

FBI arrests US Army Sergeant in ISIS sting operation

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Ikaika Erik Kang, a sergeant first class in the US Army, has pleaded not guilty to charges of supporting the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The 34-year-old soldier was arrested on July 8 in a sting operation involving six separate FBI agents posing as recruiters for ISIS. He now faces four charges of attempting to provide material aid to a terrorist organization, each carrying a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison and a fine of \$250,000.

According to the affidavit issued to the federal district court in Hawaii, Kang, 34, joined the Army in 2001—only a few months after the September 11 attacks—and began exhibiting erratic behavior following his first deployment to Iraq in 2011. In 2012, Kang's military clearance was revoked because he made threats to "hurt or kill other service members," according to the affidavit. Kang's clearance was reinstated the following year after he complied with certain requirements. He was subsequently redeployed to Afghanistan for almost a year, from 2013 to 2014.

At the time of his arrest, Kang was stationed at Wheeler Army Airfield in Hawaii and was working as an air traffic controller.

Birney Bervar, Kang's court-appointed attorney, stated that 2011 was a "turning point" for Kang in terms of his mental health. He added, "He's a decorated American soldier for 10 years, goes to Afghanistan and comes back, and things start going off the rails."

The sergeant's father, Clifford Kang, has stated that his son suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of his deployment to combat zones.

Bervar has said that he is working on getting Kang a mental health evaluation. He told the *New York Times* on Sunday, "The Army probably should have done some type of medical or mental evaluation before

launching an undercover criminal evaluation."

Fellow defense lawyer Earle Partington added: "Instead of getting him medical care, apparently, the FBI carried on with their sting program, dragging this poor soldier deeper and deeper until they can bring very serious federal charges that will keep him in prison probably for the rest of his life."

Ken Lawson, co-director of the Hawaii Innocence Project, criticized the FBI for what amounted to entrapment. "You just can't press the person too much, you just can't keep egging him on, egging him on, egging him on until finally the person commits the crime that you're trying to charge him with," he said.

Another soldier, Chris Sanders, who was deployed with Kang during his tour in Iraq, described Kang to *Hawaii News Now*. He said, "It's almost like he had no filter. He would just say—literally—whatever was on his mind and it's like he couldn't recognize that it made other people feel uncomfortable." He added that he felt Kang was a "harmless dude."

According to the affidavit, Kang also argued "pro-ISIS views while at work and on-post."

While Army personnel appear to have complained about Kang's erratic and unstable behavior, the Army continued to provide combat training to Kang and allowed him to access secure documents.

The written affidavit fails to provide any evidence that Kang had a plan to provide aid to ISIS prior to meeting with undercover FBI agents who had targeted him. According to the affidavit, Kang had expressed an interest in joining ISIS to an undercover FBI agent around November 2016, but was not willing to buy a plane ticket to Turkey or do anything over the Internet out of fear of being arrested.

Undercover FBI agents also discussed a possible job with Kang, in which he would train people, including

some “Sunni militias.” Kang was supposedly attracted to the job, which he saw as “a way to go join ISIS legally and support the cause.” However, in late May 2017 Kang cancelled a trip to discuss the job.

Continuing to pursue Kang, roughly a month later FBI agents traveled to Honolulu to meet with him, and convinced him to provide them with classified and unclassified military documents, which they claimed they would pass on to ISIS. Metadata from the documents provided by Kang show that he had initially burned them onto a CD on June 21, 2013. However, the affidavit specifies that Kang only became interested in ISIS in 2015, and it is unclear why he kept these documents.

Kang is also accused of helping make military training videos with an FBI agent who he believed was a member of ISIS, and later helped another undercover agent purchase a drone from an electronics store, with half of the money put up by the FBI. He was told by the agents that both the videos and the drone would be brought to the Middle East and used to assist ISIS.

On July 8, Kang swore allegiance to ISIS in a ceremony staged by an FBI agent posing as an ISIS supporter, and expressed a desire to kill “a bunch of people.” He was shortly thereafter arrested by an FBI SWAT team.

While Kang is the first soldier to be arrested by the FBI for allegedly attempting to aid ISIS, the FBI has for years developed sting operations designed to entrap disoriented and unstable individuals in order to justify the ongoing war on terror.

Of the 126 ISIS-related terror cases prosecuted by federal authorities across the US since 2014, roughly two-thirds involved undercover agents or informants conducting “sting” operations, creating “plots” that never would have otherwise existed, according to the Center on National Security at the Fordham University School of Law in New York.

“They’re manufacturing terrorism cases,” Michael German, a former undercover agent with the FBI who now researches national-security law at New York University’s Brennan Center for Justice, told the *New York Times*. “These people are five steps away from being a danger to the United States.”

In one recent case, 25-year-old Robert Lorenzo Hester Jr. was indicted earlier this year on charges of plotting with ISIS to bomb a train station in Kansas

City. Hester, who had posted on Facebook that he had converted to Islam and believed that US abuse of Muslims had to be ended, was targeted by the FBI, who suggested an attack. The agents had to lend him \$20 to buy batteries, duct tape, roofing nails and copper wire that they told him could be used to make a bomb. He proved incapable of buying the materials, and there was never any bomb. Nonetheless, he is in prison awaiting trial on charges of “attempting to provide material support to a foreign terrorist organization and attempting to assist in the use of a weapon of mass destruction.”

In the case of Sergeant Kang, the FBI, with the collusion of the US Army, chose to exploit a soldier’s mental instability—the result of his involvement in the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan—in order to create a justification for further suppression of democratic rights at home and wars abroad.



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