

Beat: News

New Jersey Man Convicted Of Receiving Military-Type Training From Hizballah

Marriage Fraud & Making False Statements

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USPA NEWS - Alexei Saab Was Trained by Hizballah's External Terrorist Operations Component in the Use of Firearms and Bomb-Making and Gathered Intelligence in New York City and Elsewhere in Support of Attack-Planning Efforts.

Damian Williams, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that ALEXEI SAAB, a/k/a "Ali Hassan Saab," a/k/a "Alex Saab," a/k/a "Rachid," was convicted today of receiving military-type training from a designated foreign terrorist organization, Hizballah, marriage fraud conspiracy, and making false statements, following a two-week trial before the Honorable Paul G. Gardephe.

U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said: "A unanimous jury found today that Alexei Saab is guilty of receiving military-type training from Hizballah, a known terrorist organization. The evidence at trial showed that Saab surveilled some of New York's most iconic and highly trafficked locations, such as the U.N. headquarters, Statue of Liberty, Rockefeller Center, Times Square, the Empire State Building, and local airports, tunnels, and bridges— in order to provide critical intelligence on how they could be most effectively attacked. Saab's chilling campaign against the American ideals of liberty and freedom has thankfully come to an end."

According to court documents and evidence at trial:

Hizballah is a Lebanon-based Shia Islamic organization with political, social, and terrorist components. Hizballah 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 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 2001, pursuant to Executive Order 13224, the U.S. Department of Treasury designated Hizballah a Specially Designated Global Terrorist entity. 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 component of Hizballah responsible for the planning and coordination 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, which 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 United States 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 a prison term of 40 years.

SAAB joined Hizballah in 1996. SAAB's first Hizballah 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 Hizballah 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 Hizballah'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 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 also was tasked by Hizballah 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 United States, that the marriage was not for any immigration-related purposes.

SAAB, 44, of Morristown, New Jersey, was convicted of one count of receiving military-type training from a designated foreign terrorist organization, which carries a potential sentence of 10 years in prison; one count of conspiracy to commit marriage fraud, which carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison; and one count of making false statements, which carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison. SAAB was also acquitted of one count of conspiracy to provide material support to Hizballah, one count of citizenship application fraud, and one count of naturalization fraud.

The maximum potential sentences in this case are prescribed by Congress and are provided here for informational purposes only, as the defendant's sentence will be determined by Judge Gardephe.

Mr. Williams praised the outstanding efforts of the FBI's New York Joint Terrorism Task Force, which principally consists of agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and detectives from the New York City Police Department. Mr. Williams also thanked the Counterterrorism Section of the Department of Justice's National Security Division.

This prosecution is being handled by the Office's National Security and International Narcotics Unit. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Sam Adelsberg, Jessica Fender, and Jason A. Richman are in charge of the prosecution, with assistance from Trial Attorney Alexandra Hughes of the Counterterrorism Section.

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