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Department of Justice Files First Case in U.S. Alien Terrorist Removal Court to Deport Afghan Alien Who Supported Her Family's Plans for Election-Day Shooting

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department has filed the first-ever case in the U.S. Alien Terrorist Removal Court (ATRC), seeking to remove Nazira Haji Zada, 47, residing in Fort Worth, Texas. Zada, the matriarch of an alien Afghan family, is being removed for her role in a plot to commit an ISIS-inspired mass shooting on Election Day in 2024 for which her son, Abdullah Haji Zada, and son-in-law, Nasir Ahmad Tawhedi, were previously arrested and convicted. The application to remove Nazira Haji Zada was filed on July 15. Zada was arrested earlier this week and will appear before the ATRC's Chief Judge Joan N. Ericksen in Washington, D.C. on Thursday, July 30, at 11:00 a.m.

"Congress created the Alien Terrorist Removal Court three decades ago to remove from the United States alien terrorists who never should have been here in the first place," said Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche. "The allegations in this case show the matriarch of an ISIS-sympathizing family aiding in a plot to launch a mass casualty attack on American voters on Election Day. The Department's application in this court makes clear that terrorists have no place in the United States of America."

"This is a historic step asking this court for the first time to remove an individual from the United States who supported a plot by ISIS-sympathizing family members to commit an act of terrorism in America," said FBI Director Kash Patel. "No one should be allowed to come into our country and then betray it. The FBI and our

Justice Department partners will not hesitate to use all available resources to protect the American people.”

“The ATRC embodies the recognition that the government should not have to choose between allowing a dangerous alien to remain in the United States and disclosing sensitive classified information in a traditional removal proceeding,” said Assistant Attorney General for National Security John A. Eisenberg. “We will use all the tools at our disposal, including this court, to remove foreign nationals who betray our values and exploit our goodwill by supporting ISIS and terrorist plots.”

Tawhedi and Abdullah Haji Zada were [arrested](#) on Oct. 7, 2024, after purchasing the firearms and ammunition to be used in the Election Day attack from an undercover FBI employee. Nazira’s son Abdullah, who was 17 at the time of his arrest, entered his guilty plea as an adult and was [sentenced](#) to 15 years in prison. As part of the plea agreement, Abdullah stipulated to the entry of a judicial order of removal from the United States to Afghanistan following his term of incarceration. Abdullah acknowledged that the order of removal would terminate his lawful permanent resident status. Abdullah also waived his right to appeal the conviction except in limited circumstances or seek any form of appeal or relief from his removal and deportation, including but not limited to, seeking asylum.

Tawhedi, 28, [pled](#) guilty on June 13, 2025 to two terrorism-related offenses: conspiring and attempting to provide material support and resources to the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), a designated foreign terrorist organization, and receiving, attempting to receive, and conspiring to receive firearms and ammunition in furtherance of a federal crime of terrorism, and is awaiting sentencing.

According to court documents, Tawhedi admitted that between June 2024 and October 2024, he conspired with at least one other individual to purchase two AK-47 rifles, 500 rounds of ammunition, and 10 magazines, with the intent to carry out a mass-casualty attack on or around Election Day, Nov. 5, 2024, on behalf of ISIS. According to a criminal complaint affidavit filed in the case, Tawhedi communicated with an ISIS facilitator about his plan to purchase firearms for use in the terror plot, including asking the individual whether 500 rounds of ammunition would be sufficient.

According to the criminal complaint, to raise funds for their attack, in 2024, the family also started selling off their property, including furniture, computers, a mobile phone, and the family’s two vehicles. Nazia signed a contract to sell the family house. The family also purchased one-way airfare for Nazira to take the children (but not Abdullah and Tawhedi) to Kabul, Afghanistan shortly before the planned Election Day shooting.

The ATRC is a specialized federal court, which Congress established in 1996. The court has jurisdiction to remove alien terrorists swiftly from the United States,

when the government establishes by a preponderance of the evidence that an alien is a terrorist. *See* Title Eight, United States Code, Sections 1227(a)(4)(B), 1531(1), and 1534(g). The Court is comprised of U.S. federal district court judges confirmed to the judiciary pursuant to Article III of the United States Constitution, and are then appointed to the ATRC by the Chief Justice of the United States. *See* Title 8, United States Code, Sections 1531 to 1537.

The court allows the government to use classified information, where disclosing that information to the public would pose risks to national security. The statutory provisions that establish the court provide paid counsel to the aliens if necessary and also permit either party to appeal to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit.

This removal proceeding reflects the coordinated efforts of multiple federal agencies, including the Department of Justice's National Security Division, the FBI, and the U.S. Marshals Service, as well as the Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Homeland Security Investigations and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

Acting Deputy Assistant Attorney General Hayden O'Byrne of the National Security Division is leading the litigation, with assistance from Deputy Chief Larry Schneider and Trial Attorneys Anna Donnell and Evan Schultz.

For more information on the ATRC and to view court documents visit: <https://www.atrc.uscourts.gov/>

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