Pro-Palestinian activist went looking to beat Jews at NYC Israel rally – prosecutors

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<https://www.timesofisrael.com/pro-palestinian-activists-planned-violence-at-israel-rally-in-nyc-prosecutors-say/>

A pro-Palestinian activist who committed a series of attacks on Jews in New York City in 2021 and 2022 discussed bringing firebombs to a pro-Israel rally, bragged about antisemitic assaults and plotted how to evade law enforcement, according to federal prosecutors.

Saadah Masoud [pleaded guilty](https://www.timesofisrael.com/new-york-pro-palestinian-activist-pleads-guilty-to-hate-crimes-for-3-attacks-on-jews/) to conspiracy to commit hate crimes in federal court in November as part of a plea agreement. His sentencing for separate attacks on three Jews will be held on Friday in the Southern District Court of New York. He faces up to two years in prison.

In a [sentencing submission](https://static.timesofisrael.com/www/uploads/2023/03/Masoud-doc-38.pdf) last week, prosecutors laid out discussions Masoud held with his associates around the time of the crimes that indicated the attacks were planned and targeted people they believed to be Jewish or Israeli. Masoud’s defense said the attacks were politically and personally motivated.

In May of 2021, around the time of a conflict between Israel and the Hamas terror group, Masoud discussed disrupting a pro-Israel rally in Manhattan in a group chat on the Signal messaging app.

The group discussed bringing weapons to the pro-Israel rally, including Molotov cocktails, prosecutors said.

One of the participants said, ‘Remember, don’t chant out Jews, it’s the Zionists,’ apparently to evade allegations of antisemitism. Many Jewish advocates hold that anti-Zionism is often a cover for antisemitism. Masoud expressed support for the statement in the group chat.

Another participant in the group chat said, ‘Fuck all Jews.’

‘The defendant’s attempt to place his actions in the context of international affairs… should be given little, if any credence,’ prosecutors wrote. ‘The veil of ‘anti-Zionism’ is pathetically thin in this case.’

The group also planned how to evade legal repercussions for the planned attack, reminding each other to cover their faces to hide their identities. Masoud wrote, ‘NO FACE NO CASE.’

In a separate exchange, Masoud celebrated violence against Jews, saying, ‘I beat the shit out of three Zionists yesterday and didn’t even see a jail cell.’

‘VIOLENT!! ONLY VIOLENCE… IN PALESTINE THEY WISHHH THEY COULD SMACK A ZIONIST AND NOT GET TORTURED TO DEATH. WE CAN THO!! And we’ll just get a [desk appearance ticket from the NYPD],’ he said, according to prosecutors. Jewish community leaders in New York City have long said local prosecutors are too lenient in punishments for anti-Jewish hate crimes, lessening deterrence.

The day after Masoud and his associates held the group chat, they went to a pro-Israel protest and picked out a man wearing a Star of David while he was walking with his wife.

‘Are you a fucking Jew?’ Masoud asked the man, then punched him in the face. Afterward, he texted his associates, ‘no videos of me anywhere lmaooo. I’m Gucci. No face no case.’

Less than two weeks later, Masoud and a co-conspirator drove to the Brooklyn home of Heshy Tischler, a contentious, conservative, [well-known figure](https://www.timesofisrael.com/were-at-war-heshy-tischler-the-borough-park-agitator-aiming-for-nyc-council/) in the Orthodox community in Boro Park. Tischler later told prosecutors that Masoud had shouted antisemitic insults at him at a previous Black Lives Matter rally.

Masoud approached Tischler while he was waiting in a car for his wife and granddaughter and threatened him, saying, ‘We know where you live, we’ll get you.’ Tischler got out of the car and attempted to film Masoud, who slapped the phone out of Tischler’s hand. Masoud’s associate then punched Tischler in the face.

A few days later, Masoud wrote in an Instagram message, ‘some jew politician said i assaulted him.’ He played down the offense, saying, ‘assault 3, menacing… my lawyer fire… got me out no bail.’

In the third attack, Masoud [pursued and beat a Jewish man](https://www.timesofisrael.com/pro-palestinian-protesters-allegedly-attack-man-with-israeli-flag-in-new-york/), Matt Greenmann, on the sidelines of a pro-Palestinian protest in Manhattan in April 2022. The victim had gone to the event as a counter-protester with an Israeli flag. Masoud knocked him to the sidewalk, repeatedly punched him in the face, causing a concussion, then burned his Israeli flag at the head of the protest.

The victim and an elderly woman at the scene who was knocked down required hospital treatment. [The prelude to the attack](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Qn3XvdPMjI&t=2671s) and part of the assault were caught on camera.

The following day, Masoud discussed arranging witnesses to back him up in a text message chat, telling a friend and another acquaintance to ‘get your stories straight.’ They planned to say the victim had tried to attack them with crutches.

Masoud later messaged a Jewish Instagram account that posted about the incident, saying, ‘I feel bad for you zionist people when judgment day comes and we slaughter all of them like sheep.’

Masoud was arrested in June 2022. When he arrived at the courthouse, he asked a detective, ‘All this for one Jew?’ Shortly after, an investigator overheard him saying he didn’t want any ‘Greenbergs’ for lawyers, and when he received counsel, he demanded the attorney recite and spell his last name, apparently to check if he was Jewish.

While he was being monitored before the trial, he refused to be supervised by an officer with the Jewish surname ‘Rothman.’ Masoud repeatedly violated the terms of his home confinement during the legal process and was remanded to the custody of the US Marshal’s Service last month after a bail violation hearing.

‘Each of these assaults was brazen, occurring on crowded streets and in the middle of the day. The defendant knew nothing about the victims beyond what any passerby could observe: an Israeli flag, a yarmulke, a Star of David,’ prosecutors said of the attacks. ‘Hate-motivated violence such as the defendant’s conduct sends a message to an entire group of people that its members are not safe. It targets communities, dehumanizing them, and reinforcing the idea that they are vulnerable due to their perceived otherness.’

Masoud’s defense lawyers argued[in a pre-sentencing submission](https://static.timesofisrael.com/www/uploads/2023/03/masoud-doc-37.pdf) that he had attacked the victims due to their support for Israel, not their Judaism. They claimed the man he beat at a protest provoked the attack and blamed him for not securing a protest permit that would have kept him separated from the pro-Palestinian demonstration.

The defense said Masoud had previous animosity toward Tischler and that the third victim was holding an Israeli flag during the attack. Masoud also claimed he was aggressive due to the death of his father and a cousin and a recent breakup.

Masoud has ties to Within Our Lifetime Palestine, an activist group that regularly calls for an intifada and the destruction of Israel [at rallies in New York](https://www.timesofisrael.com/intifada-until-victory-pro-palestinian-demonstrators-rally-in-new-york/), and urged the targeting of Jewish groups in the city, including by handing out maps of Jewish organization locations at a protest.

Federal hate crime charges are relatively rare, and most suspected hate incidents in New York do not result in a conviction. The feds are taking up the Masoud case amid complaints from the Jewish community about the lack of penalties against anti-Jewish attackers, and criticism of cashless bail laws that often let assailants free shortly after their arrest.

‘It shows that the Justice Department is stepping up to the task of thoroughly investigating and prosecuting hate crimes in New York City where local prosecutors seemed to have dropped the ball, especially when it comes to hate crimes against Jews,’ Gerard Filitti, Greenman’s lawyer, told The Times of Israel last year.

Jews are [targeted in hate crimes in New York](https://www.timesofisrael.com/police-data-shows-antisemitic-incidents-in-nyc-more-than-doubled-over-last-2-years/) more than any other group.