

## **California man convicted of supporting Islamic State no extremist, says former CIA expert**

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A former CIA employee who studies terror networks described Amer Alhaggagi as an internet troll who talked big to get a reaction out of people and look tough, but took no real action.

**FILE** – In this Oct. 7, 2009 file photo, Marc Sageman, of the Foreign Policy Research Institute, testifies on Capitol Hill in Washington before a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing. Sageman, a former CIA employee who studies terror networks, says Amer Alhaggagi, a California man convicted of attempting to support the Islamic State does not have the attributes of an Islamic extremist. Sageman described Alhaggagi at a sentencing hearing on Monday, Dec. 17, 2018, as an Internet troll who talked about making bombs and conducting terror attacks in the San Francisco Bay Area, but was a coward who took little action. (AP Photo/Evan Vucci, File)

**San Francisco:** A California man convicted of attempting to support the Islamic State does not have the attributes of an Islamic extremist despite his discussions about making bombs and planning terror attacks, a former CIA employee who studies terror networks testified Monday.

Marc Sageman described Amer Alhaggagi at a sentencing hearing as an internet troll who talked big to get a reaction out of people and look tough, but took no real action.

“He’s a fabulist. He spins tales,” said Sageman, who evaluated Alhaggagi for the defense. “He wants to show that he’s a mean guy, but he’s really a coward. He really doesn’t do anything.”

Alhaggagi, 23, pleaded guilty in July to creating social media accounts for Islamic State supporters. Prosecutors paint a darker picture of him, saying he accessed an Islamic State bomb-making manual and boasted about a series of attacks he wanted to commit on behalf of the group, including setting off a car bomb outside a gay nightclub.

“His aim was to ‘redefine terror,’ and he promised that if he succeeded, the whole Bay Area (was) gonna be in flames,” lawyers with the US attorney’s office in San Francisco said in a court filing.

They are seeking a sentence of 33 years in prison. Alhaggagi’s attorneys are seeking a sentence of four years.

US District Judge Charles Breyer continued the sentencing hearing to January 8. He said the case was “serious.”

“I don’t think that I’ve had a sentencing as dramatic in the sense of what was done, what was said and what a potential sentence should be,” he said.

Alhaggagi sat in a red jail jumpsuit at the defense table during the hearing, playing with his ponytail at times.

Sageman, a forensic psychiatrist and counter-terrorism consultant, said he has conducted 50 interviews of terrorists. He said Alhaggagi was not that religious and didn’t dress like an Islamic extremist or express anger with the United States like many do.

Alhaggagi told an undercover agent about plans to set fire to the Berkeley hills, poison a large number of people with strychnine and set off multiple explosions using backpacks, according to Sageman.

He told Sageman he lied to the agent and only realised what he had gotten into when the agent took him to a storage facility weeks later to show him barrels of what was supposed to be an explosive agent, Sageman said.

- AP