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New Jersey Man Sentenced To 12 Years in Prison for Receiving Military-Type Training From Hezbollah, Marriage Fraud and Making False Statements

The Justice Department today announced that Alexei Saab, aka Ali Hassan Saab, aka Alex Saab, aka Rachid, 46, was sentenced to 12 years in prison followed by three years of supervised release for receiving military-type training from Hezbollah, marriage fraud, and making false statements.

According to court documents, Saab was convicted by a jury in May 2022 after a two-week trial. The sentence was imposed by the Honorable Paul G. Gardephe, who also presided over the trial.

According to court documents and evidence presented at trial, Hezbollah is a Lebanon-based Shia Islamic organization with political, social and terrorist components. Hezbollah was founded in the 1980s with support from Iran after the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, and its mission includes establishing a fundamentalist Islamic state in Lebanon. Since Hezbollah's formation, the organization has been responsible for numerous terrorist attacks that have killed hundreds, including U.S. citizens and military personnel. In 1997, the U.S. Department of State designated Hezbollah a Foreign Terrorist Organization, pursuant to Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, and it remains so designated today. In 2001, pursuant to Executive Order 13224, the U.S. Department of Treasury designated Hezbollah a Specially Designated Global Terrorist entity. In 2010, State Department officials described Hezbollah 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 component of Hezbollah responsible for the planning and coordination of intelligence, counterintelligence, and terrorist activities on behalf of Hezbollah 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. The detonation killed six people and injured 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, and a seizure of similar chemicals in May 2015 in connection with the arrest of another IJO operative. In June 2017, two IJO operatives were arrested in the U.S and charged with terrorism-related offenses in the Southern District of New York. In May 2019, a jury convicted one of those two IJO operatives on all counts, and in December 2019, he was sentenced principally to 40 years in prison.

Saab joined Hezbollah in 1996. Saab's first Hezbollah operations occurred in Lebanon, where he was tasked with observing and reporting on the movements of Israeli and Southern Lebanese Army soldiers in Yaroun, Lebanon. Among other things, Saab reported on patrol schedules and formations, procedures at security checkpoints, and the vehicles used by soldiers. Saab also, alongside his brother, planted an improvised explosive device that detonated and hit Israeli soldiers, seriously injuring at least one.

In approximately 1999, Saab attended his first Hezbollah training. The training was focused on the use of firearms, and Saab handled and fired an AK-47, an M16 rifle, and a pistol, and threw grenades. In 2000, Saab transitioned to membership in Hezbollah's unit responsible for external operations, the IJO, and he then received extensive training in IJO tradecraft, weapons, and military tactics, including how to construct and detonate bombs and other explosive

devices and how to best use these devices in attacks. Specifically, Saab received detailed instruction in, among other things, triggering mechanisms, explosive substances, detonators, and the assembly of circuits. In pre-arrest interviews with the FBI, Saab was able to diagram multiple improvised explosive devices that would have been viable if constructed as diagrammed.

In 2000, Saab entered the United States. While living in the United States, Saab remained an IJO operative, continued to receive military training in Lebanon, and conducted numerous operations for the IJO. For example, Saab surveilled dozens of locations in New York City — including the United Nations headquarters, the Statue of Liberty, Rockefeller Center, Times Square, the Empire State Building, and local airports, tunnels, and bridges — and provided detailed information on these locations, including photographs, to the IJO. In particular, Saab focused on the structural weaknesses of locations he surveilled in order to determine how a future attack could cause the most destruction. Saab's reporting to the IJO included the materials used to construct a particular target, how close in proximity one could get to a target, and site weaknesses or "soft spots" that the IJO could exploit if it attacked a target in the future. Saab conducted similar intelligence gathering in a variety of large American cities, including Boston and Washington, D.C., Saab admitted that his surveillance was designed to best position the IJO to attack the U.S. in the future. Saab also was tasked by Hezbollah with opening a front company that he could use to obtain fertilizer in the United States for use as an explosives precursor.

In addition to his attack-planning activities in the United States, Saab conducted operations abroad. For example, in or about 2003, Saab attempted to murder a man he later understood to be a suspected Israeli spy. Saab pointed a firearm at the individual at close range and pulled the trigger twice, but the firearm did not fire. Saab also conducted surveillance in Istanbul, Turkey, and elsewhere.

Finally, in or about 2012, Saab entered into a fraudulent marriage in exchange for \$20,000. The purpose of the marriage was for Saab's purported wife to apply for her citizenship. Saab later falsely affirmed, under penalty of perjury, and in connection with his purported wife's efforts to obtain status in the U.S., that the marriage was not for any immigration-related purposes.

Assistant Attorney General Matthew G. Olsen of the Justice Department's National Security Division, U.S. Attorney Damian Williams for the Southern District of New York, and Assistant Director Robert R. Wells of the FBI Counterterrorism Division made the announcement.

The FBI and its New York Joint Terrorism Task Force, which principally consists of agents from the FBI and detectives from the New York City Police Department, investigated the case.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Sam Adelsberg and Jason A. Richman for the Southern District of New York are prosecuting the case, with assistance from Trial Attorneys Jessica Fender and Alexandra Hughes of the National Security Division's Counterterrorism Section.

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