

Filipino convicted in plot to kill G.I.s in Afghanistan

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RIVERSIDE, Calif. — A Filipino national was among two men convicted on Sept. 27 of conspiring to support an al-Qaeda plot to kill American officials in Afghanistan.

A federal jury convicted Ralph Deleon (pictured above), 25, of Ontario, a Filipino who was living in America on a green card; and the ringleader of the plot, Sohiel Omar Kabir, 36, of Pomona, an Afghan who is a naturalized U.S. citizen.

Both men face life in prison without parole.

Deleon and Kabir plotted to supply material support to al-Qaeda attacks on U.S. Government officers and employees.

“This case shows that the appeal of extremist ideologies can reach from Afghanistan to America, demonstrating the clear need for continued vigilance in rooting out homegrown violent extremists who plot terrorist acts both here and abroad,” U.S. Attorney Stephanie Yonekura said.

In a six-and-a-half week trial, prosecutors presented evidence that Kabir radicalized Deleon and another man, Santana Vidriales.

Vidriales was indicted in 2012.

Kabir left the U.S. toward the end of 2011, arriving in Afghanistan in the summer of 2012.

Kabir allegedly asked Santana and Deleon to travel to Afghanistan, where he said he had made contact with members of al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

During a meeting with Deleon and Santana in February 2012, an FBI informant reported that the

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men had talked about their radical Islamic views.

In the spring of that year, Deleon told the source he planned to leave the United States to perform a violent jihad.

Santana spoke of his desire to become a sniper, while Deleon said he wanted on to be on the "front lines or use explosives," targeting U.S. official and military bases, the U.S. Attorney's Office said last Thursday.

Deleon and Santana recruited Arifeen David Gojali in September 2012, prosecutors said.

"Deleon, Santana and Gojali made plans to join Kabir in Afghanistan to engage in violent training. As part of their planning, Santana, Deleon and Gojali conducted preliminary training in southern California at firearms and paintball facilities to prepare for terrorist training overseas," the U.S. attorney said in a statement.

FBI agents arrested Deleon, Santana and Gojali on Nov. 16, 2012 after they left their Chino apartment to begin a drive to Mexico.

From there they planned to fly to Afghanistan.

The U.S. military arrested Kabir in Afghanistan.

"The threat posed to America's security by individuals within the United States who support terrorists is very real," said Bill Lewis, a director at FBI's Los Angeles Field Office.

"This case demonstrates the process by which individuals living in the United States were groomed and radicalized toward an extremist ideology, and ultimately planned the murder of American and coalition forces."

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Kabir was found guilty of participating in two schemes to provide material support and resources to al-Qaeda and conspiring to receive military-type training from al-Qaeda.

Deleon was convicted of conspiring to commit murder, kidnapping or maiming overseas.

They are to be sentenced on Feb. 23, 2015.

(Matt Reynolds/CNS)