



THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
SOUTHERN DISTRICT *of* NEW YORK

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Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Southern District of New York

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, January 19, 2021

U.S. Army Soldier Arrested For Attempting To Assist ISIS To Conduct Deadly Ambush On U.S. Troops

U.S. Army Private First Class Cole James Bridges Provided Tactical Guidance in Attempt to Help ISIS to Attack U.S. Forces in the Middle East

Audrey Strauss, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, John C. Demers, the Assistant Attorney General for National Security, William F. Sweeney Jr., Assistant Director-in-Charge of the New York Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation ("FBI"), Dermot Shea, Commissioner of the New York City Police Department ("NYPD"), and Roy T. Cochran, Director, U.S. Army Counterintelligence Coordinating Authority, announced today the arrest of COLE JAMES BRIDGES, a/k/a "Cole Gonzales," a Private First Class in the U.S. Army, on federal terrorism charges based on BRIDGES's alleged efforts to assist ISIS to attack and kill U.S. soldiers in the Middle East. BRIDGES was charged by Complaint with attempting to provide material support to a designated foreign terrorist organization, and attempting to murder U.S. military service members. The FBI and Army Counterintelligence arrested BRIDGES today, and he will be presented on Thursday, January 21, 2021, in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Georgia.

Manhattan U.S. Attorney Audrey Strauss said: "As alleged, Cole Bridges betrayed the oath he swore to defend the United States by attempting to provide ISIS with tactical military advice to ambush and kill his fellow service members. Our troops risk their lives for our country, but they should never face such peril at the hands of one of their own. Today, thanks to the efforts of the agents and detectives of the JTTF, and our partners in the Department of Defense, Bridges is in custody and facing federal terrorism charges for his alleged crimes."

Assistant Attorney General John C. Demers said: "Bridges is charged with giving military advice and guidance on how to kill fellow soldiers to individuals he thought were part of ISIS. This alleged personal and professional betrayal of comrades and country is terrible to contemplate, but fortunately, the FBI was able to identify the threat posed by Bridges, and today's charges are the first step in holding him accountable for his crimes. ISIS ideology continues to infect those who would threaten the nation's security from within and without, and we will continue to fight this threat."

FBI Assistant Director William F. Sweeney Jr. said: "As we allege today, Bridges, a private in the U.S. Army, betrayed our country and his unit when he plotted with someone he believed was an ISIS sympathizer to help ISIS attack and kill U.S. soldiers in the Middle East. Fortunately, the person with whom he communicated was an FBI employee, and we were able to prevent his evil desires from coming to fruition.

Bridges could have chosen a life of honorable service, but instead he traded it for the possibility of a lengthy prison sentence. This case should serve as a reminder that the FBI's New York JTTF will never quit in its commitment to protect our Nation from all those who seek to do it harm."

Army Counterintelligence Coordinating Authority Director Roy T. Cochran said: "Army Counterintelligence's top priority is protecting the force so it can remain committed to fighting and winning our Nation's wars. The results of this investigation show the efforts of Army Counterintelligence agents working alongside our partners in the FBI. We are dedicated to protecting our Soldiers, Civilians, and Families from terrorist acts and insider threats."

According to the criminal Complaint charging BRIDGES,[1] which was unsealed today in Manhattan federal court:

BRIDGES joined the U.S. Army in approximately September 2019, and was assigned as a cavalry scout in the 3rd Infantry Division based in Fort Stewart, Georgia. Beginning in at least 2019, BRIDGES began researching and consuming online propaganda promoting jihadists and their violent ideology. BRIDGES also expressed his support for the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham ("ISIS") and jihad on social media. In or about October 2020, BRIDGES began communicating with an FBI online covert employee (the "OCE"), who was posing as an ISIS supporter in contact with ISIS fighters in the Middle East. During these communications, BRIDGES expressed his frustration with the U.S. military and his desire to aid ISIS. BRIDGES then provided training and guidance to purported ISIS fighters who were planning attacks, including advice about potential targets in New York City, such as the 9/11 Memorial. BRIDGES also provided the OCE with portions of a U.S. Army training manual and guidance about military combat tactics, for use by ISIS.

In or about December 2020, BRIDGES began to supply the OCE with instructions for the purported ISIS fighters on how to attack U.S. forces in the Middle East. Among other things, BRIDGES diagrammed specific military maneuvers intended to help ISIS fighters maximize the lethality of attacks on U.S. troops. BRIDGES further provided advice about the best way to fortify an ISIS encampment to repel an attack by U.S. Special Forces, including by wiring certain buildings with explosives to kill the U.S. troops. Then, in January 2021, BRIDGES provided the OCE with a video of himself in body armor standing before a flag often used by ISIS fighters and making a gesture symbolic of support for ISIS. Approximately a week later, BRIDGES sent a second video in which BRIDGES, using a voice manipulator, narrated a propaganda speech in support of the anticipated ambush by ISIS on U.S. troops.

* * *

BRIDGES, 20, of Stowe, Ohio, is charged in the Complaint with (1) attempting to provide material support to ISIS, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 2339B, which carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison; and (2) attempting to murder U.S. military service members, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1114, which carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison. The statutory penalties are prescribed by Congress and are provided here for informational purposes only, as any sentencing of the defendant would be determined by the judge.

Ms. Strauss praised the outstanding efforts of the FBI's New York Joint Terrorism Task Force, which consists of investigators and analysts from the FBI, the NYPD, and over 50 other federal, state, and local agencies. Ms. Strauss also thanked U.S. Army Counterintelligence, the FBI Washington Field Office, the FBI Atlanta Field Office and its Savannah Resident Agency, the FBI Cleveland Field Office, the FBI's Counterterrorism Division, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Georgia, the Air Force Office of Special Investigations, U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command, and the U.S. Army 3rd Infantry Division for their assistance.

This prosecution is being handled by the Office's Terrorism and International Narcotics Unit. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Sam Adelsberg, Matthew Hellman, and Sidhardha Kamaraju are in charge of the prosecution, with assistance from Trial Attorneys Michael Dittoe and Lauren Goddard of the Counterterrorism Section of the Department of Justice's National Security Division.

[1] As the introductory phrase signifies, the entirety of the text of the Complaint, and the description of the Complaint set forth herein, constitute only allegations and every fact described should be treated as an allegation.

Attachment(s):

[Download Cole James Bridges complaint \(21-mag-639\).pdf](#)

Topic(s):

Counterterrorism

Component(s):

[USAO - New York, Southern](#)

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