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Two Men Who Provided Material Support to Terrorists and Plotted to Kill American Targets in Afghanistan Receive 25-Year Prison Terms

Assistant Attorney General for National Security John P. Carlin, U.S. Attorney Stephanie Yonekura of the Central District of California and Assistant Director in Charge David Bowdich of the FBI's Los Angeles Field Office announced today that two men with ties to the Inland Empire region of California were each sentenced today to 300 months in federal prison for participating in plots to provide material support to terrorists and to kill American personnel.

The two men sentenced today by U.S. District Judge Virginia A. Phillips are Sohiel Omar Kabir, 37, a naturalized U.S. citizen who was born in Afghanistan and who until late 2011, resided in Pomona, California; and Ralph Deleon, 26, of Ontario, a lawful permanent resident and citizen of the Philippines.

Last summer, Kabir and Deleon were convicted by a federal jury for their role in a plot to travel overseas to fight against U.S. and allied forces in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Specifically, the jury convicted Kabir and Deleon of conspiring to provide material support to terrorists and conspiring to murder United States military and government personnel. The jury also found Kabir guilty of conspiring to provide material support to a designated foreign terrorist organization, namely Al-Qa'ida, and conspiring to receive military-type training from Al-Qa'ida. In addition, the jury convicted defendant Deleon of conspiring to murder, maim, or kidnap overseas.

Two other defendants who were indicted in the case in 2012 – Miguel Alejandro Santana Vidriales and Arifeen David Gojali – previously pleaded guilty and are scheduled to be sentenced by Judge Phillips on March 16, 2015.

“This case demonstrates the need for vigilance and swift action to counter the false allure of violent extremism,” said U.S. Attorney Yonekura. “When confronted with young Americans who succumbed to the empty promises of violent extremism and sought to assist a terrorist group in killing American soldiers abroad, law enforcement acted swiftly to eliminate the threat.”

“The defendants betrayed the citizens of the United States by supporting terror and conspiring to murder military members serving overseas” said Assistant Director in Charge Bowdich. “The lengthy prison sentences handed to Mr. Kabir and Mr. DeLeon should send a clear message to those who support terror groups that the FBI and our partners are committed to preventing deadly plots hatched either at home or abroad targeting the United States.”

The evidence presented during last year's trial showed Kabir introduced Deleon and Santana to radical Islamic ideology in 2010. Kabir left the United States in the final days of 2011, arriving in Afghanistan in July 2012. While in Afghanistan, Kabir continued to communicate with Deleon and others, encouraging them to join him in Afghanistan. Kabir told the group that he had contacts with terrorist organizations and that, when they arrived, he and the group would join “the Students” – referring to the Taliban – and later “the Professors” – referring to Al-Qa'ida.

Deleon, Kabir, and others involved in the plot were heavily influenced by the doctrine of now-deceased Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula spokesman Anwar Al-Awlaki and other advocates of violent jihad, whose teachings they frequently invoked during their planning and preparation in this case.

In September 2012, Deleon recruited Gojali to join the plot to travel overseas to engage in violent jihad. As part of their planning and preparation, Deleon led Santana and Gojali in training activities in southern California, including participating in paintball activities and traveling to firearms ranges to fire AK-47s and other assault weapons, which they expected to use in future fighting.

The men made plans to rejoin Kabir, who had relocated to Kabul, Afghanistan. In effort to avoid detection by law enforcement, Deleon and the others planned to cross the border into Mexico by land and from there to travel to the Middle East by air. In November 2012, Deleon purchased airline tickets for the group. On Nov. 16, 2012, the FBI arrested Deleon, Santana, and Gojali as

they departed a Chino apartment in a car driven by one of Deleon's associates intending to drive to Mexico. Kabir was taken into custody by American military personnel in Afghanistan.

The investigation into this terrorism scheme was conducted 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's Homeland Security Investigations; the U.S. Attorney's Office; and the FBI.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Allen W. Chiu, Christopher D. Grigg and Susan J. DeWitt of the Central District of California, and Trial Attorneys Annamartine Salick and Josh Parecki of the Justice Department's National Security Division.

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