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Citing complexities, judge delays Islamic State support case

By ANDREW SELSKY January 5, 2021

SALEM, Ore. (AP) — A federal judge on Tuesday granted the lawyer for a man charged with helping the Islamic State group maintain an online presence almost a year to prepare for a complicated trial involving classified information.

Hawazen Sameer Mothafar, whose trial had been scheduled to begin Tuesday in Portland, allegedly produced and disseminated Islamic State propaganda and recruiting material through social media platforms. Working from a Portland suburb, Mothafar also distributed online articles that described how to kill and maim with a knife and that encouraged attacks, the indictment says.

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told the judge he needed time to determine what evidence will be presented, what pretrial motions he would file and how much investigating his team needs to do, adding that he assumed it would involve international travel.

Judge Marco Hernandez, speaking in a conference call with the federal prosecutor and Ahlemeyer, set a new trial date of Nov. 1. He noted the case is complicated because of its international aspects, the requirements of classified discovery and other issues.

The case underscores the Islamic State’s focus on a “digital caliphate” to try to inspire attacks around the world. By late 2017, the group had lost most of the territory it seized in Iraq and Syria, and its self-declared caliphate along with it.

“While the Islamic State has lost swaths of territory, it has survived, is conducting significant numbers of attacks, and is leveraging the digital caliphate to promote its narrative,” Maxwell Markusen of the Center for Strategic and International Studies wrote in November 2018.

Mothafar, who lived in the Portland suburb of Troutdale, is accused of editing and producing material for al Anfal, a newspaper that “advocates violent jihad” and receives its orders from Islamic State’s central media office, known as Diwan, the indictment says.

The indictment alleges Mothafar tried to access information on piloting a drone to carry “an object” for an operative for al-Qaida’s North African branch who is in prison in Mauritania. What that object reportedly was, federal officials

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not in jail due to being considered a low flight risk, waived his right to be present at Tuesday’s hearing via video link, Ahlemeyer said.

Jill Sanborn, assistant director of the FBI’s Counterterrorism Division, said when Mothafar was charged in November that “we will aggressively pursue anyone who conspires with or provides material support to a foreign terrorist organization.”

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