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Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Eastern District of Virginia

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Leading ISIS Media Figure and Foreign Fighter Pleads Guilty to Conspiring to Provide Material Support to a Terrorist Organization, Resulting in Death

ALEXANDRIA, Va. – A Saudi-born Canadian citizen pleaded guilty today to conspiring to provide material support to a designated foreign terrorist organization (ISIS), resulting in death.

According to court documents, Mohammed Khalifa, aka Abu Ridwan Al-Kanadi and Abu Muthanna Al-Muhajir, 38, served in prominent roles within ISIS starting in 2013 and continuing until his capture by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in January 2019, following a firefight between ISIS fighters and the SDF. In addition to serving as a fighter and executing two Syrian soldiers on behalf of ISIS, Khalifa served as a lead translator in ISIS's propaganda production and the English-speaking narrator on multiple ISIS videos.

Khalifa traveled to Syria in the spring of 2013 with the intent of becoming a foreign fighter and ultimately joining ISIS. He joined ISIS in or around November 2013 and swore allegiance to then-ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. In early 2014, he was recruited to join ISIS's media department due in part to his language abilities as a fluent English and Arabic speaker. Starting in 2016, Khalifa directed various supporter networks that assisted in the translation, production, and dissemination of propaganda released under various ISIS media brands in order to reach Western audiences. He worked within the ISIS media operation until late 2018.

Khalifa provided the narration and translation for approximately 15 videos created and distributed by ISIS. The productions narrated by Khalifa include two of the most influential and exceedingly violent ISIS propaganda videos: "Flames of War: Fighting Has Just Begun," distributed on September 19, 2014, and "Flames of War II: Until the Final Hour," distributed on November 29, 2017. The videos depict glamorized portrayals of ISIS and its fighters as well as scenes of violence, including depictions of unarmed prisoners being executed, footage of ISIS attacks and fighting, and depictions of ISIS attacks in the United States.

The ISIS "Flames of War" videos include scenes of Khalifa executing a different Syrian soldier in each of the two videos. In the final scenes of both videos, a masked Khalifa speaks to the camera and is then seen executing a kneeling Syrian soldier while other masked ISIS members also shoot the prisoners kneeling in front of each of them.

During the time Khalifa was a prominent member of ISIS, the terrorist organization was conducting a hostage-taking and ransom demand campaign involving American, British, and European journalists and aid workers. Between August 19, 2014 and February 6, 2015, ISIS killed eight American, British or Japanese citizens in Syria as part of the hostage scheme.

In January 2019, Khalifa engaged in fighting on behalf of ISIS and attacked an SDF position in Abu Badran, Syria. Khalifa, alone and armed with three grenades and an AK-47, threw a grenade on the roof of a house where SDF soldiers were standing. The grenade detonated and Khalifa ran into the house and attempted to go to the roof, but an SDF soldier was firing from the stairs. Khalifa began firing at the SDF soldier and attempted to use all three of his grenades during the attack. Khalifa fired most of his ammunition during the assault before his AK-47 jammed. Khalifa surrendered to the SDF on or about January 13, 2019 and was detained by the SDF. Earlier this year, he was transferred to the custody of the FBI and brought to the Eastern District of Virginia, where he had his initial appearance on October 4, 2021.

Khalifa pleaded guilty to conspiring to provide material support or resources to a foreign terrorist organization, resulting in death and is scheduled to be sentenced on April 15, 2022. Khalifa faces a maximum penalty of life in prison. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

U.S. Attorney Jessica D. Aber for the Eastern District of Virginia; Assistant Attorney General Matthew G. Olsen of the Justice Department's National Security Division; and Assistant Director in Charge Steven M. D'Antuono of the FBI's Washington Field Office made the announcement after U.S. District Judge T. S. Ellis III accepted the plea.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Dennis M. Fitzpatrick, First Assistant U.S. Attorney Raj Parekh, and Assistant U.S. Attorneys John T. Gibbs and Aidan Taft Grano-Mickelson, all from the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Virginia; and Trial Attorney Alicia H. Cook of the Justice Department are prosecuting this case.

A copy of this press release is located on the website of the [U.S. Attorney's Office](#) for the Eastern District of Virginia. Related court documents and information are located on the website of the [District Court](#) for the Eastern District of Virginia or on [PACER](#) by searching for Case No. 1:21-cr-271.

Topic(s):

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