

THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE  
DISTRICT *of* CONNECTICUT

NEWS



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## **TWO BRITISH NATIONALS PLEAD GUILTY TO TERRORISM-RELATED CHARGES IN NEW HAVEN FEDERAL COURT**

NEW HAVEN, Conn. – Babar Ahmad and Syed Talha Ahsan pleaded guilty today in New Haven federal court to conspiring to provide and providing material support, including funds, personnel and physical items, to terrorists. The charges stem from their involvement in, and operation of, “Azzam Publications,” an entity in London that provided material support to the Chechen mujahideen, the Taliban and associated terrorist groups.

Today’s guilty pleas were announced by Deirdre M. Daly, Acting United States Attorney for the District of Connecticut, John Carlin, Acting Assistant Attorney General for National Security, John Sandweg, Acting ICE Director and Patricia M. Ferrick, Special Agent in Charge of the New Haven Division of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

“Today, Babar Ahmad and Syed Talha Ahsan admitted that they supported terrorists,” said Acting U.S. Attorney Daly. “They acknowledged that they solicited funds, recruited personnel and provided additional support for acts of terror, including efforts based out of the United States and solicitations for support that were specifically targeted at U.S. residents. In doing so, they also admitted that they knew that their efforts could result in the maiming and murder of individuals, including U.S. citizens. This prosecution is a testament to the resolve of our prosecution team and our federal law enforcement partners, notably Homeland Security Investigations and the FBI, as well as our counterparts in the U.K. who have provided crucial assistance to this lengthy international investigation.”

“This is an early example of individuals using the internet not only to radicalize others and spread violent propaganda, but also to further the actions of terrorist groups by soliciting supplies and personnel,” said Acting Assistant Attorney General Carlin. “This case demonstrates that the danger exists and our efforts to stop it are extensive. These pleas are a direct result of the hard work of the prosecutors, agents and analysts who spent countless hours devoted to the case.”

“These guilty pleas deal a significant blow to the financial infrastructure that supports terrorism around the world and underscores Homeland Security Investigations’ vital role in the global law-enforcement community,” said acting ICE Director John Sandweg. “This investigation further demonstrates law enforcement’s resolve to bring to justice anyone who supports those who would target American interests at home or abroad. We commend the extraordinary sophistication and collaboration with which our federal partners and British counterparts met and addressed this threat.”

“Today’s guilty pleas are particularly important because the material support of terrorism is the very lifeblood of complex global terrorist networks,” stated FBI Special Agent in Charge Ferrick. “All terrorism investigations involve the identification, disruption and dismantling of material and financial support systems, for without financial support, terrorists and terrorist groups cannot survive or propagate. This far-reaching investigation was worked deliberately and without fanfare, and truly underscores Homeland Security Investigations and the FBI’s lasting commitment to combating terrorism at all phases.”

On October 6, 2004 and June 28, 2006, federal grand juries in Connecticut returned separate indictments charging Ahmad and Ahsan, respectively, with terrorism-related offenses. Ahmad, 39, and Ahsan, 34, both British citizens, have been detained since their arrests by British law enforcement authorities on August 5, 2004, and July 19, 2006, respectively, and both were extradited to Connecticut in October 2012 following lengthy extradition proceedings abroad.

The indictments allege that Ahmad and Ahsan were members of a group that supported the Chechen mujahideen, the Taliban and associated terrorist groups through various means, including the operation of a series of websites under the name of “Azzam Publications,” including Azzam.com and Qoqaz.net, which promoted violent jihad and solicited support for such groups. During the times relevant to the indictments, the Taliban allowed territory under its control in Afghanistan to be used as a safe haven and base of operations for Usama bin Laden and Al Qaeda, who had committed and threatened to continue to commit acts of violence against the U.S. and its nationals. For a period of time, the Azzam websites were made possible through the unwitting services of a web-hosting company headquartered in Trumbull, Conn.

According to court documents, Ahmad also made efforts to secure GPS devices, Kevlar helmets, night vision goggles, ballistic vests, and camouflage combat suits. In addition, Ahmad and Ahsan recruited and arranged for individuals to travel to Afghanistan to train for violent jihad. According to court documents, a search of Ahmad’s residence in the United Kingdom in December 2003 revealed Ahmad in possession of an electronic document setting forth previously classified plans regarding the makeup, advance movements, and mission of a U.S. naval battle group as it was to transit from California to its deployment in the Middle East. The document discussed the battle group’s perceived vulnerability to terrorist attack. Ahsan was alleged to have possessed, accessed, and modified the electronic battle group document in April 2001.

Today, as part of their guilty pleas, Ahmad and Ahsan admitted that they conspired to provide and did provide material support for terrorism through Azzam.com by soliciting and conspiring to provide funds, personnel and physical items for the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, intending that

such support or resources would be used in preparation for or in carrying out a conspiracy to commit murder, kidnaping, or maiming; or an attempt or conspiracy to kill nationals of the U.S. while such nationals were outside the U.S.

Ahmad admitted that he operated the family of websites collectively known as Azzam Publications, and that “the purpose of Azzam Publications [was] to ‘Incite the believers’ and also secondly to raise some money for the brothers.” Ahsan admitted that in 2001, he assisted Ahmad by processing video orders and by providing Ahmad with correspondence sent to Azzam Publications’ post office box in London.

Ahmad and Ahsan further admitted that Azzam Publications posted articles on how to train for and support the jihad and the mujahideen, posted biographies of “martyrs,” and also produced and/or sold a number of audio and video products that were advertised on the websites, including videos containing real combat footage and biographies and images of deceased mujahideen. In 2001, Azzam Publications also posted on its websites an article entitled “What You Can Do to Help the Taliban,” which provided detailed instructions on how to raise, transport and personally deliver amounts over US\$ 20,000 in cash to the Taliban government via its consulate in Pakistan. Ahmad and Ahsan also admitted that Azzam Publications solicited personnel and physical items, including military suits and gas masks, for the Taliban.

Ahsan further admitted that, on one occasion, he received an unsolicited document sent to the Azzam post office box that described the makeup, capabilities, vulnerabilities and upcoming movements of a U.S. naval battle group from the U.S. to its deployment in the Middle East. Ahsan admitted that he created and saved an electronic version of the document, and did not dispute that the electronic version of the document was subsequently found in Ahmad’s residence in December 2003. Ahsan also did not dispute that, with the assistance of Ahmad, he traveled to and fought in Afghanistan, and attended terrorist training camps run by Al Qaeda.

Ahmad and Ahsan each pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to provide material support to terrorists and one count of providing material support to terrorists. As part of their pleas, Ahmad and Ahsan specifically agreed, in writing, that they pleaded guilty freely and voluntarily, and without intimidation or coercion of any kind, because they are guilty of conspiring to provide and providing material support to terrorists.

Due to the statutory maximum penalties that were in place during the time frame of each defendant’s criminal conduct, Ahmad faces a maximum term of imprisonment of 30 years and Ahsan faces a maximum term of imprisonment of 15 years. Pursuant to a binding plea agreement, if accepted by the court, Ahmad faces a maximum term of imprisonment of 25 years. At sentencing, the government intends to offer additional evidence of both defendants’ conduct.

U.S. District Judge Janet C. Hall scheduled sentencing for March 4, 2014.

This case has been investigated by a Task Force in Connecticut consisting of Special Agents from Homeland Security Investigations; law enforcement agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Joint Terrorism Task Force; the Internal Revenue Service – Criminal Investigation

Division, Electronic Crimes Program; the Defense Criminal Investigative Service and the Naval Criminal Investigative Service.

Acting U.S. Attorney Daly praised the substantial efforts of law enforcement authorities from the Metropolitan Police Service's Counter Terrorism Command and the Extradition Unit, both within New Scotland Yard, whose efforts and assistance have been essential in the investigation in this case. Acting U.S. Attorney Daly also thanked the U.S. Marshals Service and the HSI, FBI and Justice Department attachés in London for their assistance in the matter.

The case is being prosecuted by a team of federal prosecutors including Assistant U.S. Attorneys Stephen Reynolds and Ray Miller from the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Connecticut, Trial Attorney Alexis Collins from the Counterterrorism Section of the Justice Department's National Security Division, and Trial Attorney Richard Green from the Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section (CCIPS) of the Justice Department's Criminal Division.

**PUBLIC AFFAIRS CONTACT:**

**U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE**

Tom Carson

(203) 821-3722

[thomas.carson@usdoj.gov](mailto:thomas.carson@usdoj.gov)