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Department of Justice Removes Alien Terrorist in First Use of United States Alien Terrorist Removal Court

Afghan Alien Supported Her Family's Plans for Election-Day Shooting

WASHINGTON — In the first-ever case before the United States Alien Terrorist Removal Court (ATRC), Nazira Haji Zada, 47, an Afghan national previously residing in Fort Worth, Texas, was removed from the United States after conceding that she is an alien terrorist. As the matriarch in her family, she supported 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 ATRC issued an order of removal on Aug. 20 that was unsealed earlier today following her return to her country of origin. This was the first case ever brought before the ATRC, which Congress established decades ago, and which no previous administration had used. Zada is now permanently inadmissible to the United States.

The application to remove Zada, certified by Attorney General Todd Blanche, was filed on July 15, and Zada appeared in open court for the first time on July 30. ATRC Chief Judge Joan N. Ericksen presided over that hearing and later signed the removal order. In compliance with the ATRC statute, the government used classified information to establish that Zada is an alien terrorist. Additionally, the government provided Zada and her lawyers, two federal public defenders, with approximately half a terabyte of documents supporting the

government's case. With her lawyers, Zada conceded that she is an alien terrorist and waived appeal of the removal order, terminating her previous status.

"This landmark case, resulting in the prompt removal of this alien terrorist to her country of origin, is a win for national security and the rule of law," said Attorney General Todd Blanche. "Those who support and condone terrorism should not be living in the United States, and this first-ever case before the ATRC shows how the Department will use every tool at its disposal to protect our country."

"This is a historic and vitally important step in our work to protect the U.S. homeland from terrorism," said FBI Director Kash Patel. "An individual who supported a plot by ISIS-sympathizing family members to commit an attack in America has paid the price for that. She came to our country, betrayed it, and has now lost the right to live here and enjoy our democratic freedoms. This FBI and our Justice Department partners will protect the American people from the threat of terrorism, using all means necessary."

"From the moment President Trump took office, he made clear that his Administration would put the safety and security of the American people first," said Secretary Markwayne Mullin of the Department of Homeland Security. "The President's direction to use the Alien Terrorist Removal Court to expel Nazira Haji Zada, an Afghan national who plotted with members of her family to carry out an ISIS-inspired attack on American soil, delivers on that promise. Thanks to the President's leadership and the coordinated efforts the Departments of Homeland Security, Justice, and State, Nazira Haji Zada's final order of removal is now FINAL. Those who plot acts of terrorism against the United States have no place in our country. We will find them, and we will use every lawful tool available to remove them."

"Zada supported her sons' terrorist plot to attack the United States while she enjoyed the privilege of residing here as a resident alien," said Assistant Attorney General for National Security John A. Eisenberg. "She abused our Nation's hospitality and represented a clear threat to our national security. The United States is a safer place now that her sons are in custody and she has been deported."

"Those who support terrorism against the American people will face the consequences," said State Department Spokesman Tommy Pigott. "We will secure our borders, and we will use every tool to stop those who intend us harm from entering or remaining at-large in our country. Under the leadership of President Trump, the State Department, alongside the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security, will always work tirelessly to ensure the safety of our people and the security of our nation."

Tawhedi and Abdullah Haji Zada were [arrested](#) on Oct. 7, 2024, after purchasing firearms and ammunition to be used in an Election Day terrorist 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, and 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 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 on June 13, 2025, 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 started selling off their property, including furniture, computers, a mobile phone, and the family's two vehicles. Zada signed a contract to sell the family house. The family also purchased one-way airfare for travel to Kabul, Afghanistan shortly before Election Day 2024 for its members, including for Zada and other minor children but not Abdullah and Tawhedi.

The ATRC is a specialized federal court, which Congress established in 1996. The court has jurisdiction to swiftly remove alien terrorists from the United States when the government establishes by a preponderance of the evidence that an alien is a terrorist. *See* Title 8 of the United States Code, Sections 1227(a)(4)(B), 1531(1), and 1534(g). It is run and staffed by U.S. federal district court judges confirmed to the judiciary pursuant to Article III of the Constitution and then appointed to the ATRC by the Chief Justice of the United States. *See* Title 8 of the 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 United States 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 Homeland Security Investigations and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

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

For more information on the ATRC and to view court documents visit: www.atrc.uscourts.gov/. The Department of Justice previously announced the arrest here: www.justice.gov/opa/pr/department-justice-files-first-case-us-alien-terrorist-removal-court-deport-afghan-alien-who

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