

U.S. Prosecutor: Bin Laden Told of al-Qaida Suspect's Plot in 'Chilling' Letter

A U.S. prosecutor told jurors at the terrorism trial of accused al-Qaida operative Abid Naseer that his plan to bomb a shopping center in England in 2009 was described in a "chilling" letter recovered during the military raid that killed Osama bin Laden.

In an opening statement at trial in federal court in Brooklyn, New York, prosecutor Celia Cohen said the letter from al-Qaida's head of Western operations updated bin Laden on plans by Naseer and others to carry out attacks in New York, Copenhagen and Manchester, England.

"You will see that chilling reminder in the letter to Osama bin Laden that al-Qaida's goal was to attack infidels in their home territories," Cohen said.

Jurors were not told that the letter came from the May 2011 raid in Abbotabad, Pakistan that killed bin Laden. But before the trial, Cohen said it was recovered in that operation.

Naseer, who was extradited from Britain in 2013, is representing himself at trial. With Loretta Lynch, the U.S. Attorney for Brooklyn who is President Barack Obama's nominee for attorney general looking on, Naseer proclaimed his innocence.

"The evidence will not show the defendant was a member of al Qaeda," Naseer said.

Naseer, 28, faces up to life in prison if convicted of providing and conspiring to provide material support to al-Qaida and conspiring to use a destructive device.

The trial would be the first in the United States to feature evidence from the raid on bin Laden's hideout. The raid ended a nearly 10-year hunt following the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States using hijacked jetliners.

Prosecutors say Naseer was leader of an al-Qaida cell plotting an attack on Manchester and that another cell conspired to bomb the New York City subway system, while a third planned to attack a Copenhagen newspaper that had printed cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed.

Two men, Najibullah Zazi and Zarein Ahmedzay, pleaded guilty to charges stemming from the New York plot. A third, Adis Medunjanin, was convicted at trial and sentenced in 2012 to life in prison. Zazi was the first witness called Tuesday.

Cohen said Naseer like Zazi coordinated his plans through a Pakistan-based al-Qaida facilitator, "Sohaib," using email addresses intended to disguise his identity and describing the attack as a "wedding" or "marriage."

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