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Defendant Found Guilty of Conspiracy to Support Terrorists

Syed Haris Ahmed Faces up to 15 Years in Federal Prison

WASHINGTON - After a bench trial held last week in the Northern District of Georgia, U.S. District Judge William S. Duffey, Jr., announced today that Syed Haris Ahmed, 24, has been found guilty of conspiracy to provide material support to terrorists.

"This case has never been about an imminent threat to the United States, because in the post-9/11 world we will not wait to disrupt terrorism-related activity until a bomb is built and ready to explode," said David E. Nahmias, U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia. "The fuse that leads to an explosion of violence may be long, but once it is lit – once individuals unlawfully agree to support terrorist acts at home or abroad – we will prosecute them to snuff that fuse out. This investigation is connected to arrests and convictions of multiple terrorist supporters in Atlanta and around the world – all before any innocent people were killed. I commend the agents, prosecutors, and support staff who have worked so hard for so long to gather and present the evidence that led to today's guilty verdict."

"This prosecution underscores the importance of international and domestic cooperation in combating terrorism," said David Kris, Assistant Attorney General for National Security. "The agents, analysts and prosecutors involved in this case and in related investigations around the world deserve a special thanks for their efforts."

"Protecting the United States from terrorist attacks is the highest priority of every FBI employee," said FBI Atlanta Special Agent in Charge Gregory Jones. "Working with our law enforcement and intelligence community partners, the FBI was fortunate enough to have disrupted and dismantled a group

whose stated goal was to provide support to those engaged in terrorism. I would like to thank the men and women of the Atlanta Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) who, for over a year and a half, painstakingly pursued this defendant and others as they conspired and devised ways to achieve their dangerous goals. The conviction in this case validates the FBI's approach that we do not need to wait, nor should we wait, for an individual to be caught with his hands on a bomb before we recognize and respond to the threat."

According to U.S. Attorney Nahmias and the evidence presented during the trial:

Ahmed is a naturalized U.S. citizen who was born in Pakistan and raised in Marietta and Dawsonville, Ga. At trial, the government presented evidence that, beginning in late 2004 and early 2005, Ahmed unlawfully agreed (conspired) with others to provide material support to terrorists engaged in violent jihad. The evidence indicated that the material support consisted of: (1) Ahmed and other individuals who would provide themselves as personnel to engage in violent jihad, and (2) property, namely, video clips of symbolic and infrastructure targets for potential terrorist attacks in the Washington, D.C., area, including the United States Capitol, which were taken by Ahmed and his principal alleged co-conspirator and then sent to "the jihadi brothers" abroad.

At trial, the government presented evidence that Ahmed and his co-conspirators used the Internet to develop relationships and maintain contact with each other and with other supporters of violent jihad in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, and elsewhere. In support of the conspiracy, in March 2005 Ahmed traveled with his principal co-conspirator to Toronto, Canada, to meet with other co-conspirators and discuss their plans to travel to Pakistan in an effort to attend a paramilitary training camp operated by a terrorist organization, as well as potential targets for terrorist attacks in the United States.

In April 2005, Ahmed and his principal co-conspirator traveled to the Washington, D.C., area to take the casing videos, which the government's evidence showed they made to establish their credentials with other violent jihad supporters as well as for use in violent jihad propaganda and planning. Ahmed's co-conspirator sent several of the video clips to Younis Tsouli, a/k/a "Irhabi007" (Arabic for "Terrorist 007"), a propagandist and recruiter for the terrorist organization Al Qaeda in Iraq, and to Aabid Hussein Khan, a/k/a "Abu Umar," a facilitator for the Pakistan-based terrorist organizations "Lashkar-e-Tayyiba" and "Jaish-e-Mohammed." Both Tsouli and Khan have since been convicted of terrorism offenses in the United Kingdom.

The government also presented evidence at trial that in July 2005, Ahmed traveled from Atlanta to Pakistan in an unsuccessful attempt to enter a training camp and ultimately engage in violent jihad. After returning to Atlanta to resume his studies at Georgia Tech in August 2005, Ahmed expressed regret at his failure to join violent jihadists, conducted internet research on topics such as high explosives and evading surveillance, and discussed his intent to make another attempt to enter a violent jihad training camp.

In March 2006, however, Ahmed was approached by FBI agents and agreed to a series of voluntary, non-custodial interviews over the course of eight days. Amid efforts to deny his illegal activities and mislead the agents, Ahmed made increasingly incriminating statements. Efforts by the FBI to obtain Ahmed's

cooperation in the ongoing international terrorism investigation ended after the FBI discovered that Ahmed was surreptitiously contacting his principal co-conspirator, who was then in Bangladesh, to advise him of the FBI investigation and to warn him not to return to the United States. The conspiracy to provide material support to terrorists did not result in any known acts of terrorism.

Ahmed was arrested in Atlanta on March 23, 2006, on the original indictment in this case, which charged him with one count of material support of terrorism. He has been in custody since that time. The initial indictment was unsealed and publicly announced on April 20, 2006, after the arrest of the alleged principal co-conspirator in Bangladesh. Superseding indictments added three additional charges.

Ahmed recently waived his right to a jury trial on the conspiracy charge of the second superseding indictment (Count One) and agreed to have the verdict decided by the Court. The other three counts were severed. The bench trial was held on June 1-4, 2009, and the Court then took the verdict under advisement until today.

Judge Duffey delivered the guilty verdict in open court, but sealed his written findings supporting the verdict until the completion of the jury trial of a related case against the alleged principal co-conspirator, which is scheduled to begin on August 3, 2009. Judge Duffey set a hearing for tomorrow, June 11, at 11:00 a.m., for anyone interested in being heard on the sealing of the findings supporting the guilty verdict.

Ahmed could receive a maximum sentence of 15 years in prison, followed by a term of supervised release up to life, and a fine of up to \$250,000. In determining the actual sentence, the Court will consider the United States Sentencing Guidelines, which are not binding but provide appropriate sentencing ranges for most offenders. A sentencing date will be set after the completion of the alleged co-conspirator's trial.

This case is being investigated by agents and officers of the Atlanta Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF), which is led by the FBI, Atlanta Division.

Assistant United States Attorneys Robert McBurney and Christopher Bly and Trial Attorney Alexis Collins, of the Counterterrorism Section of the Justice Department's National Security Division, are prosecuting the case.

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