



The United States Department of Justice

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NOTE: The complaint can be found [here](#).

TAMPA MAN CHARGED WITH ATTEMPTING TO PROVIDE MATERIAL SUPPORT TO ISIS

WASHINGTON – The Department of Justice today announced the filing of a criminal complaint charging Muhammed Momtaz Al-Azhari, 23, of Tampa, Florida, with attempting to provide material support or resources to a designated foreign terrorist organization, namely, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). If convicted, Al-Azhari faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in federal prison.

“We are grateful for the quick work of our partners at the FBI to apprehend Al-Azhari before he could carry out his attack,” said Assistant Attorney General for National Security John C. Demers. “This case demonstrates the Department’s commitment to stand vigilant against the threat of terrorism and violent extremism in all its forms.”

“We are grateful for the hard work and swift action by our law enforcement partners and concerned citizens during this investigation,” stated U.S. Attorney Maria Chapa Lopez for the Middle District of Florida. “Their coordination and cooperation in this matter allowed us to interrupt a serious threat, without harm to anyone.”

“From Mr. Al-Azhari’s attempt to acquire firearms through unlawful channels to his desire to provide material support to a designated foreign terrorist organization, it was clear Mr. Al-Azhari’s intention was to carry out an act of violence,” said Assistant Director Jill Sanborn of the FBI’s Counterterrorism Division. “The FBI and the Joint Terrorism Task Forces across the country will continue to use all of their legal authorities to prevent a potential act of terrorism in the United States, and elsewhere.”

“The primary mission of the FBI is to protect the American public from a terrorist attack. Today’s announcement of the arrest of Muhammed Momtaz Al-Azahari is

proof we are committed to that pledge. I commend the 18 federal, state, and local member agencies who comprise FBI Tampa's Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) for working day and night to prevent the loss of life in the Tampa Bay community," said Special Agent in Charge of the FBI Tampa Division Michael F. McPherson. "We were also fortunate to gain the cooperation of multiple citizens who willingly and bravely provided their assistance during this investigation. This strong bond between law enforcement and the public allowed us to disrupt this threat."

According to the complaint, Al-Azhari was an ISIS supporter who planned and attempted to carry out an attack on behalf of that terrorist organization. Al-Azhari, who has a criminal history that includes prior terrorism charges in Saudi Arabia, attempted to purchase multiple firearms over the course of the investigation, before acquiring a Glock pistol and a silencer. He also expressed admiration for Pulse nightclub shooter Omar Mateen and spoke of his desire to carry out a similar mass casualty shooting. Additionally, Al-Azhari researched and scouted potential targets in the Tampa area, including Honeymoon Island. He also rehearsed portions of an attack and the statements that he would make during or in connection with such an attack.

FBI agents arrested Al-Azhari on May 24, 2020, after he took possession of weapons to be used in an attack.

A complaint is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed one or more violations of federal criminal law, and every defendant is presumed innocent unless, and until, proven guilty.

This case was investigated by the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force, including Homeland Security Investigations, the Tampa Police Department, the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office, the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, the Pasco Sheriff's Office, the St. Petersburg Police Department, the Clearwater Police Department, and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. It will be prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Patrick Scruggs with assistance from Trial Attorney Ranganath Mathripragada of the National Security Division's Counterterrorism Section.

The year 2020 marks the 150th anniversary of the Department of Justice. Learn more about the history of our agency at www.Justice.gov/Celebrating150Years.

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