THE CALIPHATE'S LONG TAIL: TWO OCTOBER 2026 US PROSECUTIONS AND THE ISLAMIC STATE CASES THAT DO NOT END

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ARDENT · KEY FINDINGS

The Caliphate's Long Tail: Two October 2026 US Prosecutions and the Islamic State Cases That Do Not End

01 On 19 October 2026 Abdulrahman El Bahnasawy, already serving 40 years for a 2016 plot against New York City, was sentenced to a further 50 years for an attack on prison officers in the Islamic State's name.

02 On 27 October a Brooklyn jury convicted Halima Salman, a US citizen taken to Syria as a teenager, of receiving military-type training from the group.

03 The cases bear on radicalisation in custody, returnees and cross-border evidence.

Summary of the study by the research team · 3 November 2026

SUMMARY

Within eight days in October 2026, two US federal cases showed how long the Islamic State's North American footprint lasts. On 19 October Abdulrahman El Bahnasawy, a Canadian already serving 40 years for a 2016 plot against New York City, was sentenced to a further 50 years for an attack on prison officers in the group's name (US Department of Justice 2026a). On 27 October a Brooklyn jury convicted Halima Salman, a US citizen taken to Syria as a teenager, of receiving military-type training from the group (US Department of Justice 2026b). This paper traces both cases and what they show about radicalisation in custody, returnees and cross-border evidence.

1. CASE ONE: RADICALISATION THAT SURVIVED PRISON

- In May 2016 El Bahnasawy, then a 20-year-old Canadian citizen and resident, travelled from Canada to the New York area to take part in a plot, with Talha Haroon and Russell Salic, to carry

out bombings and shootings in crowded places during Ramadan. An undercover FBI agent had infiltrated the plot (US Department of Justice 2026a; US Attorney's Office, SDNY 2018). He pleaded guilty in the Southern District of New York on 13 October 2016, and the plea was unsealed on 6 October 2017 (US Attorney's Office, SDNY 2017). On 19 December 2018 Judge Richard M. Berman sentenced him to 40 years (US Attorney's Office, SDNY 2018).

- Haroon and Salic have been charged only and are presumed innocent under US law. According to the sources checked, Pakistan's Supreme Court stayed Haroon's extradition in September 2020, and a Manila court approved Salic's extradition on 23 July 2018. No US trial or plea has been found for either man (Dawn 2020; Associated Press 2018).
- On 7 December 2020, at USP Allenwood, he attacked two officers with a weapon made from part of a steel desk. One officer lost his right eye. A note in his sock read "This is a terrorist attack for the Islamic State", and a pledge of allegiance was taped inside his locker (US Department of Justice 2026a).
- On 4 November 2025 he pleaded guilty without condition to eight assault and contraband counts (counts 1–8), and entered a conditional plea to material support (count 9), contesting its factual basis. In an opinion of 21 January 2026 Judge Matthew W. Brann denied the motion to dismiss and found him guilty of that count (United States v. Bahnasawy 2026; Pennlive 2026a).
- On 19 October 2026 he received 50 years, consecutive to the existing term, and was ordered to pay US$3 million in restitution. The guideline range was 30 years to life (Pennlive 2026a), and the prosecution sought 130 years, the total of the statutory maximums (Pennlive 2026b; restitution and the 130-year request are single-source).

Finding. The case is direct evidence that commitment to the Islamic State can last through years of federal custody and lead to violence there. It also shows that material support to a foreign terrorist organisation can be charged for an act committed inside a US prison.

2. CASE TWO: A RETURNEE PROSECUTED A DECADE LATER

- In September and October 2016 Salman, then a minor, was taken by her parents with her eight siblings from the United States towards Islamic State-held Syria (US Department of Justice 2026b).
- At 18, in late 2016 or early 2017, she was married to an Islamic State fighter. The Justice Department says she "voluntarily sought" military-type training linked to the Khatiba Nusaybah, a female battalion, and was authorised to carry an assault rifle and ammunition. Evidence included a training certificate, photographs and video recovered from her husband's phone on the battlefield (US Department of Justice 2026b).
- The Justice Department's Office of International Affairs helped obtain evidence from abroad. No sentencing date has been announced (US Department of Justice 2026b).

Finding. Battlefield digital evidence can sustain convictions nearly ten years later. The fact that she was taken to Syria as a minor, and convicted for conduct at 18, will be central to sentencing and to wider debates on repatriation.

3. THE NORTH AMERICAN NETWORK QUESTIONS

1. **The cross-border dimension.** El Bahnasawy's plot was organised from Canada and carried out across the border. It shows the shared exposure of the two countries that the North America Desk covers.
2. **Custody as a risk environment.** The Allenwood attack raises questions about how the Federal Bureau of Prisons manages people convicted of terrorism offences. The research team found no public review of that incident.
3. **Women and family travel.** Salman was taken to Islamic State territory as a minor with her family and later trained with a female battalion (US Department of Justice 2026b). Women repatriated to Canada from camps in north-east Syria raise comparable questions about evidence.
4. **Legacy caseload.** Both cases come from 2016-era networks. Prosecutors are still working through the Islamic State's peak years even as new online-driven threats emerge.

4. WHAT TO WATCH

- Any sentencing date for Salman before Judge Natasha C. Merle.
- Any appeal by El Bahnasawy on the conditional material-support plea.
- Whether Canadian authorities comment on the El Bahnasawy case.

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