

Two Queens, New York, Residents Charged With Conspiracy to Use a Weapon of Mass Destruction

Defendants Allegedly Plotted to Construct an Explosive Device for Use in a Terrorist Attack on U.S. Soil
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<http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/two-queens-new-york-residents-charged-conspiracy-use-weapon-mass-destruction>

U.S. Attorney Loretta E. Lynch of the Eastern District of New York, Assistant Attorney General for National Security John P. Carlin, Assistant Director in Charge Diego G. Rodriguez of the FBI's New York Field Office and Commissioner William J. Bratton of the New York City Police Department (NYPD) announced that earlier today, a criminal complaint was unsealed in federal court in the Eastern District of New York charging Noelle Velentzas and Asia Siddiqui with conspiracy to use weapons of mass destruction against persons or property in the United States. The defendants' initial appearances are scheduled for this afternoon before U.S. Magistrate Judge Viktor V. Pohorelsky of the Eastern District of New York.

As alleged in the complaint, the defendants have repeatedly expressed their support for violent jihad. For instance, in or about 2009, Siddiqui published a poem in a magazine published by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula that exhorted readers to wage jihad and declared that there is "[n]o excuse to sit back and wait – for the skies rain martyrdom." More recently, Velentzas, who has characterized al-Qaeda founder Usama Bin Laden as one of her heroes, declared that she and Siddiqui are "citizens of the Islamic State" – a reference to the foreign terrorist organization that is also known as Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Less than two weeks ago, Velentzas, asked whether she had heard the news about the recent arrest of a former U.S. airman who had attempted to travel to Syria to wage jihad and stated that she did not understand why people were traveling overseas to engage in jihad when there were more opportunities of "pleasing Allah" in the United States.

Since at least August 2014, the defendants have allegedly plotted to construct an explosive device for use in a terrorist attack on American soil. In their self-proclaimed effort to "make history," the defendants researched numerous explosive precursors. For instance, they researched and acquired some of the components of a car bomb, like the one used in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing; a fertilizer bomb, like the one used in the 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City; and a pressure cooker bomb, like the one used in the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing. The investigation recently revealed that the defendants possessed propane gas tanks together with instructions from an online jihadist publication for transforming propane tanks into explosive devices.

"We are committed to doing everything in our ability to detect, disrupt and deter attacks by homegrown violent extremists," said U.S. Attorney Lynch. "As alleged, the defendants in this case carefully studied how to construct an explosive device to launch an attack on the homeland. We remain firm in our resolve to hold accountable anyone who would seek to terrorize the American people, whether by traveling abroad to commit attacks overseas or by plotting here at home." U.S. Attorney Lynch extended her grateful appreciation to the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force, which comprises a large number of federal, state and local agencies from the region, as well as to the NYPD Intelligence Division, for their assistance in the investigation.

"Velentzas and Siddiqui are alleged to have researched how to construct bombs as part of their conspiracy to use a weapon of mass destruction on American soil," said Assistant Attorney General Carlin. "Identifying and disrupting such threats to public safety, whether at home or abroad, is the number one priority of the National Security Division and our partners in the law enforcement and intelligence communities. I want to thank the agents, analysts and prosecutors who are responsible for today's charges."

“The defendants allegedly plotted to wreak terror by creating explosive devices and even researching the pressure cooker bombs used during the Boston Marathon bombing,” said Assistant Director in Charge Rodriguez. “We continue to pursue those who look to commit acts of terror and deter others who think they are beyond the reach of law enforcement. I’d like to thank Commissioner Bratton and the New York City Police Department for their partnership on this case and so many others.”

“These defendants allegedly engaged in sustained efforts to obtain bomb-making instructions and materials, including using instructions provided by al-Qaeda’s online magazine,” said Commissioner Bratton. “The work of the NYPD’s Intelligence Bureau, its undercover Detective, and the seamless collaboration with the Special Agents and Detectives of the Joint Terrorism Task Force and United States Attorney for the Eastern District should serve as a model for early detection and prevention of terrorist plotting.”

If convicted, both defendants face a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. The charges in the complaint are merely allegations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

The government’s case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Alexander A. Solomon, Douglas M. Pravda and Jennifer S. Carapiet of the Eastern District of New York, with assistance provided by Trial Attorney Clement McGovern of the Justice Department’s National Security Division.

Velentzas and Siddiqui Complaint

http://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opa/press-releases/attachments/2015/04/02/velentzas_and_siddiqui_complaint.pdf

Velentzas Order to Unseal

http://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opa/press-releases/attachments/2015/04/02/noelle_velentzas_order_to_unseal.pdf

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