



JUDICIARY OF
ENGLAND AND WALES

IN THE CENTRAL CRIMINAL COURT
(SITTING AT WOOLWICH CROWN COURT)

REX

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JOHANNES KONGSNES NATLAND

SENTENCING REMARKS

1. The Foxtrot Network is an organised crime group which has developed an arm's length method of recruiting young people to carry out violent crimes. Posts on platforms like Snapchat, Instagram, Telegram and Signal advertise for assassins to kill for payment. The proposed victim will not be identified until the very last moment and will be a complete stranger to the perpetrator. As well as violence up to and including murder, there are large sub-groups on these platforms for fraud and drugs. At your trial for conspiracy to murder, Johannes Natland, the jury heard from a senior Swedish police officer who called this new phenomenon '*crimes as a service*'. Most examples he was aware of were committed in Sweden but posts also offered to equip volunteers to target victims abroad for payments equivalent to some tens of thousands of pounds.
2. Those at the top of the organisation have had to flee Sweden, and indeed Europe, but the digital space is not confined by state boundaries. The Foxtrot Network operates with a chain of command including 'recruiters; who may themselves be teenagers. At the business end 'facilitators' take care of the logistics; book hotel rooms, make sure the weapons arrive, and the perpetrator, known as the 'enforcer', gets the information he needs, when he needs it. He is the most vulnerable to being captured, because he is the only one who has to confront the intended victim. The evidence was that enforcers are almost always below the age of 20 and they are usually vulnerable in some way.

3. You were recruited in Norway to travel to England and kill an unidentified target. The advertisement read, [translated] *“Murder in England 270,000 [Krona, approximately £21,000]. Have transport organised... We will smuggle the assassin out of the country. The police will be paid to look the other way; nothing can go wrong.”* You told the jury that you were aware of the Foxtrot Network. The proposal was passed to you on 15 March 2025 on Signal by a teenager you had met while in a care home following a period in psychiatric hospital. Initially uncertain about whether the post was genuine, you came to understand quickly that it certainly was. You agreed to be the enforcer and pursued it, despite numerous opportunities to extricate yourself. You sent a photograph of your passport to a small online chatgroup specially created for this commission. A ticket was purchased for you and you travelled twice to the airport, on 16 and 17 March. There was a glitch because your passport had expired and you needed to get an emergency passport which you used to fly to England on 17 March.
4. Once here, you followed detailed instructions sent to you incrementally. Expenses were provided via a new Revolut account and you checked into a hotel in Manchester. The next day you were instructed to move hotels to Huddersfield, in West Yorkshire. You were directed to a cash drop of about £2,000. You bought a disposable Nokia telephone, travelled to a wooded location where you collected firearms and ammunition. You returned to the hotel with two guns and 19 bullets. You were sent directions to where a stolen car bearing false number plates was parked with its key, after which you bought rubber gloves, took photos and made videos of what you had acquired, including with the money spread out on the hotel bed. You were arrested by an armed police operation late that night.
5. I had the advantage of presiding over your trial and sentence you on my assessment of the entirety of the evidence, consistently with the verdict of the jury on 29 July this year. I reject the submission advanced on your behalf that there remains real uncertainty whether you would actually have gone through with the shooting. Although the fact that no one was shot dead or physically harmed is important I am sure that had the intervention of the police not prevented the plan from proceeding, you would have done what you had agreed to. This is clear from the actions I have described and the messages you exchanged with others. They demonstrated not merely participation but, at points, excitement about what you were to do. You referred to getting a lot of money and someone dying, to it being *“cool to kill someone”*, and to being able finally to kill someone while being paid for doing so. From the hotel you sent a photograph of yourself

smiling while holding one of the guns, with a song romanticising the life of a hitman. Shortly before your arrest, you indicated that the weapons would be tested "*on the guy*". The reason this conspiracy did not result in the death of another person was the intervention of law enforcement, not voluntary withdrawal on your part.

6. On 2 October 2025, you pleaded guilty to three firearms offences: possession of a prohibited semi-automatic pistol, a prohibited revolver, and 19 rounds of 9mm ammunition without a firearms certificate. I have to sentence you for those offences too.
7. The maximum sentence for conspiracy to murder is imprisonment for life. There is no offence-specific Sentencing Council guideline. I must identify the framework that provides the most principled assistance, while recognising that no analogous guideline can be applied mechanistically. I have regard, principally, to the guideline for attempted murder. I recognise that for Schedule 21 of the Sentencing Code, which would have applied had this been a completed murder, the use of a firearm and the killing for financial gain would each have been features capable of engaging the 30-year starting point for the minimum term, which is a useful cross-check of the gravity of offending with those characteristics. On your behalf it is argued that caution is required before equating this offence with either attempted murder or completed murder because no actual violence occurred. This is a proper distinction because a conspiracy is completed upon the making of the unlawful agreement which in your case happened in Norway on 15 March, however you went well beyond that and the preparations towards implementation of the agreement were almost complete. In these circumstances the attempted murder guideline provides an ideal structured assessment of culpability and harm and permits proper consideration of the fact that death or injury did not occur.
8. Among the factors expressly identified by the guideline for Category A are an offence involving a firearm and one committed for financial gain. Both are present here. You travelled internationally and followed instructions which resulted in your obtaining firearms, ammunition and money. Premeditation is inherent in a conspiracy and planning is also identified within the guideline, and although I take care not to double count features already reflected in the assessment, this is clearly offending which falls within very high culpability A. Harm is category 3, because no physical injury occurred this leads, by analogy to a notional starting point of 25 years' custody within a range of 20 to 30 years' custody. The absence of injury is already reflected in placing

the offence in harm category 3. This conspiracy was very close to completion and in my judgment there is only limited allowance to be made for the fact that your preparations were interrupted.

9. I turn to an important feature of this case. You are now 19 years old, having been born on 7 March 2007. You were not merely a young adult at the time of these crimes; you had turned 18 only days before these events. The law recognises what ordinary human experience also teaches: maturity does not arrive instantly on an eighteenth birthday. Age and lack of maturity are expressly identified as mitigating factors in the attempted murder guideline and apply to offenders aged between 18 and 25. The Sentencing Council's guideline dealing with children and young people formally applies to those under 18 at the relevant date, but expressly recognises that many of its principles apply to young adults between 18 and 25. The qualities relevant to criminal responsibility, judgment, foresight, resistance to influence and the ability to weigh instant reward against distant consequences, continue to develop beyond the age of 18. Developmental and emotional age remain important alongside chronological age.
10. These are not abstract principles in your case. The pre-sentence report identifies emotional and developmental immaturity, poor consequential thinking and increased susceptibility to negative peer influence in your case. It records that youth may well have increased your susceptibility to influence from older and more sophisticated criminal associates. This is the modus operandi of the Foxtrot Network. I attach substantial weight to your age and immaturity. But there are limits to what can properly be attributed to them. This was not an impulsive act lasting a few moments. You had repeated opportunities to think about what you were doing. You travelled to another country. You were capable of understanding and following detailed instructions. Your conduct demonstrated purpose and persistence. Your youth therefore reduces the sentence which would have been appropriate for a fully mature adult exhibiting the same conduct, but it does not extinguish or remove substantially your responsibility for exceptionally serious offending.
11. I have also considered your psychiatric history with care. You began misusing drugs aged 13. According to your evidence at trial your substance misuse escalated and eventually became a significant daily addiction. You experienced drug-induced psychotic symptoms, including paranoia, and had two periods of psychiatric hospital admission including shortly before these offences. I distinguish, however, between

those matters which provide background and those which actually influence culpability.

12. The relevant Sentencing Council guideline requires a sufficient connection between an impairment or disorder and offending behaviour, before culpability is reduced. Among the matters relevant to that assessment are any effect upon the ability to exercise appropriate judgement, make rational choices and understand the nature and consequences of one's actions. The agreed expert psychiatric position was that when you arrived in England you were in the recovery phase following a drug-induced psychotic episode, which might include emotional or behavioural instability, but the experts had not identified active psychotic symptoms at that time or concluded that your capacity to form the necessary intention was impaired. You admitted you were still taking cocaine. I do not find that your psychiatric condition deprived you of the capacity to make a rational choice or materially impaired your ability to form the intention to kill.
13. But I accept that the entire history immediately before you took up the Foxtrot Network's offer cannot simply be disregarded. You had been a good student from a financially secure and supportive professional home, with every prospect of a successful life. To the horror of your parents and those who knew you well, the trajectory of your adolescence was seriously disrupted by cannabis and then class A drugs. The deterioration represented a significant change from the child you had been, as the wider family and community evidence I have seen demonstrates. In combination with your immaturity, this forms part of the context in which your susceptibility to recruitment and your judgement are properly assessed.
14. I do not find that you acted under duress. Nor that you were groomed or compelled to participate. The pre-sentence report similarly concludes that you engaged willingly rather than through coercion. But I accept that your youth, immaturity, recent psychiatric history and circumstances made you more vulnerable and susceptible than a mature and settled adult to recruitment and influence by sophisticated criminals. That does not absolve you and passing an inadequately severe sentence on you would do nothing to deter other young people, perhaps in the same position as you were, from falling prey to the wicked reach of similar criminal groups. You remain responsible for your decisions but I give it some mitigating weight.

15. These are your first convictions, cautions, reprimands or warnings recorded in this country or Norway. You were previously of good character in the sense relevant to sentencing. The pre-sentence report finds no identifiable pattern of offending from your formal record. It notes what you yourself disclosed about engaging in small scale drug supply and weapon carrying while doing so, and I do not overlook those matters. I accept, however, the central proposition advanced on your behalf that, apart from the criminal activity associated with drug misuse, the evidence does not establish that you were a young man embarked upon an entrenched course of violent criminal behaviour. Rather, you had been discharged from hospital for the second time just a month or so before you travelled to England and you were living at home with your parents and working part-time. The distinction is important. It does not make this offence less serious. It is principally relevant to your personal mitigation, rehabilitative prospects and, later, my assessment of dangerousness.
16. I make clear that I have read the numerous character references submitted on your behalf because it is important that those who took the trouble to provide them should know that their accounts have been considered. They come from a strikingly broad group of people who have known you at different stages and in different settings: members of your family and extended family, childhood friends and their parents, teachers, neighbours and family friends, people who knew you through football and music, and a lawyer who dealt with you professionally. There is a consistent picture in these references. Before the drug misuse and associated mental-health difficulties, you were regarded as intelligent, humorous, sociable and capable of kindness and loyalty. Several people describe how behind an outward appearance of confidence they saw sensitivity, as I did at the trial. You were engaged in education, football, music and ordinary family and community.
17. The prohibited firearms fall within Type 1 for the purposes of the applicable guideline. Because the firearms and ammunition were intended for a criminal purpose connected with the planned killing, culpability is high in category is A. The risk of death or serious physical harm makes this harm category 1.
18. The guideline starting point for category A1 is 8 years' custody, with a range of 7 to 10 years. You pleaded guilty to these offences before trial. You are entitled to appropriate credit for those pleas. However, the relevant prohibited firearms offences are subject to the statutory minimum sentence provisions. Because you were over the age of 18

when the offences were committed, the court must impose a sentence of at least five years' custody, unless exceptional circumstances justify departure from that minimum. A reduction for your pleas cannot take the sentence below that minimum. There are no exceptional circumstances.

19. The possession of the weapons and ammunition formed an integral part of the conspiracy for which I have to impose the principal sentence. Consecutive sentences would double count the same criminality. The firearms sentences will accordingly run concurrently with each other and concurrently with the sentence for conspiracy to murder. That reflects the Totality Guideline, it is just and proportionate to the entirety of your offending and it is consistent with the principle within the attempted murder guideline that where offences arise from the same incident or facts, concurrent sentences reflecting the overall criminality will ordinarily be appropriate.
20. Returning to the notional starting point for the conspiracy to murder, before applying mitigation I take a term of 24 years' custody. This is the notional determinate term appropriate for an adult. The prosecution does not have evidence to satisfy the foreign power aggravation requirement pursuant to s.69A Sentencing Code because it cannot say who the intended victim was. Consistent with the analysis I have set out, I find substantial mitigation in your age and relative immaturity, your vulnerability to recruitment, the limited significance of your psychiatric history, your previous good character and take the strong character evidence into account in your favour.
21. I also bear in mind that an exceptionally long sentence bears particularly heavily upon an offender who has only just entered adulthood. You will serve your sentence in a foreign country, separated from your family. Having weighed all of those matters, the term for this conspiracy to murder, before considering dangerousness, would be 20 years detention.
22. I turn to consider dangerousness. This is a separate question with a particular statutory definition to be applied. Conspiracy to murder is a specified offence to which the dangerous offender provisions apply. The prosecution submit that the facts of the offences here are such as to require a finding of dangerousness because you were close to committing a murder for gain in a foreign country, involving two firearms and 19 rounds of ammunition. They draw attention to the things you were saying over the few days before your arrest and the speed and alacrity with which you agreed to take part.

23. The test is whether there is a significant risk to members of the public of serious harm occasioned by the commission by you of further specified offences. In making that assessment I consider the circumstances of this offence, any relevant offending and behaviour, and all the information available about you. The probation officer concludes you do pose a high risk of serious harm to the public. The factors identified in the report bear repetition and include your association with people linked to the Foxtrot Network, the organised nature of the offending, your journey to England, possession of firearms and ammunition, willingness to offend for financial gain, the apparent thrill and status associated with the offending in your mind, longstanding substance misuse, poor consequential thinking and developmental immaturity.
24. But dangerousness is concerned with future risk. The court cannot reason from the proposition that because someone has committed one exceptionally grave offence, he must remain dangerous in the statutory sense. This would be simply attaching another label to the seriousness of the offence and the only offence treated in that way is the crime of murder itself. There is a genuine tension in your case between the offending and material considerations pointing in the other direction. There is no reason to think you will be of any interest to the Foxtrot Network after this conviction, the opposite is true; your expendability was part of the attraction for them. The actuarial assessments recorded in the pre-sentence report indicate a low likelihood of general reoffending, a low likelihood of violent reoffending and a medium likelihood of serious recidivism. The probation officer explains why she considers those assessments to understate the dynamic and static risks in your case, in part because she had so little to go on and because your current abstinence and apparent insight in custody have not been tested in the community. She was entitled to reach that conclusion, which deserves substantial weight although she did not see the expert medical evidence from the trial or the broader character material before me.
25. The unusually copious references I have seen cannot outweigh the gravity of what you did. But that evidence supports the proposition that this offence does not represent an established or escalating history of violence and that you have substantial resources of family, friendship and social support upon which rehabilitation may eventually be built.
26. In terms of emerging insight, you told the probation officer that you now realise you should never have entertained the initial approach and that, once it became clear that

the proposal was genuine, you should have withdrawn. You acknowledged that there had been numerous opportunities to do so. You said that you were glad you had been arrested and that the experience had "*only done [you] good*". I give that some weight, although I temper it because your insight is comparatively recent and, as the probation officer observes, has developed in the controlled circumstances of custody.

27. You are presently abstinent from illegal drugs. You are reported as settled in custody, taking educational opportunities and compliant with prescribed medication. You have expressed ambitions to resume formal education, attend university and obtain stable employment. Your family remains strongly supportive. I regard your prospects of eventual rehabilitation as real although much will depend on sustained abstinence from substance misuse, effective management of your mental health and engagement with support services and pro-social activities.. At your age it would be a failing to assume that the person you were at 18 is permanently fixed.
28. I have to consider the full picture available and reach a judgment. You were only just 18. I have re-read all the psychiatric evidence in your case and it is clear that there is evidence of developmental immaturity. The principal dynamic risk factors, drugs, mental health, immaturity and criminal association, are not immutable characteristics. In other words, I have to make proper allowance for the capacity of a young person like you to continue to mature and rehabilitate. In doing so you will have the support of an unusually substantial pro-social network of family and friends. These are all relevant considerations when assessing whether the circumstances that produced this offence are likely to be repeated.
29. The present offence demonstrates that at the age of 18 you were capable of extraordinarily dangerous behaviour. Rationally, this gives rise to at least some risk of similar serious offending in the future, but the statutory prediction of future dangerousness requires a significant risk and having applied close and searching scrutiny to the question, I am unable to conclude that a significant risk of future serious harm from further specified offending has been established or that the risk you do pose will not reduce as you mature. I also take account of the fact that because of the length of detention I must impose even without a finding of dangerousness, the risk is temporally remote and will not materialise for more than a decade during which time there is every reason to expect that you will continue to mature towards a healthier future. I order the forfeiture and destruction of the cash, firearms and

ammunition identified in the prosecution's schedule. The statutory surcharge is applied.

30. Johannes Natland, at the heart of this case is a stark fact. You agreed to assassinate another human being, a stranger to you, in a foreign country. You knew nothing of that person's life or circumstances. You were just 18 years old when you placed yourself in readiness to murder for money. The commission was for the Foxtrot Network and arranged on-line through social media platforms. But the idea of being involved in such an endeavour thrilled your immature personality, which was no longer tethered to the strong family and social network you had grown up in, due to teenage drug addiction. Now 19 and with 574 days already spent in custody, one consequence of your age is that the sentence I pass today will occupy a large proportion of the life you have lived so far. I have taken that fully into account. I do not sentence you on the assumption that you are incapable of change. On the contrary, your age and everything I know about you makes the capacity for maturation and rehabilitation realistic. There are many people prepared to support you in achieving that change. I do not sentence you on the basis that the worst thing you have done, defines everything you will ever become. It will be up to you to decide how your life turns out after today.
31. For conspiracy to murder the sentence is 20 years detention. For the firearms offences, taking the guideline, mitigation and guilty pleas into account, I impose the following concurrent sentences. For possession of the prohibited semi-automatic pistol: 5 years detention. For possession of the prohibited revolver: 5 years detention and for possession of the ammunition: 3 years detention. **The total term is 20 years detention.** You will have to serve two thirds. The days served on remand will count. After you have served 13 years 4 months in total you will be released on licence. The licence continues until the 20 years are over and if you breach your licence before then you could be returned to serve the remainder of the term.

Cheema-Grubb J.

16 October 2026