

America's Orwellian Police State Goes Live: US Citizen Convicted of Providing 'Material Support' to Terrorists

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An American citizen from Boston suburb [was convicted on Tuesday on terrorism charges](#), but the charges were loosely defined and the verdict may represent a significant blow to free speech rights.

Federal prosecutors claimed that Tarek Mehanna, 29, traveled to Yemen in 2004 with the hope of training as a terrorist and going on to fight American soldiers in Iraq. He failed to find any training camps, but returned home and allegedly promoted al Qaeda by writing about violent jihad against U.S. foreign policy on the Internet.

Mehanna and his lawyers instead claimed that he traveled to Yemen to receive training to become an Islamic scholar and that his writings on the Internet amounted to free speech.

"The charges scare people," said J. W. Carney Jr., Mehanna's lawyer and told reporters they would appeal. "The charges scared us when we first saw them. But the more that we looked at the evidence, the more that we got to know our client Tarek, the more we believed in his innocence."

Post 9/11, the government has convicted many people on charges of "material support" to terrorists. But free speech advocates insist these are suffocating First Amendment rights and may grow to be even broader in the future.

Mehanna's lawyers requested a jury instruction on First Amendment issues [which included three points of instruction](#). The first reminded the jury of the right to hold views they regard as appalling. The second emphasized special protection for speech concerning public issues.

And the third explained the material support statute Mehanna was charged with, and makes clear: "To constitute a crime, the material support must be provided at the direction of the terrorist group, or in coordination with the terrorist group, or as a service provided directly to the terrorist group at its request. The statute does not prohibit someone from vigorously promoting and supporting the political goals of the group. This is considered independent advocacy, and is protected by the First Amendment."

"The ACLU of Massachusetts," read [a statement by executive director of the Massachusetts ACLU Carol Rose](#), "is gravely concerned that today's verdict against Tarek Mehanna undermines the First Amendment and threatens national security."

"Under the government's theory of the case, ordinary people—including writers and

journalists, academic researchers, translators, and even ordinary web surfers—could be prosecuted for researching or translating controversial and unpopular ideas. If the verdict is not overturned on appeal, the First Amendment will be seriously compromised.”

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