

Department of Justice Press Release

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United States Attorney's Office

Central District of Illinois

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Illinois Man Arrested in Plot to Bomb Courthouse and Murder Federal Employees *Vehicle Bomb Placed at Scene Was Inactive and Posed No Danger to Public*

SPRINGFIELD—Acting U.S. Attorney Jeffrey B. Lang of the Central District of Illinois and Karen E. Spangenberg, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI, Springfield Division, today announced that Michael C. Finton, aka., "Talib Islam," has been arrested on charges of attempted murder of federal employees and attempted use of a weapon of mass destruction (explosives) in connection with a plot to detonate a vehicle bomb at the federal building in Springfield, Ill.

In his alleged efforts to carry out the plot, Finton ultimately dealt with undercover FBI agents and confidential sources who continuously monitored his activities up to the time of the arrest. Further, in his alleged efforts, Finton drove a vehicle containing inactive explosives to the Paul Findley Federal Building and Courthouse in Springfield and attempted to detonate them, according to a criminal complaint filed today in the Central District of Illinois. The arrest of Finton is not in any way related to the ongoing terror investigation in New York and Colorado.

Finton, 29, a resident of Decatur, Ill., is charged in the criminal complaint with one count of attempted murder of federal officers or employees and attempted use a weapon of mass destruction. If convicted, he faces a maximum penalty of life in prison. Finton made his initial appearance today in federal court in Springfield.

"This alleged plot drives home the stark reality that we must avoid complacency and remain ever vigilant to the threats that violent extremists may pose to public safety," said Acting U.S. Attorney Jeffrey B. Lang. "A number of different law enforcement agencies and officers worked closely together to avert the potential tragedy alleged in the complaint."

"The criminal complaint alleges that Michael Finton sought and attempted to bomb a federal courthouse, but fortunately a coordinated undercover law enforcement effort was able to thwart his efforts and ensure no one was harmed," said David Kris, Assistant Attorney General for National Security.

"The FBI, working in conjunction with our law enforcement partners through the Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF), is working behind the scenes every day to proactively identify and neutralize potential threats before they come to fruition," said Karen E. Spangenberg, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI, Springfield Division. "This case is a prime example of our commitment to protect Americans from terrorist attacks, through prevention."

According to the affidavit filed in support of the criminal complaint, Finton came to the attention of law enforcement. As a part of the investigation, his parole officer was contacted. After his parole officer learned that Finton had committed a parole violation, he was arrested in August 2007 and his parole was revoked. Several of Finton's writings recovered after his arrest indicate that he had written a letter to John Walker Lindh, an American who was captured fighting for the Taliban and is imprisoned on terrorism violations. After his release from prison, in a January 2008 interview with the FBI, Finton allegedly explained that he idolized Lindh. The affidavit further alleges that, in March 2008, Finton received funds from an individual in Saudi Arabia that he used to travel to Saudi Arabia in April 2008. He returned to the United States in May 2008.

According to the affidavit, over the next few months, Finton communicated with an individual who, unbeknownst to him, was a law enforcement source. The affidavit alleges that during these talks,

Finton expressed his desire to receive military training and to travel to Gaza or other overseas locations to become a jihadist fighter.

In February 2009, Finton was introduced to an undercover FBI special officer posing as a low-level al-Qaeda operative. According to the affidavit, Finton expressed his desire to receive military training at a camp and to fight in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Somalia or other locations. The undercover agent told Finton several times that it was Finton's decision and that he could walk away from the decision anytime. According to the affidavit, Finton indicated that he was excited and had no second thoughts about attending a camp.

In the ensuing months, the affidavit alleges that Finton discussed possibly targeting locations in the United States. The affidavit alleges that Finton ultimately suggested the Paul Findley Federal Building and Courthouse in downtown Springfield as a primary target. According to the affidavit, Finton conducted surveillance of the building and proposed a remotely-detonated car bomb for the attack. Further, according to the affidavit, Finton observed that U.S. Congressman Aaron Schock's office, located at the corner of East Monroe and 6th Streets, would be a secondary target.

The affidavit alleges that on Aug. 14, 2009, Finton and the undercover officer made a video recording in which Finton provided his own political rationale for attacking the United States. Days later, Finton allegedly made two more videos in which he spoke of his belief that America is at war with Islam.

On Sept. 1, 2009, Finton met with the undercover FBI officer and was told the vehicle for the attack would be carrying close to one ton of explosives. According to the affidavit, Finton indicated an awareness that the bomb would cause civilian casualties, but expressed his view that such casualties were justified. Unbeknownst to Finton, the FBI ensured that the vehicle for the attack contained no actual explosive materials.

The affidavit alleges that yesterday, on September 23, 2009, Finton drove a van containing what he understood to be explosive material and parked it directly in front of the northwest corner of the federal building. Finton got out of the van, locked the door and got into another vehicle driven by the undercover FBI officer and drove away. Within a few blocks of the federal building, Finton made a cell phone call to remotely detonate the purported bomb in the van. FBI agents arrested Finton immediately after he attempted to detonate the device.

The investigation was conducted by the Springfield FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force and assisting law enforcement agencies. The prosecution is being handled by Assistant U.S. Attorney David E. Risley from the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Central District of Illinois, with assistance from Trial Attorney Joanna Baltes from the Counterterrorism Section of the Justice Department's National Security Division.

The public is reminded that a criminal complaint contains mere allegations and that a defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty in a court of law.