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Virginia Man Arrested for Plotting Attacks on D.C.-area Metro Stations with People He Believed to Be Al-Qaeda Members

WASHINGTON – Farooque Ahmed, 34, of Ashburn, Va., was arrested today for attempting to assist others whom he believed to be members of al-Qaeda in planning multiple bombings at Metrorail stations in the Washington, D.C., area.

David Kris, Assistant Attorney General for National Security; Neil H. MacBride, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia; and John G. Perren, Acting Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI Washington Field Office, made the announcement after Ahmed was taken into custody earlier this morning.

In announcing this arrest, officials emphasized that at no time was the public in danger during this investigation and that the FBI was aware of Ahmed's activities from before the alleged attempt began and closely monitored his activities until his arrest. The public should be assured that there was no threat against Metrorail or the general public in the Washington, D.C., area.

"Today's case underscores the need for continued vigilance against terrorist threats and demonstrates how the government can neutralize such threats before they come to fruition," said David Kris, Assistant Attorney General for National Security. "Farooque Ahmed is accused of plotting with individuals he believed were terrorists to bomb our transit system, but a coordinated law enforcement and intelligence effort was able to thwart his plans."

"It's chilling that a man from Ashburn is accused of casing rail stations with the goal of killing as many Metro riders as possible through simultaneous bomb attacks," said U.S. Attorney Neil H. MacBride. "Today's arrest highlights the terrorism threat that exists in Northern Virginia and our ability to find those seeking to harm U.S. citizens and neutralize them before they can act. We are grateful for the outstanding work of the FBI in detecting and disrupting this plot."

"Just as we ask the public to remain vigilant about possible terrorists among us, the FBI remains committed to rooting out and dismantling those groups and organizations who seek to cause harm to U.S. citizens," said Acting FBI Assistant Director in Charge John G. Perren.

Yesterday, a federal grand jury in Alexandria, Va., returned a three-count indictment against Ahmed, a naturalized U.S. citizen born in Pakistan, charging him with attempting to provide material support to a designated terrorist organization, collecting information to assist in planning a terrorist attack on a transit facility, and attempting to provide material support to help carry out multiple bombings to cause mass casualties at D.C.-area Metrorail stations. If convicted, he faces a maximum penalty of 50 years in prison.

Ahmed was arrested by the FBI early this morning and is scheduled to make his first appearance before U.S. Magistrate Judge John F. Anderson at 2:00 P.M. EDT at the federal courthouse in Alexandria.

According to the indictment, from April 2010 through Oct. 25, 2010, Ahmed attempted to assist others whom he believed to be members of al-Qaeda in planning multiple bombings to cause mass casualties at Metrorail stations. On April 18, 2010, Ahmed allegedly drove to a hotel in Dulles, Va., and met with a courier he believed to be affiliated with a terrorist organization who provided Ahmed with a document that provided potential locations at which future meetings could be arranged. On or about May 15, 2010, at a hotel in Herndon, Va., Ahmed allegedly agreed to watch and photograph another hotel in Washington, D.C., and a Metrorail station in Arlington, Va., to obtain information about their security and busiest periods.

According to the indictment, Ahmed allegedly participated in surveillance and recorded video images of Metrorail stations in Arlington, Va., on four occasions. On or about July 19, 2010, in a hotel room in Sterling, Va., Ahmed allegedly handed a memory stick containing video images of a Metrorail station in Arlington to an individual whom Ahmed believed to be affiliated with al-Qaeda. On that same day, Ahmed allegedly agreed to assess the security of two other Metrorail stations in Arlington as locations of terrorist attacks.

The indictment further alleges that, on or about Sept. 28, 2010, in a hotel room in Herndon, Ahmed handed a USB drive containing images of two Metrorail stations in Arlington to an individual whom Ahmed believed to be affiliated with al-Qaeda.

According to the indictment, on or about Sept. 28, 2010, Ahmed provided to an individual whom he believed to be affiliated with al-Qaeda diagrams that Ahmed drew of three Metrorail stations in Arlington and provided suggestions as to where explosives should be placed on trains in Metrorail stations in Arlington to kill the most people in simultaneous attacks planned for 2011.

This case is being investigated by the FBI's Washington Field Office Joint Terrorism Task Force, which includes 35 agencies in the Northern Virginia and Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. Assistant U.S. Attorney Gordon Kromberg and Trial Attorneys Joseph Moreno and Paul Casey of the Counterterrorism Section in the Justice Department's National Security Division are prosecuting the case on behalf of the United States.

Indictments are only charges and not evidence of guilt. A defendant is presumed to be innocent until and unless proven guilty.

<http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/2010/October/10-nsd-1213.html>