

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Southern District of Texas

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Iraqi Refugee Convicted of Attempting to Provide Material Support to ISIL

HOUSTON – Omar Faraj Saeed Al Hardan, the 24-year-old Houston resident charged with attempting to provide material support or resources to a designated foreign terrorist organization, has pleaded guilty.

U.S. Attorney Kenneth Magidson, Acting Assistant Attorney General for National Security Mary B. McCord, Special Agent in Charge Perrye K. Turner of the FBI's Houston Division and Special Agent in Charge Mark Dawson of Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) in Houston made the announcement.

Al Hardan, a refugee born in Iraq, pleaded guilty today to one count of attempting to provide material support – specifically himself – to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Al Hardan entered the United States as a refugee on or about Nov. 2, 2009. Prior to entering the country, Al Hardan was in at least two refugee camps in Jordan and Iraq. After being admitted into the U.S. as an Iraqi refugee, he was granted legal permanent residence status on or about Aug. 22, 2011, and had resided in Houston.

In April 2014, federal agents began investigating Al Hardan who had been communicating with a California man whom he understood was associated with Al-Nusrah front. In those communications, the individual had told Al Hardan that he had previously traveled to Syria to fight for Al-Nusrah and discussed plans to return to Syria with Al Hardan to fight for Al-Nusrah.

Beginning in June 2014 and continuing through 2015, Al Hardan also developed a relationship with a Confidential Human Source (CHS). During that time, they discussed traveling overseas to support ISIL in fighting jihad and various ways to assist ISIL. Al Hardan also said he wanted to be trained in building remote transmitter/receiver detonators for improvised explosive devices, wanted to learn to use cell phones as the remote detonators and wanted to build remote detonators for ISIL. Al Hardan indicated he taught himself how to make remote detonators by accessing online training videos and other resources he found online and showed the CHS a circuit board he built to be used as a transmitter for a detonator.

On Nov. 5, 2014, Al Hardan took an oath of loyalty to ISIL, according to the plea agreement. Two days later, Al Hardan and the CHS participated in approximately one hour of tactical weapons training with an AK-47 that Al Hardan indicated he wanted.

During the investigation, Al Hardan had also posted many statements on social media in support of ISIL. One of those included a photo of a Humvee with an ISIL flag. Above the photo, Al Hardan posted, "ISIS yesterday in Iraq, today in Syria and Allah willing, tomorrow in Jerusalem." He also made numerous statements about his plans to travel to Syria and fight alongside ISIL and become a martyr. In one instance he said "I want to blow myself up. I want to travel with the Mujahidin. I want to travel to be with those who are against America. I am against America."

Upon his arrest in January 2016, investigators discovered training CDs on how to build remote detonators, electronic circuitry components, tools used to build circuitry, multiple cell phones (that had not been activated), a prayer list for committing Jihad and becoming a martyr and the ISIL flag.

Al Hardan has been and will remain in custody pending his sentencing hearing, set for Jan. 17, 2017. At that time, he faces up to 20 years in federal prison and a possible \$250,000 fine.

The FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force and HSI conducted the investigation with the assistance of the Houston Police Department. Assistant U.S. Attorneys S. Mark McIntyre and Ralph Imperato are prosecuting the case with assistance of the National Security Division's Counterterrorism Section