

Two Virginia Men Charged with Terrorism Offenses Related to Attempted Travel to Syria to Join ISIL

Joseph Hassan Farrokh, 28, and Mahmoud Amin Mohamed Elhassan, 25, both of Woodbridge, Virginia, were charged today for criminal activity relating to Farrokh's attempt to travel to Syria to join the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

The charges were announced by Assistant Attorney General for National Security John P. Carlin, U.S. Attorney Dana J. Boente of the Eastern District of Virginia and Assistant Director in Charge Paul M. Abbate of the FBI's Washington Field Office.

Farrokh was arrested yesterday afternoon at the Richmond, Virginia, International Airport as he attempted to board a flight to Chicago, where he intended to board a flight to Amman, Jordan, with an ultimate destination of Syria. Elhassan was arrested yesterday evening in Woodbridge after returning from driving Farrokh to Richmond and being interviewed by FBI agents.

Farrokh, who is a U.S. citizen originally from Pennsylvania, has been charged with attempting to provide material support and resources to ISIL, a designated foreign terrorist organization. Elhassan, who is a legal permanent U.S. resident originally from Sudan, has been charged with aiding and abetting Farrokh's attempt to provide material support and resources to a designated foreign terrorist organization.

According to the criminal complaints, since at least Nov. 20, 2015, Farrokh has been engaged in efforts to leave the United States and join ISIL in Syria. Farrokh met several times with confidential human sources in attempts to work out the details of how and when he could travel to Syria to join ISIL. Farrokh purchased airline tickets on Dec. 21, 2015, for flights departing yesterday from Richmond with an ultimate arrival destination of Jordan. He planned to thereafter travel to Syria to join ISIL. According to the criminal complaints, Elhassan introduced Farrokh to a person who Elhassan believed maintained connections to individuals engaged in jihad overseas, Elhassan knew of Farrokh's plans to travel to Syria to join ISIL and he acknowledged to others that Farrokh was falsely telling his family that he intended to travel to Saudi Arabia to study.

According to the criminal complaints, Elhassan picked up Farrokh yesterday morning and drove him to Richmond, to a location approximately one mile from the airport. Farrokh subsequently took a cab to the airport, checked in for his flight, cleared security and was arrested. After driving Farrokh to Richmond, Elhassan returned to Woodbridge yesterday afternoon and voluntarily consented to an interview by FBI agents. Elhassan acknowledged to the interviewing agents several times that he knew it was illegal to knowingly lie to federal agents, then proceeded to make a number of false statements in response to the agents' questions, according to the criminal complaints.

The initial appearance for both defendants is scheduled for Jan. 19, 2016, at the federal courthouse in Alexandria, Virginia.

If convicted, Farrokh and Elhassan each face a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison. The maximum statutory sentence is prescribed by Congress, and is provided here for informational

purposes, as the sentencing of the defendant will be determined by the court based on the advisory sentencing guidelines and other statutory factors.

The case is being investigated by the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Gordon D. Kromberg and Dennis Fitzpatrick of the Eastern District of Virginia, along with Trial Attorney D. Andrew Sigler of the National Security Division's Counterterrorism Section.