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South Carolina Man Sentenced for Attempting to Provide Material Support to ISIS

<https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/south-carolina-man-sentenced-attempting-provide-material-support-isis>

Zakariya Abdin, 20, of Ladson, South Carolina, was sentenced yesterday to 20 years to be followed by a lifetime of supervised release for attempting to provide material support to the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), a designated foreign terrorist organization. Abdin previously entered a guilty plea in August of 2018 and has remained in federal custody since his arrest by the FBI in March of 2017.

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.

“The Department of Justice is committed to holding accountable U.S. citizens, like Abdin, and others who would leave here to provide material support to ISIS overseas,” said Assistant Attorney General Demers. “Thanks to the great work of the agents and prosecutors on this case, his plans were thwarted and with this sentence he is now being held accountable for his crime. The National Security Division is committed to identifying and bringing to justice those who would provide material support to foreign terrorist organizations.”

“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, and preventing what could have been a much greater tragedy. I am proud of the great work JTTF did in preventing this defendant from joining ISIS and fighting on their behalf, whether that would have been domestically or internationally. His goal was to kill on behalf of ISIS, whether that was in the United States or abroad. His goal was to be an ISIS soldier, and to kill Americans wherever ISIS directed him.” 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 to join ISIS.

According to court documents, Abdin, a U.S. citizen, began his efforts on Jan. 3, 2017, when he created a social media account to be used to join ISIS. On Jan. 20, 2017, Abdin visited the FBI in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, to meet with an FBI Special Agent from the Joint Terrorism Task Force. During this visit, the agent advised Abdin about the FBI's role in conducting counterterrorism investigations, discussed various statutory definitions (including terrorism), and 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 undercover 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 ISIS in 2014 and provided a video of a new pledge to Abu Baker al Baghdadi, the self-proclaimed leader of ISIS, in which Abdin pledged to “wage jihad against the enemy of Allah.”

Abdin also indicated that he wished to join ISIS and its so-called caliphate and requested to serve in combat. He stated that he was proficient with various weapons, including pistols and AK and SKS rifles. He also asserted that he was well prepared, knew how to shoot, and had experience with and was reliable in close combat. He also purchased weapons, including an SKS assault rifle, modifying it to expand its capacity from a 10 round magazine to a 30 round magazine. Abdin practiced with an AK assault rifle at a local gun store, and with an SKS assault rifle and a 9mm handgun 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 ISIS 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. After making the reservations, Abdin told to undercover FBI employee that he was scheduled to arrive in Amman, Jordan on April 1, 2017.

On March 30, 2017, Abdin arrived at the Charleston International Airport, checked in for his departing flight, and was subsequently arrested.

Abdin 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.

This case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Nathan Williams and Sean Kittrell of the District of South Carolina and Trial Attorney Jennifer Burke of the National Security Division’s Counterterrorism Section.