

Virginia Woman Sentenced for Making False Statements in an International Terrorism Investigation

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<http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/virginia-woman-sentenced-making-false-statements-international-terrorism-investigation>

Heather Elizabeth Coffman, 29, of Glen Allen, Virginia, was sentenced today to 54 months in prison for making false statements in an international terrorism investigation.

Assistant Attorney General for National Security John P. Carlin, U.S. Attorney Dana J. Boente of the Eastern District of Virginia and Special Agent in Charge Adam S. Lee of the FBI's Richmond Field Office made the announcement.

Coffman pleaded guilty to a one-count criminal information on Jan. 30, 2015. According to the statement of facts filed with the plea agreement, Coffman admitted that beginning prior to June 2014 and continuing up through November 2014, she used several Facebook accounts under different names showing her support for the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant's (ISIL, referred to as ISIS by the defendant and within court documents) cause. These accounts also revealed the defendant's romantic involvement with an individual referred to as "N.A.," a foreign national living outside of the United States. In the months leading up to September 2014, Coffman and N.A. communicated almost daily via Facebook and other communications platforms. During their conversations, Coffman and N.A. explored options for N.A. to travel to Syria in order to fight for ISIS and die a "Shaheed," referring to a martyr who dies for "jihad."

Coffman cultivated online relationships with individuals she believed were ISIS facilitators operating in Syria. She put N.A. in contact with a facilitator to assist with his travel and eventual training with ISIS (with the Coffman's financial assistance for travel) before he was to cross the border into Syria to fight with ISIS. This plan was moving forward when the couple's relationship deteriorated in early September 2014, and N.A. backed out of the plans. Coffman later communicated with others about her disappointment and expressed how she wished that the plan had succeeded.

According to the plea documents, Coffman admitted that she lied during the ongoing investigation on Nov. 13, 2014, when she told FBI agents that she did not know whether N.A. had talked to anybody else who supported ISIS, and that she did not know anybody N.A. had talked to when, as Coffman well knew, she had previously put N.A. in contact with ISIS fighters and N.A., in turn, had communicated with them to facilitate N.A.'s travel to Turkey to join ISIS.

This case was investigated by FBI's Richmond Field Office and the Richmond Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF). Member agencies of the Richmond JTTF who assisted in this particular investigation include Virginia State Police, Henrico County Police, Chesterfield County Police, Richmond Police, Homeland Security Investigations, U.S. Secret Service, Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms and Explosives, Department of State Diplomatic Security Service, Transportation Security Administration and Defense Criminal Investigative Service.

The prosecution is being handled by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Michael Gill and Jessica Aber of the Eastern District of Virginia, and Trial Attorney Annamartine Salick of the National Security Division's Counterterrorism Section.

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