

## **California massacre: Female shooter pledged allegiance to ISIS**

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**San Bernardino, California:** The woman who helped her husband kill 14 people at a holiday banquet for his county co-workers pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group and its leader on Facebook using an alias, then deleted the messages before the attack, a U.S. law enforcement official said Friday, providing the strongest evidence to date that the rampage may have been a terrorist attack.

The remarkable disclosure about the online activities of Tashfeen Malik provided the first significant details suggesting a motive for her participation with her husband, Syed Farook, in the shooting.

Malik was a Pakistani woman who came to the U.S. in 2014 on a fiancée visa before Farook married her in California. They had a 6-month-old daughter.

Malik's alias on Facebook and specifics about her postings were not publicly disclosed by the law enforcement official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because this person was not allowed to discuss an ongoing investigation.

Another U.S. official said Malik expressed "admiration" for the extremist group's leader on Facebook under the alias account and said there was no sign that anyone affiliated with the Islamic State group communicated back to her and no signs of any operational instructions being conveyed to her. This official also spoke on condition of anonymity because this person was not authorized to discuss case details by name.

The FBI was investigating the shooting as a potential act of terrorism but had reached no firm conclusions Thursday. Separately, a U.S. intelligence official said Farook had been in contact with known Islamic extremists on social media. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because the person was not authorized to discuss the investigation publicly.

At the same time, law enforcement officials from local police to Attorney General Loretta Lynch cautioned it could have been work-related rage. Or a twisted hybrid of religion and personal vendetta.

Farook, 28, had no criminal record and was not under scrutiny by local or federal law enforcement before the attacks. Friends knew him by his quick smile, his devotion to Islam and his earnest talk about cars he would restore.

They didn't know the man authorities say was busy with his wife building homemade bombs and stockpiling thousands of rounds of ammunition for a commando-style assault Wednesday on a holiday party of his co-workers that killed 14 and injured 21.

"This was a person who was successful, who had a good job, a good income, a wife and a family. What was he missing in his life?" asked Nizaam Ali, who worshipped with Farook at a mosque in San Bernardino — the city east of Los Angeles where Farook killed and died.

Authorities say that the couple sprayed as many as 75 rounds into the room before fleeing. They died four hours later and 2 miles away during a furious gunbattle with police.

The pair had more than 1,600 bullets when they were killed. Police said they also had 12 pipe bombs, tools to make more explosives, and well over 4,500 rounds of ammunition at home.

Police Lt. Mike Madden, one of the first officers to reach the room at the social services center, where Farook's

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colleagues from San Bernardino County's public health department had gathered, said the carnage was unspeakable, the scene overwhelming: the smell of gunpowder, the wails of the injured, the blood, fire sprinklers pumping and fire alarms blaring. All in a room with a Christmas tree and decorations on every table.

The dead ranged in age from 26 to 60. Among the 21 injured were two police officers hurt during the manhunt, authorities said. Two of the wounded remained in critical condition Thursday.

Nearly all the dead and wounded were county employees.

Syed Rizwan Farook was born in Chicago on June 14, 1987, to parents born in Pakistan. He was raised in Southern California.

In July 2010, he was hired as a seasonal public employee and served until December of that year, according to a work history supplied by the county. In January 2012, he was rehired as a trainee environmental health specialist before being promoted two years later. Among his job duties was inspecting restaurants.

The soft-spoken Farook was known to pray every day at San Bernardino's Dar Al Uloom Al Islamiyah mosque. That is where Nizaam Ali and his brother Rahemaan Ali met Farook.

The last time Rahemaan Ali saw his friend was three weeks ago, when Farook abruptly stopped coming to pray. Rahemaan Ali said Farook seemed happy and his usual self. Both brothers said they never saw anything to make them think Farook was violent.

They remember when Farook announced that he would be getting married, saying he had met his future wife online and that she was Pakistani. Farook told the brothers that he traveled to Mecca in Saudi Arabia last summer.

They said he was gone about a month before returning to the U.S. with his wife. Malik arrived on a K-1 visa for fiancées and with a Pakistani passport in July 2014, authorities said.

The two were married on Aug. 16, 2014, according to their marriage license. Both listed their religion as Muslim. The couple had a 6-month-old daughter who they dropped with relatives Wednesday morning before the shooting.

Farhan Khan, Farook's brother-in-law, told NBC News that he had started the legal process to adopt the girl. He described Farook as a "bad person," but said he was not radical.

Patrick Baccari, who sat at the same table as Farook at the employee party, recalled he was short on words and inclined to talk about cars, not religion.

However, a friend of a man killed in the rampage said Farook had a heated conversation about Islam two weeks before the attack.

Kuuleme Stephens said she happened to call Nicholas Thalasinis while her friend was talking with Farook at work. She said Thalasinis, a Messianic Jew who was passionately pro-Israel, told her Farook "doesn't agree that Islam is not a peaceful religion." Stephens said Farook replied that Americans don't understand Islam.

Stephens added that Thalasinis did not think their conversations would turn violent.

The U.S. official briefed on the investigation said whatever communication Farook had with suspected extremists was with "people who weren't significant players on our radar" and dated back some time.

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Â The official said the communication was a "potential factor" being looked at, but cautioned that "contact with individuals who are subjects of investigations in and of itself doesn't mean that you are a terrorist."

Farook legally bought two handguns used in the massacre and their two assault rifles were legally bought by someone else federal authorities wanted to question. That person's identity was not released.

A profile on a matchmaking website for South Asians that matched Farook's name, California hometown, county health job and Muslim faith said his interests included target shooting in his backyard. Though the date of the posting was not clear, it listed his age as 22.

Details about Farook's upbringing are sparse.

He grew up in a turbulent home but later graduated from California State University, San Bernardino, with a degree in environmental health sciences in 2010.

Divorce records depicted a home divided by abuse. Farook's mother alleged in 2006 that her husband, also named Syed, attacked her while her children were present, dropped a TV on her and pushed her toward a car, according to records.

Rafia Sultana Farook filed a petition for a domestic violence order of protection on July 3, 2006, against her husband. She said she was forced to move out with three of her children because her husband continually harassed her "verbally and physically," according to the divorce records.

The Associated Press could not immediately reach the father for comment and was unable to corroborate the allegations in the records. No one answered the door at a home in Corona where a neighbor said the father lived.

- AP