

Four Men Charged for Conspiracy to Provide Material Support to Terrorism

U.S. Attorney's Office

Central District of California

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<http://www.fbi.gov/losangeles/press-releases/2012/four-men-charged-for-conspiracy-to-provide-material-support-to-terrorism>

RIVERSIDE COUNTY—Four men have been charged for their roles in a plot to provide material support to terrorists by making arrangements to join al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan in order to kill, among others, American targets, announced André Birotte, Jr., the United States Attorney in Los Angeles, and Bill Lewis, the Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI's Los Angeles Field Office.

According to a criminal complaint filed in U.S. District Court in the Central District of California, the defendants conspired to provide material support to terrorists in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 2339A, knowing or intending that such support was to be used in preparation for or in carrying out:

- conspiracy to kill, kidnap, maim, or injure persons and damage property in a foreign country, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 956;
- killing and attempting to kill officers and employees of the United States, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1114;
- killing nationals of the United States, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 2332(b);
- conspiracy to use a weapon of mass destruction outside the United States, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 2332a(b);
- and bombing places of public use and government facilities, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 2332f.

The defendants, listed below, are also known by alias identities listed in the criminal complaint.

- Sohiel Omar Kabir, 34, a former resident of Pomona and naturalized United States citizen, born in Afghanistan
- Ralph Deleon, 23, of Ontario, a lawful permanent resident alien, born in the Philippines

- Miguel Alejandro Santana Vidriales (further described herein and in the criminal complaint as “Santana”), 21, of Upland, a lawful permanent resident, born in Mexico and whose application for citizenship is pending in the United States
- Arifeen David Gojali, 21, of Riverside, a United States citizen

The complaint, which was unsealed today during the defendants’ initial appearance in U.S. District Court, alleges that in 2010, Kabir introduced Deleon and Santana to radical and violent Islamic doctrine and various extremist material, including essays and lectures by now-deceased al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula leader, Anwar Al-Awlaqi. Kabir traveled overseas in December 2011 and later to Afghanistan in July 2012, where he continued to communicate with Santana and DeLeon to arrange for their travel to join him in Afghanistan, according to the complaint. The complaint alleges that Kabir told Santana and Deleon that he had made contacts with individuals who have connections to terrorist organizations. Kabir further said that he would wait for their arrival before departing to a training location in Afghanistan and that, when they arrived, they would meet “the students” and “the professors.” According to the complaint, the term “students” referred to the Taliban and the term “professors” referred to al Qaeda.

The complaint alleges that Santana and Deleon told a confidential source working for the FBI, identified in the complaint as the “CS,” that they planned to travel to Afghanistan to engage in “violent jihad.” In addition, the defendants described potential targets for violent attacks, including overseas American military personnel and bases, according to the complaint. Evidence in this case demonstrates that the defendants used the word “jihad” to refer to armed combat, according to the complaint.

According to the complaint, the defendants both discussed the plot among themselves and with the confidential source. The various conversations detail the defendants’ plans to travel overseas to attend terrorist training, as well as to kill American soldiers and others. In one discussion with the FBI confidential source, Santana and Deleon discussed their preferred roles in carrying out attacks. For example, Santana stated that he had experience with firearms and that he wanted to become a sniper. Deleon stated he wanted to be on the front lines with a second choice of explosives. Both men also indicated they were willing to kill an enemy.

In September 2012, Deleon and Santana recruited defendant Gojali to join them and to travel overseas to commit violent jihad, as alleged in the complaint. The complaint further alleges that defendants Santana, Deleon, and Gojali made plans to join Kabir in Afghanistan to attend terrorist training, and that they arranged travel logistics, including flight arrangements and required documentation. The complaint details the defendants’ activity in raising funds for their travel to Afghanistan and their discussion of various cover stories and code words they could use to conceal their true intentions when traveling abroad. The complaint further alleges that Santana, Deleon, and Gojali conducted preliminary training in southern California at firearms and paintball facilities to prepare for terrorist training overseas.

Defendants Santana, Deleon, and Gojali were apprehended on Friday without incident by members of the Joint Terrorism Task Force and had their initial appearance before a federal magistrate this afternoon in U.S. District Court in Riverside, California. Santana and Deleon were remanded to federal custody and Gojali's detention hearing was continued to Monday, November 26. Kabir is in custody in Afghanistan.

If convicted, the defendants face a statutory maximum penalty of 15 years in federal prison.

This case is a continuing investigation by the Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) in Riverside, California. The Riverside JTTF is comprised of members from the following agencies: Riverside County Sheriff's Office; Riverside Police Department; San Bernardino Sheriff's Department; Beaumont Police Department; Ontario Police Department; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement-Homeland Security Investigations (ICE-HSI); the United States Attorney's Office; and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

This case will be prosecuted by the United States Attorney's Office for the Central District of California, with assistance from the Counterterrorism Section of the Justice Department's National Security Division.

A criminal complaint contains allegations that a defendant has committed a crime. Every defendant is presumed to be innocent until proven guilty in court.