

Russell Defreitas Sentenced to Life in Prison for Conspiring to Commit Terrorist Attack at JFK Airport

Defreitas and Coconspirators Plotted to Explode Fuel Tanks at Airport

U.S. Attorney's Office February 17, 2011

Eastern District of New York (718) 254-7000

BROOKLYN, NY—Earlier today in the Eastern District of New York, United States District Judge Dora L. Irizarry sentenced convicted defendant Russell Defreitas to life in prison for conspiring to commit a terrorist attack at John F. Kennedy International Airport in Queens, New York, by exploding fuel tanks and the fuel pipeline under the airport. Defreitas and his coconspirators believed their attack would cause extensive damage to the airport and to the New York economy, as well as the loss of numerous lives.

The sentence was announced by Loretta E. Lynch, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York. The case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) in New York.

A federal jury convicted Russell Defreitas and coconspirator Abdul Kadir in July 2010 after a nine-week trial. The evidence at trial established that Russell Defreitas, a naturalized United States citizen from Guyana, originated the idea to attack JFK Airport and its fuel tanks and pipelines by drawing on his prior experience working at the airport as a cargo handler. In 2006 and 2007, Defreitas recruited Kadir and others to join the plot during multiple trips to Guyana and Trinidad. Between trips, Defreitas engaged in video surveillance of JFK Airport and transported the footage back to Guyana to show Kadir and their co-conspirators. Kadir, a trained engineer with connections to militant groups in Iran and Venezuela, provided the conspirators with links to individuals with terrorist experience, advice on explosive materials, and a bank account through which to finance the terrorist attack.

On December 15, 2010, Judge Irizarry sentenced Abdul Kadir to life in prison. A third defendant, Abdel Nur, pleaded guilty before trial to supporting the plot and was sentenced to 15 years on January 13, 2011. A fourth member of the plot, Kareem Ibrahim, faces trial on the same charges as Defreitas and Kadir.¹

According to the trial evidence, Defreitas and his fellow plot members attempted to enlist support from prominent international terrorist groups and leaders, including Abu Bakr, leader of the Trinidadian militant group Jamaat Al Muslimeen, and Adnan El Shukrijumah, an al Qaeda

leader, as well as the Iranian revolutionary leadership. During cross-examination at trial, Kadir, a former member of the Guyanese parliament, admitted that he regularly passed information to Iranian authorities about sensitive topics, including the Guyanese military, and believed himself bound to follow fatwas from Iranian religious leaders.

On June 1, 2007, Defreitas was arrested in New York, and Kadir was arrested in Trinidad aboard a plane headed to Venezuela, en route to Iran. He was subsequently extradited to the United States.

The specific charges Defreitas was convicted of were: conspiracy to attack a public transportation system, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 2332f; conspiracy to destroy a building by fire or explosive, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 844(n); conspiracy to attack aircraft and aircraft materials, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 32; conspiracy to destroy international airport facilities, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 37; and conspiracy to attack a mass transportation facility, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1992(a)(10).

"Russell Defreitas plotted to commit a terrorist attack that he hoped would rival 9/11," stated United States Attorney Lynch. "But law enforcement detected and thwarted the plot, saving lives. Now, our courts have dispensed justice by handing out the life sentence that Defreitas richly deserves." Ms. Lynch extended her grateful appreciation to the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force in New York for its role in investigating and prosecuting the case, as well as to the Guyanese and Trinidadian law enforcement authorities who assisted with the investigation and apprehension of the defendants.

The government's case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Marshall L. Miller, Jason A. Jones, Berit W. Berger, and Zainab Ahmad.

The Defendant:

RUSSELL DEFREITAS, also known as "Mohammed"
Age: 67

¹ The charges against Ibrahim are only allegations, and Ibrahim is presumed innocent until proven guilty.