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Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Eastern District of Pennsylvania

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Bangladeshi Husband and Wife Sentenced For Conspiring to Provide Material Support to ISIS

PHILADELPHIA – Acting United States Attorney Jennifer Arbittier Williams announced that Shahidul Gaffar, 40, and Nabila Khan, 35, both residents of Pennsylvania, were sentenced to 18 months and two years in prison, respectively, by United States District Court Judge Joshua D. Wolson for conspiracy to provide material support and resources to ISIS, a designated Foreign Terrorist Organization. Judge Wolson also sentenced both defendants to three years of supervised release.

According to court documents, in 2015, Gaffar and Khan, a married couple originally from Bangladesh, provided and attempted to provide financial support to two of Khan's brothers who traveled to Syria to join ISIS fighters. Gaffar and Khan discussed the brothers' travel plans in detail with each other, as well as with the brothers and other family members, as early as September 2014. In January 2015, Khan asked her sister living in Bangladesh to sell some of Khan's gold and provide the money to their oldest brother, J.K., in order to assist him in travelling to Syria. Khan then flew to Bangladesh to wish J.K. farewell before his departure in February 2015. Gaffar, who remained in Pennsylvania, sent supportive messages to Khan's mother, stating: "Be [p]roud mother for the noble cause and for the sake of Allah!!!"

Further, Khan's second brother, I.K., had come to the United States on a student visa and resided with Khan and Gaffar in Pennsylvania from June 2014 until February 2015, when he returned to Bangladesh. Over the next few months, Khan, who was still in Bangladesh, observed I.K. watching terrorist propaganda videos featuring Anwar al-Awlaki, a designated global terrorist who is now deceased. Around the same time, Gaffar began sending international money transfers to I.K. in Bangladesh. These funds had multiple purposes, but one was to support I.K.'s travel to Syria to join ISIS. In June 2015, Gaffar sent a message to Khan, stating: "Let [I.K.] know that I will manage and send 3000 dollars if Allah wills. Let's help him, my love, for the good cause who knows that might be enough to get forgiveness from Allah and accept[ance] [in]to heaven." In July 2015, Gaffar continued to communicate with Kahn regarding the conspiracy, saying in part: "I feel bad for mom and dad, at the same time, I feel very proud. [W]hat a lucky mom and dad."

In early July 2015, I.K. traveled to Syria to join ISIS. The next day, Gaffar and Khan discussed via electronic messages how Khan had tried to give I.K. more money right before he left, and days later, Kahn exchanged multiple electronic messages with a family member discussing I.K.'s arrival in Syria and reunion there with J.K. Gaffar sent reassuring messages to Khan, stating that it was "cool" that she had been able to observe I.K.'s radical Islamist "changes" from "beginning to end."

According to court documents, in May 2016, Khan received an electronic message that I.K. had been wounded in the fighting in Syria, and in August 2016, Khan's mother sent a message to Kahn with photographs of I.K.'s wounds sustained while in Syria. In September 2016, I.K. changed his online social media account profile picture to an image depicting himself, his brother and another male sitting in front of the black ISIS flag with firearms on a table in front of them, overtly identifying himself and his brother as members of ISIS. I.K. was ultimately killed in the fighting in Syria in March 2019.

"This case draws into sharp focus the first priority of the Department of Justice and the U.S. Attorney's Office: protecting our Nation from all security threats," said Acting United States Attorney Williams. "The defendants encouraged and financially supported the efforts of Nabila Kahn's brothers to join the murderous terrorist group ISIS, which is a direct threat to the United States. The public can rest assured that our Office is working tirelessly every day to protect all Americans from the threat of terrorism."

"Money and manpower are the lifeblood of terror groups like ISIS," said Bradley S. Benavides, Acting Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's Philadelphia Division. "Gaffar and Khan, while enjoying all the rights and privileges of living in America, conspired to support violent extremists who consider our country their sworn enemy. Know that FBI Philadelphia's Joint Terrorism Task Force is working diligently around the clock to detect and disrupt anyone whose beliefs have crossed the line into terrorist activity."

The case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Sarah Wolfe and Robert Livermore.

Topic(s):

Counterterrorism

Component(s):

USAO - Pennsylvania, Eastern

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