

Former member of US Navy arrested on terrorism, espionage charges

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

NEW HAVEN, Conn. - Hassan Abujihad, formerly known as Paul R. Hall, 31, of 15449 N. 25th Avenue, Apt. #2025, Phoenix, was arrested today in Phoenix on a federal criminal complaint from the District of Connecticut, U.S. Attorney Kevin J. O'Connor for the District of Connecticut announced today. The complaint alleges that, in 2001, Abujihad provided material support or resources, knowing or intending that they were to be used in preparation for, or in carrying out, a conspiracy to kill U.S. nationals, in violation of 18 U.S.C. Section 2339A, and that Abujihad delivered, communicated, transmitted or caused the delivery, communication or transmission of classified information relating to the national defense to persons not entitled to receive it, in violation of 18 U.S.C. Section 793(d).

Abujihad appeared this afternoon before United States Magistrate Judge Lawrence O. Anderson in Phoenix and agreed to a temporary order of detention and to be removed to the District of Connecticut for further prosecution.

According to information previously disclosed in court, from approximately 1997 through at least August 2004, British nationals Babar Ahmad, Syed Talha Ahsan and others, through an organization based in London called Azzam Publications, are alleged to have conspired to provide material support and resources to persons engaged in acts of terrorism through the creation and use of various internet web sites, e-mail communications, and other means. One of the means Ahmad and his coconspirators are alleged to have used in this effort was the management of various Azzam Publications websites, principally <http://www.azzam.com/>, which, along with associated administrative email accounts, were hosted for a period of time on the servers of a web hosting company located in the State of Connecticut.

During a December 2003 search of Ahmad's residence in London, British law enforcement officers recovered a computer floppy disk that contained a password-protected document that set forth previously classified information regarding the movements of a United States Navy battle group that was charged with enforcing sanctions against the Taliban and engaging in missions against Al Qaeda. The information included details on the battle group's movements as it was to transit from California to the Gulf region in the spring of 2001. The document went on to discuss the battle group's perceived vulnerability to terrorist attack. Additional investigation and computer forensic analysis later determined that Syed Talha Ahsan allegedly possessed, accessed, modified and re-saved the electronic battle group file before it was found in Ahmad's possession.

Ahmad and Ahsan were previously indicted in the District of Connecticut in the now-pending terrorism cases of *United States v. Babar Ahmad*, 3:04CR301(MRK) and *United States v. Syed Talha Ahsan*, 3:06CR194(JCH), and their extradition from the United Kingdom to Connecticut to face the charges remains pending.

According to documents filed with the court and statements made in court, the criminal complaint against Abujihad alleges that, in 2001, Abujihad provided the battle group information to Azzam Publications. The complaint alleges that search warrants executed upon the various email accounts associated with the Azzam

websites recovered several email exchanges from late 2000 to late 2001 between members of Azzam Publications and Abujihaad while Abujihaad was an enlistee in the United States Navy on active duty in the Middle East and stationed aboard the U.S.S. Benfold, one of the ships in the battle group whose movements were disclosed.

Recovered emails between Abujihaad and Azzam Publications included discussions regarding videos Abujihaad ordered from Azzam Publications that promoted violent jihad, a small donation of money Abujihaad made to Azzam Publications; and whether it was "safe" to send materials to Abujihaad at his military address onboard the U.S.S. Benfold.

The complaint further alleges that, during another email exchange with Azzam Publications, Abujihaad described a recent force protection briefing given aboard his ship, voiced enmity toward America, praised Usama bin Laden and the mujahideen, praised the October 2000 attack on the U.S.S. Cole - which Abujihaad described as a "martyrdom operation," - and advised the members of Azzam Publications that such tactics were working and taking their toll. The email response from Azzam Publications encouraged Abujihaad to "keep up... the psychological warfare [sic]."

The complaint further alleges that, during the searches executed on the email accounts that were associated with administering the Azzam websites, Abujihaad's contact information - specifically, his abujihah@benfold.navy.mil email account - was found in the possession of the members of Azzam Publications.

The complaint further alleges that, in 2004, when Abujihaad learned the news of Babar Ahmad's arrest and the allegations that Ahmad possessed the battle group file, Abujihaad destroyed certain Azzam Publications videos and deleted certain computer files that reflected material from the Azzam Publications sites while at his home in Phoenix.

The complaint further alleges that, in December 2006, during consensual recorded conversations, Abujihaad, while negotiating the purchase of two AR-15 assault rifles for approximately \$1300, admitted to corresponding by email with members of Azzam Publications through their websites, admitted to sending the email discussing the attack on the U.S.S. Cole, and admitted to destroying Azzam-related materials in 2004.

In approximately January 2002, before the alleged conduct was discovered, Abujihaad was discharged from active duty from the United States Navy.

If convicted of both charges, Abujihaad faces a maximum term of imprisonment of 25 years.

U.S. Attorney O'Connor stressed that a complaint is only a charge and is not evidence of guilt. The defendant is entitled to have this matter presented to a grand jury and, in the event an indictment is returned, he is entitled to a trial at which it will be the government's burden to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

U.S. Attorney O'Connor commended the substantial efforts and cooperation of the several federal law enforcement agencies involved in the investigation including the United States Attorney's Offices in Phoenix and Chicago; the FBI in New Haven, Phoenix and Chicago; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and the Naval Criminal Investigative Service. U.S. Attorney O'Connor also praised the substantial efforts of law enforcement authorities from the Metropolitan Police Service's Anti-Terrorist Branch within New Scotland Yard, whose efforts and assistance have been essential in the investigation of this matter.

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