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Illinois Man Admits Plotting to Bomb Federal Courthouse and Is Sentenced to 28 Years in Prison

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WASHINGTON – Michael C. Finton, aka “Talib Islam,” pleaded guilty today to attempting to bomb the federal courthouse in Springfield, Ill., in September 2009 and was immediately sentenced to serve 28 years in prison, announced Todd Hinnen, Acting Assistant Attorney General for National Security, U.S. Attorney James A. Lewis of the Central District of Illinois, and Armando Fernandez, Acting Special Agent in Charge of the FBI Springfield Division.

At a hearing today in East St. Louis, Ill., Finton, 31, a U.S. citizen and resident of Decatur, Ill., appeared before U.S. District Judge David R. Herndon and entered a plea of guilty to one count of attempted use of a weapon of mass destruction (an explosive bomb) against property owned by the United States. Judge Herndon sentenced Finton to 336 months in prison in accordance with the terms of his plea agreement with the government.

“Michael Finton is one of a number of young Americans over the past two years who, under the influence of a radical and violent ideology, have sought to carry out acts of terrorism in the United States,” said Acting Assistant Attorney General Hinnen. “Although a coordinated undercover law enforcement investigation thwarted Mr. Finton's plot to destroy the federal courthouse in Springfield, this case underscores the need to remain vigilant against the threat posed by homegrown extremism.”

“Michael Finton tried to bomb our federal courthouse with the intent to kill innocent civilians, committed public servants and dedicated first responders,” said U.S. Attorney Lewis. “This terrible attempt was prevented through the excellent investigative work of the Springfield FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force and assisting law enforcement agencies.”

“The investigation of Michael Finton is a significant accomplishment in the FBI’s mission to protect the United States from terrorist attack. The dedication and professionalism of the Springfield Joint Terrorism Task Force and the U.S. Attorney’s Office in this case have made America safer,” said FBI Acting Special Agent in Charge Fernandez.

According to the plea agreement and other documents filed in court, Finton admitted that on Sept. 23, 2009, he traveled from Decatur to Springfield, where he knowingly took possession of a truck that he believed contained a bomb with approximately one ton of explosives. The explosive device was actually inert. Finton drove the truck to the Paul Findley Federal Building and Courthouse at 600 East Monroe

Street, where he parked immediately outside the federal building and across the street from an office used by a U.S. Congressman.

At the time he parked the truck, Finton activated a timer connected to the explosive device, which he believed was large enough to destroy the federal building and the congressman's office. After Finton parked the van and armed the device, he locked the truck and got into a vehicle with an undercover law enforcement agent whom he believed was associated with the al-Qaeda terrorist organization. Finton then used a cell phone to attempt to remotely detonate the purported bomb after he and the undercover agent had driven a safe distance away.

Prior to Sept. 23, 2009, according to filed court documents, Finton met on several occasions with an undercover law enforcement officer whom Finton believed was acting on behalf of al-Qaeda. During a meeting on July 29, 2009, Finton proposed the federal building in Springfield as a target and proposed that two vehicle-borne bombs be used, the first to do the initial damage, and the second to attack the responders. Finton also suggested that if the bomb was big enough it might also "take out" the office of the congressman across the street from the federal building.

Finton has remained detained in the custody of the U.S. Marshals Service since his arrest on Sept. 23, 2009.

The case was investigated by the Springfield FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force and assisting law enforcement agencies. Assistant U.S. Attorney Eric I. Long of the Central District of Illinois, and Trial Attorney Alamdar Hamdani of the Counterterrorism Section at the Justice Department's National Security Division, prosecuted the case.

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National Security Division