

Feds: Support for attack

Yemeni spoke favorably of truck attack in Times Square like in France

BY JOHN RILEY

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A Yemeni man from Brooklyn who traveled to the Middle East to join the Islamic State terror group later expressed support for a truck attack in Times Square similar to the carnage carried out in Nice, France, according to a federal complaint filed yesterday.

Mohamed Rafik Naji was charged in federal court in Brooklyn with attempting to provide material support to a foreign terrorist group for visiting Turkey and Yemen in 2015 to fight for the Islamic State and then discussing a terror attack with an informant after his re-

turn to the United States.

“If there is a truck, I mean a garbage truck and one drives it there to Times Square and crushes them shshshshshsh,” he said in a taped conversation with the informant. “Times-Square day.”

Prosecutors did not charge that Naji ever successfully joined the Islamic State or that he was on a mission in the United States, but alleged that he spoke favorably of the idea based on what he had seen on the internet.

“They want an operation in Times Square, reconnaissance groups already put out a scene, the Islamic State already put out scenes of Times Square, you un-



JANE ROSENBERG

Mohamed Rafik Naji

derstand,” he said. “I said that was an indication for whoever is smart to know.”

Naji’s discussion of a Times Square attack came on July 19, five days after Tunisian Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhdiel drove a truck into a Bastille Day crowd in Nice, killing 86 people. Yesterday’s charges triggered a statement from Gov. An-

drew M. Cuomo.

“The arrest . . . is a sharp reminder of the evolving threat of global terrorism,” Cuomo said. “While we do not have any specific threat at this time, public safety is paramount and we will continue to work aggressively with all local and federal partners.”

Prosecutors described Naji, 37, as a lawful permanent resident of the United States. He was arrested yesterday and was detained after an appearance in federal court in Brooklyn. His defense attorney last night said Naji has a right to be presumed innocent.

The government said that Naji expressed sympathy for the Islamic State in Facebook posts and communications with the informant and “Individual 1” — a person who appeared to be his wife or girlfriend — dating back

to 2014.

It said that he traveled to Istanbul in March, 2015, and shortly afterward began sending emails from an Internet Protocol address in Yemen, in which he described efforts to get into Islamic State-controlled portions of Yemen and said, “I belong to Islamic State only.”

In one email when “Individual 1” asked if she should have come, Naji allegedly responded, “It’s good and it’s bad no electricity no wifi on certain areas and u need lot money to get aroun and-becareful who u talk to bcuz u end up dead lotta spy’s.”

He returned to the U.S. in September 2015, and subsequently met multiple times with the informant, who recorded conversations about his travel to the Middle East. The conversation about a Nice-style attack in Times Square occurred in July.

\$2M pledged to curb addiction

BY NICOLE FULLER

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Nassau County District Attorney Madeline Singas, seeking to stem the deadly tide of heroin addiction among teenagers, pledged \$2 million yesterday to kick-start emergency drug-addiction treatment for adolescents.

Singas yesterday issued a request for proposals to provide addiction services for adolescents ages 13 to 17 who have overdosed or are in the grips of addiction — seeking to close a crucial gap in care for teens.

The money from the district attorney’s asset-forfeiture funds will be awarded to up to three providers over a three-year period, keeping high-risk teens off the streets as their long-term treatment plans are developed. It is believed to be the first initiative of its kind in the county to target teenagers.

“Addiction is here; it’s real,” Singas said yesterday. “It is affecting our kids at school. It’s affecting people at work. It’s tearing up families and we need to intervene to make sure there are services available.”

Fatal overdoses across Long

Island have shown no signs of slowing down. Nassau clocked a record number of fatal heroin overdoses last year — 58 — and Suffolk tallied more than 100 deaths for the third consecutive year, according to statistics. This although police have used the heroin antidote naloxone, or Narcan, to save hundreds of addicts’ lives last year.

While some parents can afford to send their children to expensive drug-rehabilitation centers, which aren’t always covered by health insurance, Singas said, others are left struggling after a drug-addicted child is released from an emergency room with instructions from well-meaning medical professionals, but without a comprehensive plan to help their child beat addiction.

Steven Chassman, executive director of the Mineola-based Long Island Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, said he was heartened that the district attorney’s office was looking for ways to deal with drug and alcohol abuse, other than through a strictly law enforcement lens.

“We commend DA Singas,” Chassman said. “We gotta do



District Attorney Madeline Singas talks drug addiction treatment for teens. ■ Video: newsday.com/nassau

HOWARD SCHNAPP

more than just lock them up.”

LICADD, in its 60th year, serves more than 1,000 people a month, and around half of the clients are 25 or younger. Services for teens are limited, Chassman said, but are much needed.

The request for proposals requires the providers to be available on a 24-hour basis every day of the year, be at no out-of-pocket cost to clients, and must be licensed by the New York State Office of Alcohol and Sub-

stance Abuse Services.

County Executive Edward Mangano also praised Singas for using money seized from criminal activity to fight the heroin scourge and predicted the plan would be a success.

Singas said her office funding drug treatment isn’t new — citing the \$585,000 used for 35 beds at the Maryhaven’s Hope Crisis Center in Freeport for addicts who overdosed and have nowhere to go — but part of a

larger role as “crime prevention stewards.”

“We’re looking for success here,” Singas said. “It’s not just a bandage and then putting them out on the street again. It’s making sure — how can we make sure this 17-year-old will beat this addiction? What does this 17-year-old need and this family need so that we can up the odds so that they can lead a productive life free of addiction?”