

Long Island Man Pleads Guilty to Attempting to Join al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and Obstruction of Justice

Defendant Admitted He Attempted to Travel from New York to Yemen to Support Terrorist Group and Then Destroyed Evidence

U.S. Attorney's Office September 09,
2014

- Eastern District of New York (718) 254-7000

Earlier today at the federal courthouse in Central Islip, New York, Marcos Alonso Zea, also known as "Ali Zea," an American citizen and resident of Brentwood, New York, pled guilty to attempting to provide material support to al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, also known as Ansar al-Sharia (collectively "AQAP"), and obstruction of justice.

The guilty plea was announced by Loretta E. Lynch, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York; John Carlin, Assistant Attorney General, National Security Division; George Venizelos, Assistant Director-in-Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), New York Field Office; and William J. Bratton, Commissioner, New York City Police Department (NYPD).

As set forth in the indictment and other court filings, beginning in the fall of 2011, Zea planned to travel overseas in order to wage violent jihad against the perceived enemies of Islam, which included the government of Yemen and its allies. In furtherance of his plot, on January 4, 2012, Zea boarded a flight at John F. Kennedy Airport ("JFK") in Queens, New York to London, England, en route to Yemen. Zea was not permitted to transit onward from London, however, and was returned to the United States by British authorities. Zea was interviewed and closely surveilled by investigators following his return. Despite being prevented from traveling to Yemen, Zea continued to plot, including by encouraging and supporting his co-conspirator, Justin Kaliebe, who also was planning to travel to fight jihad. In January 2013, Kaliebe was arrested at JFK while attempting to travel to Yemen to join AQAP.1 Months later, after learning that he too was under investigation, Zea caused electronic media on his computer to be destroyed in an effort to obstruct the investigation. Despite his efforts, a forensic examination of Zea's electronic media subsequently conducted by investigators revealed an assortment of violent Islamic extremist materials, including issues of Inspire magazine, part of AQAP's English-language media operations.

"American citizens who offer support to terrorist organizations pose a grave threat to our national security and the security of our allies around the world," stated U.S. Attorney Lynch. "In this case, the defendant not only attempted to join al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, but also tried to thwart an investigation by destroying evidence. We will continue our relentless efforts against terrorists, whether they hail from overseas or from our own homeland." Ms. Lynch expressed her grateful appreciation to the Immigration and Customs Enforcement/Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), the New York City Police Department, the Nassau County Police Department, the Suffolk County Police Department, the New York

State Police, and the Port Authority of New York & New Jersey Police Department for their work on the investigation.

“One of our highest priorities is to protect our nation by identifying, disrupting, and holding accountable those who provide or attempt to provide material support to foreign terrorist organizations,” said Assistant Attorney General for National Security Carlin. “This case serves unambiguous notice that attempting to travel abroad to engage in such conduct has significant consequences.”

FBI Assistant Director-in-Charge Venizelos stated, “As we are far too familiar, Zea attempted to travel to Yemen in support of a radical terrorist agenda. When he couldn’t get there to join al-Qaeda, he went to work recruiting others to go in his stead. And when Zea learned he was under investigation he made every attempt to destroy the incriminating evidence.”

Zea is scheduled to be sentenced by United States District Judge Sandra J. Feuerstein on January 14, 2015. He faces a sentence of up to 25 years in prison.

The government’s case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Seth D. DuCharme, John J. Durham, and Michael P. Canty, with assistance provided by Trial Attorney Kelli Andrews of the Counterterrorism Section of the Department of Justice.

The Defendant:

MARCOS ALONSO ZEA (a/k/a “Ali Zea”) Age: 26 Brentwood, New York

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