

2 charged with conspiring with Boston man to help IS group

13/06/2015 12:57 by admin

Boston:Â Two men were charged on 12 June with conspiring to help the Islamic State group by plotting with a Boston terror suspect to kill a conservative blogger known for provoking Muslims.

Nicholas Rovinski, 24, of Warwick, Rhode Island, made a brief appearance in federal court in Boston on Friday on a charge of conspiring to provide material support to terrorists. David Wright, 25, of Massachusetts, was initially arrested last week.

Both men are accused of scheming with Usaama Rahim, 26, of Boston, who was killed last week by terror investigators who had him under 24-hour surveillance. Authorities say Rahim lunged at police with a military-style knife, but his family has questioned that account, noting a knife isn't seen in a grainy surveillance video cited by authorities.

Wright, Rahim's nephew, told the FBI he met Rovinski about a year ago through Facebook, and they began communicating, according to an FBI affidavit.

The affidavit says the three men initially planned to behead a political activist whom law enforcement officials have identified as Pamela Geller, a blogger who campaigned against a mosque near the World TRADE Center site in New York and organized a Prophet Muhammad cartoon contest in Texas.

Rovinski, wearing a blue T-shirt and gray sweatpants, did not enter a plea at Friday's appearance. His lawyer declined to comment afterward. But earlier, Rovinski's mother, Lori, told reporters, "It's not true. That's all I can say. It'll all come out."

Wright's lawyer, Jessica Hedges, didn't immediately return a call seeking comment on the new charge. Wright has been in custody since his arrest last week on a charge of conspiracy to destroy evidence.

Both Rovinski and Wright are schedule to appear in court for a detention hearing June 19. Prosecutors said Friday that they'll ask for Rovinski to be held without bail until his trial because he poses a "significant threat" to public safety.

Wright and Rovinski told authorities that during a meeting with Rahim on May 31, they discussed plans to behead Geller, according to the affidavit. Two days later, Rahim called Wright and told him in a recorded conversation that he had "changed plans" and now wanted to attack "those boys in blue," referring to police, either that day or the following day, the affidavit states.

Wright is accused of encouraging Rahim to "be steadfast in his intentions" and to destroy his phone and wipe his laptop computer to prevent law enforcement from searching them. "In the course of this conversation, Rahim made several statements including his awareness that he might die during the attack," the affidavit states.

About two hours after that conversation, Rahim was approached in a parking lot by Boston police officers and FBI agents. He was shot and killed after he refused commands to drop his knife, responding, "you drop yours," the affidavit says.

The complaint says the men targeted Geller after she organized the May cartoon contest. Muslims generally believe any physical depiction of the Prophet Muhammad is blasphemous. Two men showed up with assault rifles and began firing, and a police officer shot them to death.

Days later, the Islamic State group publicly condemned Geller and called for her "slaughter." "They want to make an example out of me to frighten the rest of the US into silence and submission," Geller wrote in an email to The Associated Press last week after authorities confirmed she was the original target of the plot.

Using social media, Islamic State has called for attacks against residents of countries participating in the US-led coalition against it.

The affidavit says that for the last six months, Rovinski has been posting comments on YouTube and Twitter supporting the Islamic State group. For at least two months, he has viewed videos about making weapons and uploaded them to his YouTube account, the affidavit says.

CNN reported that one of its producers exchanged messages with Rovinski in March as part of research on Americans drawn to jihadists online. "I am not violent at heart but push the wrong button and its (sic) not pretty," he wrote, according to CNN.

During an interview with the FBI after Rahim was killed, Rovinski told agents he converted to Islam two years ago and was drawn to the teachings of the Islamic State group "because they represent the more pure and honest form of the religion."