

Leading ISIS Media Figure and Foreign Fighter Charged with Conspiring to Provide Material Support to a Terrorist Organization, Resulting in Death

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Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Eastern District of Virginia

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Defendant was Detained by the Syrian Democratic Forces and Transferred to the Eastern District of Virginia in FBI Custody

ALEXANDRIA, Va. – As alleged in a criminal complaint unsealed today in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, Mohammed Khalifa, a Saudi-born Canadian citizen who was a leading figure in the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham's (ISIS) English Media Section and served as an ISIS fighter, was charged with conspiring to provide material support to ISIS, a foreign terrorist organization, resulting in death. Khalifa was captured overseas by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in January 2019. He was recently transferred into the custody of the FBI, at which point he was first brought to the Eastern District of Virginia.

“As alleged, Mohammed Khalifa not only fought for ISIS on the battlefield in Syria, but he was also the voice behind the violence,” said Raj Parekh, Acting U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia. “Through his alleged leading role in translating, narrating, and advancing ISIS's online propaganda, Khalifa promoted the terrorist group, furthered its worldwide recruitment efforts, and expanded the reach of videos that glorified the horrific murders and indiscriminate cruelty of ISIS. EDVA and our partners have a long history of prosecuting national security cases, and we are honored to serve once again in this effort to seek justice on behalf of the United States and the victims of ISIS's brutality.”

As alleged in the criminal complaint, Mohammed Khalifa, a/k/a “Abu Ridwan Al-Kanadi,” a/k/a “Abu Muthanna Al-Muhajir,” 38, of Canada, served in prominent roles within ISIS starting in 2013 and continuing until his capture by the SDF in January 2019 following a firefight between ISIS fighters and the SDF. In addition to allegedly serving as an ISIS fighter, Khalifa allegedly served as a lead translator in ISIS's propaganda production and the English-speaking narrator on multiple violent ISIS recruitment videos.

“This arrest is the first step in holding the defendant accountable for his alleged terrorist activity, which included serving as an ISIS fighter and an important member of the ISIS media bureau,” said Acting Assistant Attorney General for National Security Mark J. Lesko. “As alleged in the complaint, the defendant and others engaged in a wide-ranging conspiracy to provide material support to ISIS, with the conspirators serving the terrorist organization in a variety of capacities. As alleged, that conspiracy resulted in the death of numerous others at the hands of ISIS members and fighters. The National Security Division and our partners are committed to holding accountable those who provide material support to foreign terrorist organizations. I want to thank all of the agents, analysts, and prosecutors who are responsible for this case.”

“Let there be no doubt, the FBI will hold terrorists and those who provide material support to terrorist organizations accountable for their actions,” stated Assistant Director Timothy Langan, FBI Counterterrorism Division. “The unsealing of the charges today demonstrates the FBI’s tireless dedication and commitment to pursue those who join foreign terrorist organizations like ISIS. The defendant is alleged to have, among other things, played an integral role in the recruitment and radicalization of Westerners through the production, narration, and dissemination of English-language ISIS propaganda, including the Flames of War videos that depicted the brutal execution of ISIS-held prisoners and hostages. He will now face justice inside of a U.S. courtroom for his actions. We will continue to present a united front, with our U.S. government and international partners, in the fight against ISIS, those who support ISIS, and other terrorist groups.”

“As alleged in the complaint, as one of the leading figures in ISIS’s English media section, Mohammed Khalifa contributed to the radicalization of individuals through his English narration of ISIS recruitment propaganda,” said Steven M. D’Antuono, Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI’s Washington Field Office. “While many Americans are aware of the brutal and violent crimes committed by many ISIS actors, ISIS’s efforts to radicalize individuals to travel to Syria and commit violence on its behalf were equally horrendous. The charges announced today, which are the result of years of diligent work by the FBI’s Washington Field Office and our partners, are a reminder to those who continue to support ISIS around the world that the U.S. Government has not forgotten your crimes. We will find you and hold you accountable.”

The complaint also alleges that Khalifa traveled to Syria in the spring of 2013 with the intent of becoming a foreign fighter and ultimately joining ISIS. He joined ISIS in or around November 2013 and swore allegiance to then-ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. In early 2014, he was recruited to join ISIS’s Media Bureau due in part to his linguistic capabilities as a fluent English and Arabic speaker. Khalifa played an important role in the production and dissemination of ISIS propaganda across multiple media platforms targeting Western audiences. A primary focus of much of Khalifa’s propaganda production was aimed at enticing ISIS supporters to travel to ISIS-controlled areas to join ISIS or to conduct attacks in the West, including in the United States, on ISIS’s behalf.

Khalifa actively participated in armed hostilities on behalf of ISIS. Just prior to his capture by the SDF on or about January 13, 2019, Khalifa engaged in armed conflict on behalf of ISIS, including throwing grenades against opposing combatants.

The complaint further alleges that Khalifa was a prominent figure within the ISIS Media Bureau, the “Diwan of Central Media,” and assisted in the translation and narration of approximately 15 total videos created and distributed by ISIS. The productions narrated by Khalifa include two of the most influential and exceedingly violent ISIS propaganda videos: “Flames of War: Fighting Has Just Begun,” distributed on September 19, 2014, and “Flames of War II: Until the Final Hour,” distributed on November 29, 2017. These videos, containing English narration by Khalifa, were part of an ISIS media campaign promoting violence committed against U.S. citizens and other countries’ citizens in order to incite further violence against the United States, allied nations, and their citizens. The videos depict glamorized portrayals of ISIS and its fighters as well as scenes of violence, including depictions of unarmed prisoners being executed, depictions of ISIS attacks in the United States, and footage of ISIS attacks and fighting in what is described as Syria and Egypt.

Khalifa also allegedly narrated a series of recruitment videos entitled “Inside the Khilafah” that depicted various aspects of daily life within the Islamic State and featured ISIS members encouraging potential recruits to join ISIS and conduct terrorist attacks against non-Muslims. The narration in one of these videos encourages recruits unable to leave their home countries to join ISIS in conducting attacks in countries outside the Islamic State, displaying footage of ISIS attacks in Europe, including attacks in Paris, France; Brussels, Belgium; and Nice, France. The video also includes a voice recording of Omar Mateen, the Pulse Nightclub mass shooter, declaring his allegiance to ISIS during the June 12, 2016 terrorist attack in Orlando, Florida.

Productions by the ISIS Media Bureau during the time period in which Khalifa was allegedly a prominent member include videos or images depicting: the beheadings of American hostages James Wright Foley, Steven Joel Sotloff, and Peter Edward Kassig; an announcement concerning the death of American hostage Kayla Jean Mueller; the beheadings of British citizens David Haines and Alan Henning; the decapitated body of Japanese citizen Haruna Yukawa; and the beheading of Japanese citizen Kenji Goto.

Khalifa is charged with conspiring to provide material support or resources to a foreign terrorist organization, resulting in death. If convicted, he faces a maximum penalty of life in prison. Actual sentences for federal crimes are typically less than the maximum penalties. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after taking into account the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Dennis M. Fitzpatrick; Acting United States Attorney Raj Parekh; and Assistant U.S. Attorneys John T. Gibbs, and Aidan Taft Grano-Mickelson, all from the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of Virginia; and Trial Attorney Alicia H. Cook of the Justice Department are prosecuting the case.

A copy of this press release is located on the website of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Virginia. Related court documents and information are located on the website of the District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia or on PACER by searching for Case No. 1:21-mj-34.

[Affidavit is available here.](#)

A criminal complaint contains allegations that a defendant has committed one or more crimes. The defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

Topic(s):

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