

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Wednesday, August 8, 2018

## **South Carolina Teen Convicted for Attempting to Join ISIS**

Zakaryia Abdin, 19, of Ladson, South Carolina, pleaded guilty today to attempting to provide material support to the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), a designated foreign terrorist organization.

Assistant Attorney General for National Security John C. Demers, U.S. Attorney Sherri A. Lydon for the District of South Carolina and Special Agent in Charge Jody Norris of the FBI's Columbia Division made the announcement. Abdin appeared before U.S. District Court Judge Richard M. Gergel.

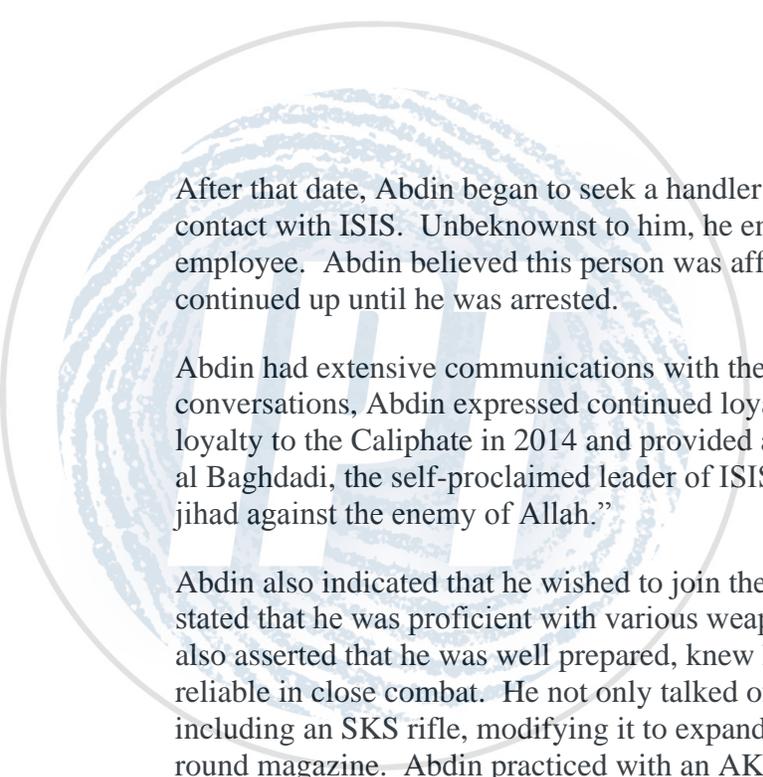
“Abdin’s attempt to provide material support to ISIS by traveling overseas put American lives at risk,” said Assistant Attorney General Demers. “That is unacceptable, and I applaud the dedicated agents and prosecutors who stopped him and have achieved this successful outcome.”

“The most important job of government is protecting the people of the United States from harm, whether it comes from criminals or terrorists,” said U.S. Attorney Lydon. “This case is an example of law enforcement doing exactly that. The threat to our safety continues to be very real. The JTTF did a great job in preventing this defendant from joining ISIS. He wanted to fight as a soldier committing acts of terror for ISIS and he didn’t care where he fought.” U.S. Attorney Lydon commended the intense work of Charleston’s Joint Terrorism Task Force and noted that this is the first conviction for a person attempting to provide material support to a terrorist organization in the District of South Carolina.

“Once again, the Joint Terrorism Task Force has uncovered, investigated and prevented terrorist activity with roots in South Carolina” said Special Agent in Charge Norris. “These results are made possible by the coordinated efforts of our federal, state and local partners, who are committed to sharing information and resources to protect our communities.”

The FBI arrested the defendant at the Charleston International Airport on March 30, 2017 when he attempted to board an airplane in order to travel overseas. The defendant’s intent was to travel overseas in order to provide material support or resources to ISIS.

Abdin began his efforts on Jan. 3, 2017, when he created a social media account to attempt to join ISIS. On Jan. 20, 2017, Abdin visited the FBI in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina to meet with a special agent from the Joint Terrorism Task Force. During this interview, the special agent advised Abdin about the FBI’s role in conducting counterterrorism investigations and outlined for him various statutory definitions. The special agent also provided the definitions for terrorism and specifically told Abdin that ISIS was a designated foreign terrorist organization and that it was illegal to give any foreign terrorist organization any form of material support, including personnel.



After that date, Abdin began to seek a handler to get him overseas to Syria or Egypt to make contact with ISIS. Unbeknownst to him, he ended up making contact with an undercover FBI employee. Abdin believed this person was affiliated with ISIS. These communications continued up until he was arrested.

Abdin had extensive communications with the FBI employee. During the course of these on line conversations, Abdin expressed continued loyalty to ISIS. He said he had given a pledge of loyalty to the Caliphate in 2014 and provided a video of a new pledge to Commander Abu Baker al Baghdadi, the self-proclaimed leader of ISIS or the Caliphate, in which he pledged to “wage jihad against the enemy of Allah.”

Abdin also indicated that he wished to join the Caliphate and requested to serve in combat. He stated that he was proficient with various weapons, including AK’s, SKS rifles, and pistols. He also asserted that he was well prepared, knew how to shoot, and had experience with and was reliable in close combat. He not only talked of joining jihad, he also purchased weapons, including an SKS rifle, modifying it to expand its capacity from a 10 round magazine to a 30 round magazine. Abdin practiced with an AK at a local gun store, and with an SKS and a 9mm at a local outdoor shooting range outside of Charleston.

Abdin took a picture of himself carrying the 9mm in his waistband and took a picture of himself practicing shooting at night at the local outdoor range, and sent these to the undercover FBI employee.

Abdin undertook concrete steps to join the Caliphate and travel overseas to fight jihad. He applied for a passport. On March 22, 2017, the FBI was notified Abdin’s passport was delivered to his residence in Ladson. Later on the same date, Abdin sent a message to the undercover FBI employee to tell him to “let the brothers know I am coming very soon”

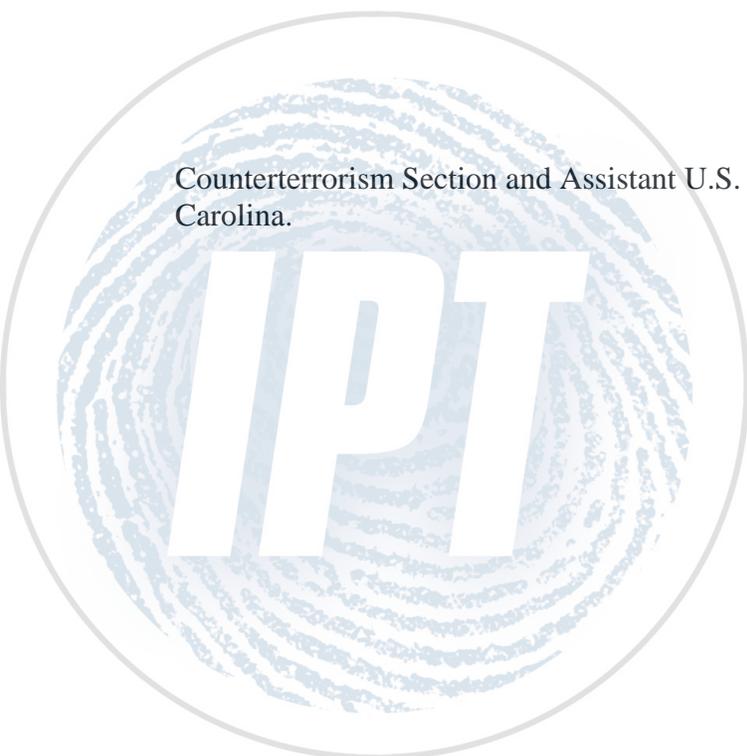
On March 23, 2017, Abdin made flight reservations aboard a commercial airline departing Charleston with a final destination of Amman, Jordan. The date for travel was set for March 30, 2017 at approximately 7:30 PM. Shortly thereafter on March 23, 2017, Abdin communicated to the undercover FBI employee that he was scheduled to arrive in Amman, Jordan on April 1, 2017, at approximately 2:05 AM.

On March 30, 2017, at approximately 4:17 PM Abdin arrived at the Charleston International Airport with one piece of luggage and a carry-on backpack. Abdin proceeded to a commercial airline ticket counter where he provided the attendant with travel documents and received a boarding pass for international travel to Amman. Abdin then proceeded from the ticketing counter toward the Transportation Security Administration’s security screening area where he was arrested.

Abdin, a U.S. citizen, faces a statutory maximum sentence of 20 years in prison. The maximum statutory sentence is prescribed by Congress and is provided here for informational purposes. Any sentencing of the defendant will be determined by the court based on the advisory Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

The case was investigated by Special Agents of the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Force. This case is being prosecuted by Trial Attorney Jennifer Burke of the National Security Division’s

Counterterrorism Section and Assistant U.S. Attorney Sean Kittrell of the District of South Carolina.

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