

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Northern District of Ohio

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Akron jury convicts North Carolina man of conspiring to support ISIS

A Charlotte, North Carolina, man was convicted by a jury in Akron, Ohio, of conspiring to provide material support to the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), a designated foreign terrorist organization.

Erick Jamal Hendricks, 37, will be sentenced at a date to be determined. The guilty verdict was announced by Assistant Attorney General for National Security John C. Demers, U.S. Attorney Justin E. Herdman of the Northern District of Ohio and Special Agent in Charge Stephen D. Anthony of the FBI's Cleveland Office following a two-week trial before U.S. District Judge John Adams.

"This defendant recruited and directed people here in the United States to launch attacks against our citizens, and attempted to recruit others to engage in similar attacks," U.S. Attorney Herdman said. "Protecting our citizens from terrorist attacks remains our priority and our community will be safer with this defendant behind bars."

"Erick Jamal Hendricks represents the significant online ISIS threat that we face daily -- a US citizen that becomes radicalized online and attempts to recruit and train individuals to commit jihad, all while on American soil," Special Agent in Charge Anthony said. "The FBI urges the public to report information regarding individuals pledging their allegiance to ISIS or other identified terrorist groups. The FBI is pleased that Hendricks was stopped before he was successful and now will spend a significant amount of time behind bars."

According to court documents and trial testimony, Hendricks tried to recruit people to train together and conduct terrorist attacks in the United States on behalf of ISIS.

Amir Al-Ghazi was arrested in the Northern District of Ohio in June 2015 after attempting to purchase an AK-47 assault rifle and ammunition from an undercover law enforcement officer. Al-Ghazi had pledged allegiance to ISIS in social media and made statements expressing interest in conducting attacks in the United States.

Hendricks had contacted Al-Ghazi over social media to recruit him in the spring of 2015. Hendricks allegedly told Al-Ghazi that he "needed people" and wanted to meet in person; that there were several "brothers" located in Texas and Mexico; that he was attempting to "get brothers to meet face to face;" and that he wanted "to get brothers to train together," according to court documents and trial testimony.

Al-Ghazi said Hendricks tested his religious knowledge and commitment, inquiring about his willingness to commit “jihad,” to die as a “martyr” and his desire to enter “jannah” (paradise). Al-Ghazi understood these statements to mean that Hendricks was recruiting people to train together for the purpose of conducting a terrorist attack in the U.S. and to see if Al-Ghazi was suitable for recruitment, according to the allegations. Al-Ghazi believed that Hendricks and the “brothers in Texas and Mexico” may have been responsible for a thwarted terrorist attack in Garland, Texas, on May 3, 2015, and therefore he decided to stay away from social media for a period following the attack to minimize detection by law enforcement.

Hendricks also communicated over social media with several other people, including an undercover FBI employee (UCE-1). Hendricks on April 16, 2015 instructed UCE-1 to download the document “GPS for the Ghuraba in the U.S.”, which included a section entitled “Final Advice” which advocated that “brothers and sisters” should not allow themselves to go to jail. This section also allegedly encouraged Muslims to die as a “Shaheed” (martyr), to “Boobie trap your homes,” to “lay in wait for them” and to “never leave your home without your AK-47 or M16.” Hendricks also directed UCE-1 to communicate online with other people and stated “It’s hard to sift through brothers;” “Allah chooses only the few;” and “Everyday I do this day in and day out,” according to court documents and trial testimony.

Hendricks told another person that his goal was to create a sleeper cell to be trained and housed at a secure compound that would conduct attacks in the United States. He mentioned that potential targets included military members whose information had been released by ISIS and the woman who organized the “Draw Prophet Mohammad contest,” and he claimed to have 10 members signed up for his group, according court documents and trial testimony.

On April 23, 2015, Hendricks used social media to contact Elton Simpson, who, along with Nadir Hamid Soofi, was inspired by ISIS and launched the attack on the “First Annual Muhammad Art Exhibit and Contest” in Garland. Simpson and Soofi opened fire, wounding a security guard, before Garland police returned fire and killed both Simpson and Soofi. Hendricks also connected UCE-1 with Simpson via social media; communicated with UCE-1 about the contest in Garland; and directed UCE-1 to go to the contest. Hendricks said: “If you see that pig (meaning the organizer of the contest) make your ‘voice’ heard against her.” He also asked UCE-1 a series of questions related to security at the event, including: “How big is the gathering?” “How many ppl?” “How many police/agents?” “Do you see feds there?” “Do you see snipers?” and “How many media?” Shortly thereafter, Simpson and Soofi committed the attack on the cartoon drawing contest.

Al-Ghazi previously pleaded guilty to attempting to provide material support to a designated terrorist organization and being a felon in possession of firearms. He is awaiting sentencing.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Matthew W. Shepherd and Mark S. Bennett and Justice Department Trial Attorney Rebecca Magnone. This case was investigated by the FBI’s offices in Cleveland; Columbia, South Carolina; Baltimore; and Charlotte, North Carolina, with assistance the U.S. Attorney’s Offices in the District of Maryland, District of South Carolina and the Western District of North Carolina.

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