



Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2012
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AL-QAEDA OPERATIVE SENTENCED TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT IN ONE OF THE MOST SERIOUS TERRORIST THREATS TO THE UNITED STATES SINCE 9/11

Defendant and Co-Plotters Came Within Days of Suicide Bombing of New York City Subways

Defendant Attempted Suicide Attack on Whitestone Expressway in Queens, New York

BROOKLYN, NY – Earlier today, Adis Medunjanin, age 34, a Queens resident who joined al-Qaeda, then plotted and attempted to commit suicide terrorist attacks, was sentenced to life imprisonment for multiple federal terrorism offenses. The defendant and his accomplices came within days of executing a plot to conduct coordinated suicide bombings in the New York City subway system in September 2009, as directed by senior al-Qaeda leaders in Pakistan. When the plot was foiled, the defendant attempted to commit a terrorist attack by crashing his car on the Whitestone Expressway in an effort to kill himself and others.

The sentence was announced by Loretta E. Lynch, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, and Lisa Monaco, Assistant Attorney General for National Security.

The government's evidence at trial in this and related cases established that in 2008, Medunjanin and his co-plotters, Najibullah Zazi and Zarein Ahmedzay, agreed to travel to Afghanistan to join the Taliban and kill United States military personnel abroad. They arrived in Peshawar, Pakistan, in late August 2008, but Medunjanin and Ahmedzay were turned back at the Afghanistan border. Within days, Medunjanin, Zazi, and Ahmedzay met with an al-Qaeda facilitator in Peshawar and agreed to travel to Waziristan for terrorist training. There, they met with al-Qaeda leaders Saleh al-Somali, then the head of al-Qaeda external operations, and Rashid Rauf, a high-ranking al-Qaeda operative, who explained that the three would be more useful to al-Qaeda and the *jihād* by returning to New York and conducting terrorist attacks. In Waziristan, Medunjanin, Zazi, and Ahmedzay received al-Qaeda training on how to use various types of high-powered weapons, including the AK-47, PK machine gun, and rocket-propelled grenade launcher. During the training, al-Qaeda leaders, including Adnan El Shukrijumah, continued to encourage Medunjanin and his fellow plotters to return to the United States to conduct a "martyrdom" operation, and emphasized the need to hit well-known targets and maximize the number of casualties. Medunjanin, Zazi and Ahmedzay agreed and discussed the timing of the attacks and possible target locations in Manhattan, including the subway system, Grand Central Terminal, the New York Stock Exchange, Times Square, and movie theaters.

Upon their return to the United States, Medunjanin, Zazi and Ahmedzay met and agreed to carry out suicide bombings during the Muslim holiday of Ramadan, which fell in late August and September 2009. Zazi agreed to prepare the explosives, and all three agreed to conduct coordinated suicide bombings. In July and August 2009, Zazi purchased large quantities of the component chemicals necessary to produce the explosive TATP (Triacetone Triperoxide) and twice checked into a hotel room near Denver, Colorado, to mix the chemicals. Federal investigators later found bomb-making residue in the hotel room.

On September 8, 2009, Zazi drove from Denver to New York, carrying operational detonator explosives and other materials necessary to build the suicide bombs. However, shortly after arriving in New York, he learned that law enforcement was closing in on the plotters. In an unsuccessful effort to avoid detection, the men discarded the explosives and other bomb-making materials, and Zazi traveled back to Denver, where he was arrested on September 19, 2009.

On January 7, 2010, law enforcement agents executed a search warrant at Medunjanin's residence. Shortly thereafter, Medunjanin left his apartment and attempted to turn his car into a weapon of terror by crashing it into another car at high speed on the Whitestone Expressway. Moments before impact, Medunjanin called 9-1-1, identified himself, and left his message of martyrdom, shouting the al-Qaeda slogan: "We love death more than you love your life."

On May 1, 2012, a jury convicted Medunjanin of:

- conspiring to use weapons of mass destruction,
- conspiring to commit murder of U.S. military personnel abroad,
- providing and conspiring to provide material support to al-Qaeda,
- receiving military training from al-Qaeda,
- conspiring and attempting to commit an act of terrorism transcending national boundaries, and
- using explosives in relation to these offenses.

To date, seven defendants, including Medunjanin, Zazi, and Ahmedzay, have been convicted in connection with the al-Qaeda New York City bombing plot and related charges.

"Adis Medunjanin sought martyrdom for himself and death for innocent New Yorkers as part of al-Qaeda's plan to spread terror within our shores. Instead, he will now spend the rest of his life where he belongs, behind bars," stated United States Attorney Lynch. "Justice demanded a sentence of life for this al-Qaeda operative, who was dedicated to mass murder and destruction in the New York City subways. Scores of innocent New Yorkers would have been killed or maimed had Medunjanin succeeded in his plot. The combined efforts of dedicated law enforcement stood as a bulwark against al-Qaeda's reach." Ms. Lynch expressed her gratitude and appreciation to the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force in New York and each of the federal, state, and local law enforcement personnel who took part in the investigation, as well as to the law enforcement authorities in the United Kingdom and Norway who assisted with the case.

“Adis Medunjanin was today held accountable for his role in one of the most serious terrorist plots against the homeland since 9/11. Were it not for the combined efforts of the law enforcement and intelligence communities, the suicide bomb attacks that he and others planned would have been devastating,” said Assistant Attorney General Monaco. “I thank the many agents, analysts, and prosecutors who helped bring about today’s result.”

The government’s case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys David Bitkower, James P. Loonam, and Berit W. Berger of the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of New York, and Jeffrey H. Knox, formerly of the U.S. Attorney’s Office, with assistance provided by the Counterterrorism Section of the Justice Department’s National Security Division.