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Three Men Plead Guilty to Conspiring to Provide Material Support to a Plot to Attack Power Grids in the United States

Domestic Terrorism Plot was in Furtherance of White Supremacist Ideology

Three men pleaded guilty today to crimes related to a scheme to attack power grids in the United States in furtherance of white supremacist ideology.

According to court documents, Christopher Brenner Cook, 20, of Columbus, Ohio; Jonathan Allen Frost, 24, of West Lafayette, Indiana, and of Katy, Texas; and Jackson Matthew Sawall, 22, of Oshkosh, Wisconsin, each pleaded guilty to one count of conspiring to provide material support to terrorists. The charge and plea agreements indicate that the defendants knew and intended that the material support they conspired to provide would be used to prepare for and carry out the federal offense of destroying energy facilities.

"These three defendants admitted to engaging in a disturbing plot, in furtherance of white supremacist ideology, to attack energy facilities in order to damage the economy and stoke division in our country," said Assistant Attorney General for National Security Matthew G. Olsen. "The Justice Department is committed to investigating and disrupting such terrorist plots and holding perpetrators accountable for their crimes."

"These defendants conspired to use violence to sow hate, create chaos, and endanger the safety of the American people," said U.S. Attorney Kenneth L. Parker for the Southern District of Ohio. "As this case shows, federal and state law enforcement agencies are dedicated to working together to protect this country against all enemies, foreign and domestic."

"The defendants in this case wanted to attack regional power substations and expected the damage would lead to economic distress and civil unrest," said Assistant Director Timothy Langan of the FBI's Counterterrorism Division. "These individuals wanted to carry out such a plot because of their adherence to racially or ethnically motivated violent extremist views. When individuals move from espousing particular views to planning or committing acts of violence the FBI will investigate and take action to stop their plans. We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to protect our communities."

"Those inspired to commit terrorist acts in the name of hate pose a serious threat to our nation," said Special Agent in Charge J. William Rivers of the FBI's Cincinnati Field Office. "I am thankful for the Joint Terrorism Task Force and our law enforcement partners who work each day to prevent this type of violence from occurring in our communities."

According to court documents, in fall 2019, Frost and Cook met in an online chat group. Frost shared the idea of attacking a power grid with Cook, and within weeks, the two began efforts to recruit others to join in their plan.

As part of the recruitment process, Cook circulated a book list of readings that promoted the ideology of white supremacy and Neo-Nazism. By late 2019, Sawall – a friend of Cook's – joined the conspiracy and assisted Cook

with online recruitment efforts, operational security and organization.

As part of the conspiracy, each defendant was assigned a substation in a different region of the United States. The plan was to attack the substations, or power grids, with powerful rifles. The defendants believed their plan would cost the government millions of dollars and cause unrest for Americans in the region. They had conversations about how the possibility of the power being out for many months could cause war, even a race war, and induce the next Great Depression.

In February 2020, the co-conspirators met in Columbus, Ohio, to further discuss their plot. Frost provided Cook with an AR-47 and the two took the rifle to a shooting range to train.

Frost also provided Cook and Sawall with suicide necklaces during the Columbus meeting. The necklaces were filled with fentanyl and were to be ingested if and when the defendants were caught by law enforcement. Both Cook and Sawall expressed their commitment to dying in furtherance of their mission.

Upon arriving in Columbus, Sawall and Cook purchased spray paint and painted a swastika flag under a bridge at a park with the caption, "Join the Front." The defendants had additional propaganda plans for their time in Ohio, but they were derailed during a traffic stop, during which Sawall swallowed his suicide pill but ultimately survived.

Court documents detail that Cook and Frost continued to travel together after their Ohio meeting, and drove to Texas in March 2020. Cook stayed in different cities with various juveniles who he was attempting to recruit for their plot.

Cook, Frost and Sawall were each charged with providing material support to terrorism by a bill of information filed on Feb. 7. The defendants face a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Jessica W. Knight for the Southern District of Ohio and Trial Attorney Justin Sher of the National Security Division's Counterterrorism Section are prosecuting this case.

The case was investigated by the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force in Columbus, Milwaukee, Indianapolis and Houston. The U.S. Attorney's Offices in the Eastern District of Wisconsin and Northern District of Indiana provided valuable support.

Attachment(s):

[Download Cook et al. Information](#)
[Download Cook Plea Agreement](#)
[Download Frost Plea Agreement](#)
[Download Sawall Plea Agreement](#)

Topic(s):

Counterterrorism
Domestic Terrorism
National Security

Component(s):

[Federal Bureau of Investigation \(FBI\)](#)
[National Security Division \(NSD\)](#)
[USAO - Ohio, Southern](#)

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