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Monday, February 4, 2019

North Carolina Man Sentenced to 15 Years in Prison for Attempting and Conspiring to Provide Material Support to ISIS

<https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/north-carolina-man-sentenced-15-years-prison-attempting-and-conspiring-provide-material>

Erick Jamal Hendricks, 38, of Charlotte, North Carolina, was sentenced to 15 years in prison for attempting to provide material support to the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS).

A jury in Akron, Ohio, convicted Hendricks last year of attempting and conspiring to provide material support to a designated foreign terrorist organization.

The sentence was announced by Assistant Attorney General for National Security John C. Demers, U.S. Attorney Justin E. Herdman of the Northern District of Ohio and Special Agent in Charge Eric Smith of the FBI's Cleveland Office.

According to court documents and trial testimony, Hendricks tried to recruit people to train together and conduct terrorist attacks in the United States on behalf of ISIS.

"Hendricks used social media to recruit others to plan and carry out attacks on our homeland in the name of ISIS, with the goal of creating a sleeper cell on our soil," said Assistant Attorney General Demers. "Thanks to the collaborative efforts of law enforcement, Hendricks' plan was thwarted, and with today's sentence, he is being held accountable for his terrorist activities."

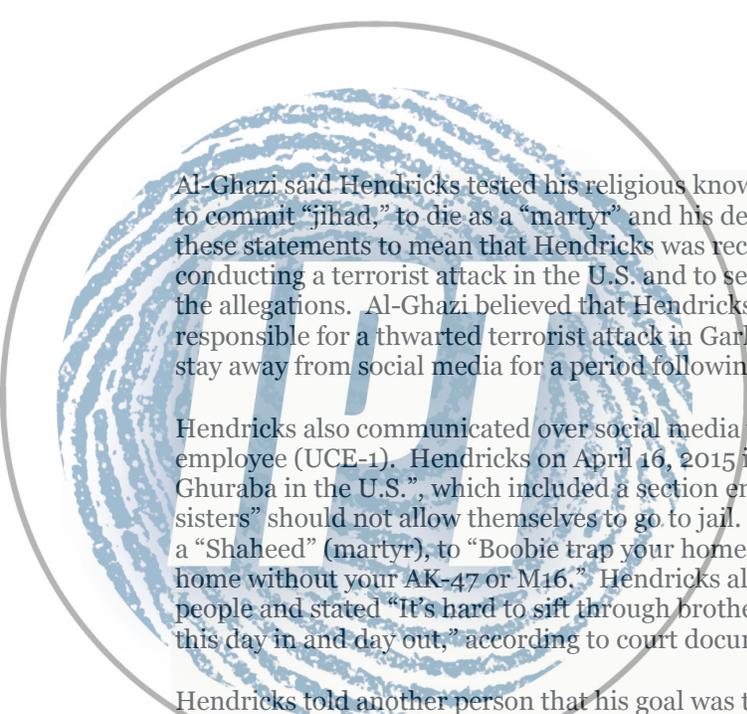
"This defendant sought to create a cell of ISIS supporters, train those people and then launch attacks from inside the United States," U.S. Attorney Herdman said. "This defendant posed a very real threat to the safety of our community and nation."

"Erick Jamal Hendricks represents the significant online ISIS threat that we face daily – a US citizen that became radicalized online and attempted to recruit and train individuals to commit jihad, all while living in the United States," said Special Agent in Charge Smith. "The FBI urges the public to report information regarding individuals pledging their allegiance to ISIS or other identified terrorist groups. The FBI is pleased that Hendricks was stopped before he was successful and now will spend a significant amount of time behind bars."

According to court documents and trial testimony, Hendricks tried to recruit people to train together and conduct terrorist attacks in the United States on behalf of ISIS.

Amir Al-Ghazi was arrested in the Northern District of Ohio in June 2015 after attempting to purchase an AK-47 assault rifle and ammunition from an undercover law enforcement officer. Al-Ghazi had pledged allegiance to ISIS in social media and made statements expressing interest in conducting attacks in the U.S.

Hendricks had contacted Al-Ghazi over social media to recruit him in the spring of 2015. Hendricks allegedly told Al-Ghazi that he "needed people" and wanted to meet in person; that there were several "brothers" located in Texas and Mexico; that he was attempting to "get brothers to meet face to face;" and that he wanted "to get brothers to train together," according to court documents and trial testimony



Al-Ghazi said Hendricks tested his religious knowledge and commitment, inquiring about his willingness to commit “jihad,” to die as a “martyr” and his desire to enter “jannah” (paradise). Al-Ghazi understood these statements to mean that Hendricks was recruiting people to train together for the purpose of conducting a terrorist attack in the U.S. and to see if Al-Ghazi was suitable for recruitment, according to the allegations. Al-Ghazi believed that Hendricks and the “brothers in Texas and Mexico” may have been responsible for a thwarted terrorist attack in Garland, Texas, on May 3, 2015, and therefore he decided to stay away from social media for a period following the attack to minimize detection by law enforcement.

Hendricks also communicated over social media with several other people, including an undercover FBI employee (UCE-1). Hendricks on April 16, 2015 instructed UCE-1 to download the document “GPS for the Ghuraba in the U.S.,” which included a section entitled “Final Advice” which advocated that “brothers and sisters” should not allow themselves to go to jail. This section also allegedly encouraged Muslims to die as a “Shaheed” (martyr), to “Boobie trap your homes,” to “lay in wait for them” and to “never leave your home without your AK-47 or M16.” Hendricks also directed UCE-1 to communicate online with other people and stated “It’s hard to sift through brothers;” “Allah chooses only the few;” and “Everyday I do this day in and day out,” according to court documents and trial testimony.

Hendricks told another person that his goal was to create a sleeper cell to be trained and housed at a secure compound that would conduct attacks in the U.S. He mentioned that potential targets included military members whose information had been released by ISIS and the woman who organized the “Draw Prophet Mohammad contest,” and he claimed to have 10 members signed up for his group, according to court documents and trial testimony.

On April 23, 2015, Hendricks used social media to contact Elton Simpson, who, along with Nadir Hamid Soofi, was inspired by ISIS and launched the attack on the “First Annual Muhammad Art Exhibit and Contest” in Garland. Simpson and Soofi opened fire, wounding a security guard, before Garland police returned fire and killed both Simpson and Soofi. Hendricks also connected UCE-1 with Simpson via social media, communicated with UCE-1 about the contest in Garland, and directed UCE-1 to go to the contest. Hendricks said: “If you see that pig (meaning the organizer of the contest) make your ‘voice’ heard against her.” He also asked UCE-1 a series of questions related to security at the event, including: “How big is the gathering?” “How many ppl?” “How many police/agents?” “Do you see feds there?” “Do you see snipers?” and “How many media?” Shortly thereafter, Simpson and Soofi committed the attack on the cartoon drawing contest.

Al-Ghazi is serving a 16-year prison sentence after pleading guilty to attempting to provide material support to a designated terrorist organization and being a felon in possession of firearms.

This case was investigated by the FBI’s offices in Cleveland; Columbia, South Carolina; Baltimore; and Charlotte, with assistance from the U.S. Attorney’s Offices in the District of Maryland, District of South Carolina and the Western District of North Carolina.

This case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Matthew W. Shepherd and Mark S. Bennett and Trial Attorney Rebecca Magnone of the National Security Division’s Counterterrorism Section.

Topic(s):

Counterterrorism
National Security

Component(s):

National Security Division (NSD)