

Al Qaeda Operative Convicted for Role in International Terrorism Plot Targeting the United States and Europe

Defendant and Co-Plotters Came Within Days of Bombing a U.K. Shopping Mall

U.S. Attorney's Office
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Earlier today, following a two-week trial, Abid Naseer, a Pakistani national who joined al-Qaeda and plotted to commit a terrorist attack in the United Kingdom, was found guilty by a jury in Brooklyn federal court of providing material support to al-Qaeda, conspiring to provide material support to al-Qaeda, and conspiring to use a destructive device in relation to a crime of violence. The evidence at trial established that the defendant and his accomplices came within days of executing a plot to conduct an attack on a busy shopping mall located in the city center of Manchester, United Kingdom in April 2009. The planned attack, which also targeted the New York City subway system and a newspaper office in Copenhagen, Denmark, had been directed by and coordinated with senior al-Qaeda leaders in Pakistan. Naseer is the eighth defendant to face charges, and the fourth to be convicted, in Brooklyn federal court related to the al-Qaeda plot, which also involved Adis Medunjanin, Najibullah Zazi, and Zarein Ahmedzay, the three members of the cell that targeted New York City.

The verdicts were announced by Loretta E. Lynch, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York; John P. Carlin, Assistant Attorney General for National Security; Diego G. Rodriguez, Assistant Director-in-Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), New York Field Office; and William J. Bratton, Commissioner, New York City Police Department (NYPD).

“This al-Qaeda plot was intended by the group’s leaders to send a message to the United States and its allies,” stated United States Attorney Lynch. “Today’s verdict sends an even more powerful message in response: the United States will stop at nothing in order to hold those who plot to kill and maim on behalf of terrorist groups accountable for their grievous crimes.” Ms. Lynch extended her grateful appreciation to the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Force, which led the investigation and comprises a large number of federal, state, and local agencies from the region. She also sent her appreciation to the Internal Revenue Service–Criminal Investigation, New York, the U.S. Marshal Service, Brooklyn, and the law enforcement authorities in the United Kingdom and Norway, including the Greater Manchester Police, the British Security Service, and the Norwegian Police Security Service, for their outstanding assistance with the case.

“Abid Naseer was part of an Al Qaeda conspiracy that targeted Western countries, including the United States and the United Kingdom, for terrorist attack,” said Assistant Attorney General Carlin. “His conviction reflects our dedication to identifying and holding accountable those who seek to target the United States and its allies. I want to thank the many agents, analysts, and prosecutors who are responsible for this successful result.”

FBI Assistant Director-in-Charge Rodriguez stated, “Naseer knowingly and willingly conspired with others to carry out a destructive plot on behalf of al-Qaeda. The wheels were set in motion, and he and his accomplices were prepared to execute their plan. Those who pledge allegiance to terrorists and terrorist organizations throughout the world will be brought to justice, and every effort will be made to protect Americans and our interests throughout the world. The FBI will continue to work with our local and international partners to mitigate the threat of global terrorism.”

“The Abid Naseer case demonstrates that terrorists who target the U.S. and its allies will be brought to justice, no matter where they are. This investigation involved leads from the streets of Manchester, England, to New York City, to Usama Bin Laden’s hidden lair in Pakistan. I want to thank the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District and the members of the N.Y. FBI-NYPD Joint Terrorism Task Force for the work that led to this successful prosecution,” said Police Commissioner Bratton.

In approximately September 2008, al-Qaeda leaders in Pakistan recruited Medunjanin, Zazi, and Ahmedzay, three friends from New York City, to conduct a suicide bombing attack in New York City. Those al-Qaeda leaders, including Adnan El-Shukrijumah and Saleh al-Somali, communicated with Zazi about the plot through an al-Qaeda facilitator named “Ahmad,” who was located in Peshawar, Pakistan. In early September 2009, after Medunjanin, Zazi, and Ahmedzay had selected the New York City subway system as their target, Zazi e-mailed with “Ahmad” in Pakistan about the proper ingredients for the main charge explosive, which included flour and oil. Zazi pleaded guilty to his role in the plot on February 22, 2010; Ahmedzay pleaded guilty on April 23, 2010; and Medunjanin was convicted after trial on May 1, 2012.

The investigation by authorities in the United States and United Kingdom revealed that “Ahmad” had also been communicating with the defendant earlier in 2009. The evidence at trial demonstrated that the defendant and his Pakistani accomplices had been dispatched by al-Qaeda to the U.K. in 2006 in order to begin preparations for an attack in that country. The defendant and his co-conspirators entered the U.K. on student visas but then immediately dropped out of the university in which they had enrolled. The defendant, like Zazi, returned briefly to Peshawar in November 2008, at the same time Zazi and his co-conspirators were receiving weapons and explosives training from al-Qaeda in that region. After returning to the U.K., the defendant sent messages back and forth to the same e-mail account that “Ahmad” was also using to communicate with the American-based al-Qaeda cell on behalf of Saleh al-Somali, al-Qaeda’s then-head of external operations. In the messages, the defendant used coded language to refer to different types of explosives. At the culmination of the plot, in early April 2009, the defendant told “Ahmad” that he was planning a large “wedding” for numerous guests during the upcoming Easter weekend, and that “Ahmad”—whom he called “Sohaib”—should be ready. Notably, Zazi testified that Ahmad had instructed him to use the same code of “marriage” to refer to the planned attack on the New York City subway, and that Zazi e-mailed Ahmad that “the marriage is ready” just before he drove to New York in early September 2009 to conduct the attack.

On April 8, 2009, the defendant and several associates were arrested in the United Kingdom. In connection with these arrests, U.K. authorities conducted searches of the plotters’ homes as well as an Internet café used by the defendant to send his messages to Ahmad, where they seized a large volume of electronic media. As demonstrated at trial, a forensic review of that electronic media revealed that the defendant had downloaded several jihadi nasheeds, or anthems, calling

for “death in large numbers.” A document recovered from the raid on Usama bin Laden’s compound in May 2011 contained a letter from Saleh al-Somali to Bin Laden, written on April 16, 2009, that discussed the defendant and his accomplices’ arrests in the U.K.

On January 30, 2012, three defendants were also convicted in a Norwegian court of plotting a similar terrorist attack in Denmark as part of the same overall multinational al-Qaeda conspiracy. During that trial, the United States made available to the Norwegian prosecutors three witnesses who also pleaded guilty to terrorism offenses in the Eastern District of New York: Zazi, Ahmedzay, and Bryant Neal Vinas. Zazi and Ahmedzay again testified in the trial against Naseer.

The defendant faces up to life imprisonment when he is sentenced by the Honorable Raymond J. Dearie.

The government’s case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Zainab Ahmad, Celia A. Cohen, and Michael P. Canty, with assistance provided by the Justice Department’s National Security Division and Office of International Affairs.