

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Middle District of Florida

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Friday, June 26, 2020

Tampa Man Indicted For Attempting To Provide Material Support To Isis And Firearms Offenses

Tampa, Florida – United States Attorney Maria Chapa Lopez announces the return by a federal grand jury of an indictment charging Muhammed Momtaz Al-Azhari (23, Tampa) with attempting to provide material support or resources to a designated foreign terrorist organization, namely the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (“ISIS”), and with violations of the National Firearms Act. If convicted on all counts, Al-Azhari faces a maximum penalty of 40 years in federal prison.

According to court documents, Al-Azhari was an ISIS supporter who planned and attempted to carry out an attack on behalf of that terrorist organization. Since at least 2019, Al-Azhari has consumed ISIS propaganda and spoken favorably about ISIS. Al-Azhari, who has a criminal history that includes prior terrorism charges in Saudi Arabia, acquired multiple firearms, including a Glock pistol and silencer. Al-Azhari also expressed admiration for Pulse nightclub shooter Omar Mateen and spoke of his desire to carry out a similar mass shooting. Additionally, Al-Azhari researched and scouted potential targets in the Tampa area, including beaches and the FBI Tampa Field Office. He also rehearsed portions of an attack and statements that he would make during or in connection with such an attack.

FBI agents arrested Al-Azhari on May 24, 2020, after he took possession of weapons, including a Glock handgun and silencer, to be used in an attack.

An indictment is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed one or more violations of federal criminal law, and every defendant is presumed innocent unless, and until, proven guilty.

This case was investigated by the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force, including Homeland Security Investigations, the Tampa Police Department, the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office, the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, the Pasco Sheriff's Office, the St. Petersburg Police Department, the Clearwater Police Department, and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. It will be prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Patrick Scruggs, with assistance from Trial Attorney Ranganath Mathripragada of the National Security Division's Counterterrorism Section.