that the UC was an ISIS supporter prepared to carry out the attacks with them.
- El Bahnasawy, who has been in custody since he was arrested by the FBI in May 2016, pleaded guilty to terrorism offenses and is awaiting sentencing.
- Haroon and Salic have been arrested in foreign countries by foreign authorities in connection with these charges and it is the hope and expectation of this Office and U.S. law enforcement that they will be extradited to the United States to face justice in a United States court.

On May 21, 2016, El Bahnasawy was arrested in New Jersey, after traveling to the United States from Canada in preparation for carrying out the NYC Attacks. Haroon was arrested in Pakistan in or about September 2016, and Salic was arrested in the Philippines in or about April 2017. El Bahnasawy pleaded guilty on Oct. 13, 2016, to a seven-count Superseding Information before U.S. District Judge Richard M. Berman. Today, the Court unsealed the Superseding Information and El Bahnasawy's guilty plea, as well as the Complaint and Indictment previously filed against El Bahnasawy.^[1] The Court also unsealed today the five-count Complaint charging Talha Haroon (the Haroon Complaint), and the seven-count Complaint charging Russell Salic (the Salic Complaint), based on their alleged participation with EL Bahnasawy in the plot to carry out the NYC Attacks.

According to the allegations in the Haroon Complaint and the Salic Complaint^[2]; the Complaint, Indictment, and Superseding Information filed against El Bahnasawy; and the transcript of El Bahnasawy's guilty plea^[3]:

In the spring of 2016, El Bahnasawy and Haroon were plotting to carry out terrorist attacks in New York City in support of ISIS during the Islamic holy month of Ramadhan (which ran from approximately June 5 to July 5 in 2016). In the course of their preparations, El Bahnasawy and Haroon communicated, via electronic messaging applications accessible on cellphones, with a certain individual posing as an ISIS supporter who was, unbeknownst to them, the UC.

El Bahnasawy and Haroon declared their allegiance to ISIS in electronic communications with the UC, and expressed their intention of carrying out Paris- and Brussels-like terrorist attacks on behalf of ISIS in New York City. El Bahnasawy explained to the UC that he was in contact with an ISIS affiliate about obtaining official sanction of the planned attacks by the Khorasan Province, a branch of ISIS active in Pakistan. Haroon, who was based in Pakistan and was introduced to the UC by El Bahnasawy, informed the UC that he was in contact with ISIS associates within the Khorasan Province, and that "khurasan dawla [ISIS] has o [u]r back." El Bahnasawy stated to the UC that "[t]hese Americans need an attack," that he aspired to "create the next 9/11," and that he planned to "com[e] to new York at around may 22" from Canada. Haroon stated that he intended to fly from Pakistan to New York City to carry out the NYC Attacks with El Bahnasawy, and hoped to "cause great destruction to the filthy kuffars" by our hands."^[4]^[5]

El Bahnasawy and Haroon identified multiple locations and events in and around New York City as targets of the planned attacks, including the New York City subway system, Times Square, and certain concert venues. For example, on May 1, 2016, El Bahnasawy sent the UC multiple images of maps of the New York City subway system containing markings that depicted plans for attacking the subway system, including by identifying the subway lines in which explosives would be detonated as part of the NYC Attacks. On May 12, 2016, El Bahnasawy sent the UC an image of Times Square and stated: "[W]e seriously need a car bomb at times square. . Look at these crowds of people!" That same day, El Bahnasawy also expressed his desire to "shoot up concerts cuz they kill a lot of people." El Bahnasawy described the plan to attack concerts as follows: "[W]e just walk in with guns in our hands. That's how the Paris guys did it."

On May 5, 2016, Haroon expressed to the UC that the subway was a "perfect" target, that they should shoot as many passengers on the train as possible, including "women or kids," and that "when we run out of bullets we let the vests go off." That same day, Haroon discussed with the UC the necessary supplies for making explosive devices for use in the NYC Attacks. On May 9, 2016, Haroon stated to the UC: "NY Needs to fall. It's a must."

During May 2016, El Bahnasawy, while in Canada, purchased an array of bomb-making materials for use in the NYC Attacks, including approximately 40 pounds of **hydrogen peroxide** (the “Hydrogen Peroxide”) – which is a primary ingredient in TATP (triacetone triperoxide), a powerful explosive commonly used in improvised explosive devices. El Bahnasawy also purchased, among other things, **batteries, Christmas lights, thermometers, and aluminum foil** for use in constructing explosive devices to carry out the NYC Attacks.

Meanwhile, in Pakistan, based on Haroon’s communications with the UC, **Haroon traveled to a certain city to meet with an explosives expert** for the purpose of obtaining additional information to be used in building bombs for the planned NYC Attacks. Haroon advised that they would need “perming cords” (i.e., detonator cords) for constructing the improvised explosive devices, and conveyed his expectation that El Bahnasawy was acquiring “all that’s needed.” Haroon repeatedly expressed his commitment to travel to New York City as soon as feasible to carry out the planned attacks in support of ISIS, and described the steps that he had taken to renew the necessary travel documents to enable him to exit Pakistan and travel to the United States for the purpose of carrying out the NYC Attacks.

In early May 2016, El Bahnasawy informed the UC that El Bahnasawy had been communicating with Salic – who was known to El Bahnasawy as “Abu Khalid” and “the doctor” – about providing additional funding for the NYC Attacks. El Bahnasawy further informed the UC that Salic was a trusted ISIS supporter who had provided funding in support of ISIS on prior occasions. El Bahnasawy advised that Salic would send approximately \$500 to help fund the NYC Attacks, and that the money sent by Salic would be used to acquire additional ammunition and bomb-making materials for carrying out the attacks. El Bahnasawy informed the UC that he had sent the UC’s account information to Salic so that Salic could transfer money to the United States in support of the NYC Attacks, and El Bahnasawy provided the UC with Salic’s contact information on an electronic messaging application, to enable Salic to execute the planned money transfer.

Shortly thereafter, Salic, using the alias Abu Khalid, began messaging with the UC. Salic informed the UC that he had been in contact with El Bahnasawy, and that Salic was prepared to transfer money to the United States to help fund the NYC Attacks. **Salic, who allegedly maintained an active pro-ISIS social media presence**, also conveyed that he had previously sent money to multiple other countries in support of ISIS, and expressed his allegiance to ISIS. For example, on May 9, 2016, Salic informed the UC that he was “desperate” to travel to Syria to join ISIS. Salic also expressed his belief that he could safely send money to support the NYC Attacks from the Philippines, where he claimed to be at the time, without attracting law enforcement scrutiny, stating: “[I]t’s not strict here. Unlike in Aus [Australia] or UK [the United Kingdom] even liking FB [Facebook] status will put[] u in jail . . . Terrorists from all over the world usually come here as a breeding ground for terrorists . . . hahahaha . . . But no worry here in Philippines. They don’t care about IS [ISIS]. lol[] Only in west.”

On May 11, 2016, **Salic sent approximately \$423 from the Philippines to the UC to help fund the planned NYC Attacks**. Salic also informed the UC that he **intended to continue sending additional money** in support of ISIS in the future, stating: “In Sha Allah once we have the blessings again we will distribute again.”

As described above, El Bahnasawy acquired an array of bomb-making materials for use in carrying out the NYC Attacks. In mid-May 2016, **El Bahnasawy shipped those bomb-making materials, including the Hydrogen Peroxide, to the UC in the United States**. **El Bahnasawy planned to build the explosive devices and prepare for the NYC Attacks with Haroon and the UC at a rural cabin** within driving distance of New York City. El Bahnasawy helped to secure such a cabin for a period beginning in late May 2016, when he planned to arrive in the New York City area. El Bahnasawy informed the UC that the cabin would need to

contain a refrigerator for purposes of making the explosives, and that El Bahnasawy wanted to “practise shooting” at the cabin site if it was not “too close to people.”

On May 12, 2016, when the UC sent Salic a photograph of the Hydrogen Peroxide that El Bahnasawy had purchased for use in the NYC Attacks, Salic reiterated his support for the planned attacks, and Salic also conveyed that if he was unable to travel to Syria to join ISIS, he might carry out an attack himself. During subsequent communications with the UC, Salic described New York City as “the capital of Kufr [Kuffar],” and stated that “[i]t would be a great pleasure if we can slaughter” people in New York City. Salic further conveyed to the UC that he would be praying to Allah for the success of the operation when the planned attacks were imminent.

On May 20, 2016, Haroon conveyed to the UC that Times Square was “a perfect spot to hit them,” and suggested that the plan could include “[d]rive by or we surround the whole street and trap them and kill as many as possible.” In the course of his communications with the UC, Haroon also stated: “I wanna kill . . . them in thousands”; and “we have to make a ocean out of their blood[.] Leave no one standing.” Haroon reiterated his intention of traveling to New York City, and discussed attempting to execute the attacks as soon as Memorial Day (i.e., May 30, 2016), stating that “that’s a day that will change history” and that the attacks “will scar them for life knowing the soldiers of Allah are everywhere and ready.”

On May 21, 2016, El Bahnasawy traveled from Canada to the New York City area, in preparation for staging and ultimately carrying out the NYC Attacks with Haroon. In coordination with Canadian law enforcement, U.S. law enforcement closely monitored El Bahnasawy’s travel to the United States on May 21, 2016, and El Bahnasawy was arrested by the FBI that night in Cranford, New Jersey. Haroon was subsequently arrested in Pakistan based on the charges in the Haroon Complaint, and Salic was subsequently arrested in the Philippines based on the charges in the Salic Complaint.

* * *

The chart below reflects: (i) the charges in the Superseding Information to which El Bahnasawy, 19, of Mississauga, Canada, pled guilty; (ii) the charges in the Haroon Complaint filed against Haroon, 19, a U.S. citizen residing in Pakistan; and (iii) the charges in the Salic Complaint filed against Salic, 37, of the Philippines.

CHARGE	STATUTE	DEFENDANTS CHARGED (COUNT)	MAXIMUM PENALTY
Conspiracy to use weapons of mass destruction	18 U.S.C. § 2332a	El Bahnasawy (1) Haroon (1) Salic (1)	Life in prison
Conspiracy to commit acts of terrorism transcending national boundaries	18 U.S.C. § 2332b	El Bahnasawy (2) Haroon (2) Salic (2)	Life in prison
Conspiracy to bomb a place of public use and public transportation system	18 U.S.C. § 2332f	El Bahnasawy (3) Haroon (3) Salic (3)	Life in prison
Conspiracy to provide material support and resources to terrorists	18 U.S.C. § 2339A	El Bahnasawy (4) Haroon (4) Salic (4)	15 years in prison
Attempted provision and provision of material support and resources to terrorists	18 U.S.C. § 2339A	El Bahnasawy (5) Salic (5)	15 years in prison

Conspiracy to provide material support and resources to a designated foreign terrorist organization, i.e., ISIS	18 U.S.C. § 2339B	El Bahnasawy (6) Haroon (5) Salic (6)	20 years in prison
Attempted provision and provision of material support and resources to a designated foreign terrorist organization, i.e., ISIS	18 U.S.C. § 2339B	El Bahnasawy (7) Salic (7)	20 years in prison

The maximum potential sentences in this case are prescribed by Congress and are provided here for informational purposes only, as any sentencing of the defendants will be determined by a judge. The charges contained in the Haroon Complaint and the Salic Complaint are merely accusations, and Haroon and Salic are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

As noted above, El Bahnasawy was arrested in New Jersey on May 21, 2016, and has remained in custody since that date. On Oct. 13, 2016, El Bahnasawy pled guilty to the seven-count Superseding Information. El Bahnasawy is scheduled to be sentenced on Dec. 12. Haroon was arrested in September 2016 in Pakistan in connection with the charges in the Haroon Complaint, and proceedings for his extradition to the United States are currently pending in Pakistan. Salic was arrested in April 2017 in the Philippines in connection with the charges in the Salic Complaint, and proceedings for his extradition to the United States are currently pending in the Philippines.

Mr. Boente and Mr. Kim 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 NYPD, and the FBI's Los Angeles and Denver Field Offices. Mr. Kim also thanked the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the FBI's Cleveland Field Office, the FBI's Legal Attaché Offices in Canada, Pakistan, and the Philippines, the New York State Police, the Department of Justice's Office of International Affairs, the Counterterrorism Section of the Department of Justice's National Security Division, and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Central District of California for their assistance.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys George D. Turner and Negar Tekeei of the Southern District of New York are in charge of the prosecution, with assistance from Trial Attorneys Joshua Champagne and Larry Schneider of the National Security Division's Counterterrorism Section.

[1] Certain portions of the transcript of El Bahnasawy's guilty plea remain sealed pursuant to judicial order. Those portions have been redacted from the version of the transcript unsealed today.

[2] As the introductory phrase signifies, the entirety of the texts of the Haroon Complaint and the Salic Complaint, and the descriptions of the allegations against Haroon and Salic in those charging documents set forth herein, constitute only allegations, and should be treated as allegations. El Bahnasawy has pled guilty, so as to him, the descriptions are not merely allegations.

[3] The Complaint, Indictment, and Superseding Information filed against El Bahnasawy refer to Haroon as "CC-1" and to SALIC as "CC-2." The Haroon Complaint refers to El Bahnasawy as "CC-1" and to SALIC as "CC-2." The Salic Complaint refers to El Bahnasawy as "CC-1" and to Haroon as "CC-2."

[4] "Kuffar" generally means "disbelievers."

[5] Unless otherwise indicated, the communications quoted herein have not been altered to correct for grammatical, spelling, or other errors that exist in the original communications.

Attachment(s):

[Download el_bahnasawy superseding information.pdf](#)

[Download u.s. v. salic complaint.pdf](#)

[Download u.s. v. talha haroon complaint.pdf](#)

[Download el_bahnasawy complaint.pdf](#)

[Download el_bahnasawy indictment.pdf](#)

Topic(s):

Counterterrorism

Component(s):

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