

Man Sentenced in Boston for Plotting Attack on Pentagon and U.S. Capitol and Attempting to Provide Detonation Devices to Terrorists

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November 01, 2012

<http://www.fbi.gov/boston/press-releases/2012/man-sentenced-in-boston-for-plotting-attack-on-pentagon-and-u.s.-capitol-and-attempting-to-provide-detonation-devices-to-terrorists>

BOSTON—Rezwan Ferdaus was sentenced today for plotting an attack on American soil and attempting to provide detonation devices to terrorists.

Ferdaus, 27, was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Richard G. Stearns to 17 years in prison, to be followed by 10 years of supervised release. On July 20, 2012, Ferdaus pleaded guilty to attempting to damage and destroy a federal building by means of an explosive and attempting to provide material support to terrorists. In the plea agreement, the parties agreed to a joint sentencing recommendation of 17 years in prison, to be followed by 10 years of supervised release. In exchange for the defendant's guilty plea, the government dismissed the remaining charges against Ferdaus after the imposition of his sentence.

At the change of plea hearing, the prosecutor detailed the evidence against the defendant, which Judge Stearns concluded was "overwhelming." Had this case gone to trial, the government would have shown through consensually recorded conversations that, beginning in 2010 and continuing until his arrest, Ferdaus planned to commit acts of violence against the United States, both here and abroad.

Beginning in January 2011, Ferdaus began designing and constructing detonation components for improvised explosive devices (IED) using mobile phones. Ferdaus supplied 12 mobile phones, which he modified to act as an electrical switch for an IED, to FBI undercover employees (UCEs), whom he believed were members of al Qaeda, with the intention that they be used to kill U.S. soldiers overseas. In June 2011, Ferdaus delivered his first mobile phone detonation device to the UCEs. At a subsequent meeting, the UCEs falsely told Ferdaus that his first phone detonation device had succeeded in killing three U.S. soldiers and injuring others in Iraq. Ferdaus responded, "That was exactly what I wanted" and that he felt "incredible....We're changing the world." He also suggested that he could make "20 to 30 [detonation components] per week" to send to his "brothers overseas."

He told the UCEs that he was "100 percent" at "peace" with the fact that his devices "are killing American soldiers" and was "so happy to hear that and so thankful." After each subsequent delivery to the UCEs, Ferdaus asked how each detonation device had worked and how many Americans had reportedly been killed. Ferdaus also made a 20-minute training video, which was recorded by the UCEs, giving instructions on how to make cell phone detonators. Ferdaus believed that the video would be used for training members of al Qaeda.

Ferdaus also planned to obtain a remote-controlled aircraft similar to a small drone aircraft, fill it with grenades, and fly the plane into the Pentagon using a built-in GPS system. Ferdaus told the UCEs that he conducted Internet research on remote-controlled aircraft and found a website that sells such airplanes, which can fly 100 mph.

According to the prosecutor, in May and June 2011, Ferdaus provided two very detailed attack plans to the UCEs. The defendant's first attack plan, among other things, contained photographs of the Pentagon and U.S. Capitol with superimposed arrows, showing where he intended to strike. The defendant stated that his plan "ought to terrorize...it ought to result in the downfall of this entire disgusting place. That is my goal."

In May 2011, Ferdaus traveled to Washington, D.C., where he conducted surveillance, and photographed the Pentagon and Capitol Building. He also identified and photographed sites at the East Potomac Park, in Washington, D.C., from which he planned to launch his airplanes filled with explosives.

In June 2011, Ferdaus informed the UCEs that he had decided to expand his attack plan to include a ground assault on the Pentagon and requested that the UCEs supply him with explosives, grenades, fully automatic weapons, and a silencer. Ferdaus then rented space at a storage facility under a false name, where he planned to store and prepare the components for his attack plan. In July 2011, Ferdaus placed an order with a Florida distributor for a remote controlled aircraft under a false identity. He told the UCEs that he wanted them to get him 24 pounds of plastic explosives to maximize the attack. He explained that 15 of the 24 pounds of explosives were for the planes—five pounds per plane. Ferdaus later increased his request to 25 pounds of explosives.

In September 2011, Ferdaus instructed the UCEs to deliver C-4 explosives, three grenades, and six fully automatic AK-47 assault rifles to him, which he later received at the storage facility he rented. Ferdaus inspected the explosives and firearms and placed some of the C-4 explosives inside the remote-controlled aircraft he had previously ordered.

Shortly after receiving the explosives and weapons in the storage facility, Ferdaus was arrested. The public was never in danger from the explosive devices, which were closely monitored by the UCEs. Ferdaus was under surveillance as his alleged plot developed and the UCEs were in frequent contact with him.

During their communications with him, the UCEs told Ferdaus more than 25 times that he did not have to go through with his plan to attack the Pentagon and Capitol, that there was no shame in backing out, and that he could turn back at any time. In response to these inquiries, Ferdaus repeatedly reaffirmed his commitment to his attack plans and his hope to cause mass destruction and psychological harm to the United States.

“As is evident from the facts of this case, Mr. Ferdaus posed a significant threat to the people of the United States,” said First Assistant U.S. Attorney Jack Pirozzolo. “His actions were self-initiated, deliberate, and dangerous. He intended to unleash horrific acts of violence against the people of the United States both here and abroad. His plea and 17-year sentence should send a strong message to others that our priority is to move aggressively to investigate and prosecute anyone who intends to commit acts of terrorism whether at home or abroad.”

“Mr. Ferdaus’ sentence reflects that he alone conceived the plot, was responsible for his illegal acts, and acted purposefully,” said Richard DesLauriers, the Special Agent in Charge of the Boston FBI. “The FBI’s top priority and clarion mission is to detect, deter, and disrupt all potential terrorist threats to the United States. Our community should be proud of the efforts of the Worcester Police Department, U.S. Attorney’s Office, and all members of the Boston Joint Terrorism Task Force. Working in partnership, we seek to disrupt homegrown violent extremists like Mr. Ferdaus who attempt to use violence, rather than democratic means, to achieve their political or social goals.”

First Assistant U.S. Attorney Jack Pirozzolo and Richard DesLauriers, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI Boston Field Division, made the announcement today. Assistance was provided by the Worcester, Massachusetts Police Department; the Ashland, Massachusetts Police Department; and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney B. Stephanie Siegmann of the U.S. Attorney’s Office’s Anti-Terrorism and National Security Unit.