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Man, woman indicted in Edmond terroristic hoax

By Traci Chapman SPECIAL TO THE SUN Mar 7, 2015

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A man and woman investigators say falsely accused a former University of Central Oklahoma student of planning a suicide bombing have been indicted.

The Federal Grand Jury of the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Oklahoma on March 3 filed the indictment against Sajjad Hussein Al Fehaidah, 23, and 19-year-old Israa Jafar Ali.

The indictment represents a change in what crimes Fehaidah and Ali would face at trial, according to court documents. Prosecutors initially charged the pair with making a false report; with the indictment, they each would defend two counts — conspiracy to commit a terroristic hoax and terroristic hoax. If convicted, Fehaidah and Ali could face up to five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine for each count, prosecutors said.

The alleged plot began Sept. 19, 2014, when Ali made a call to the Edmond Police Department to report a threat she said she heard a Saudi Arabian University of Central Oklahoma student make. That man planned to wear an explosive, nail-laden coat to an unspecified Christian church in Edmond near the UCO campus and detonate it, she said. The reported attack, according to Ali, was expected to take place in two to three weeks, investigators testified during a Feb. 9 hearing in Fehaidah's case.

“Ms. Ali said he wanted to injure a lot of people,” FBI Special Agent Kristen Foster testified. “She identified a particular Saudi male who she said made the statement.”

Despite confusion about the identity of the alleged bomber, Foster said there was no mistake about the series of events surrounding that call. Investigators said they learned Ali’s then-boyfriend, Fehaidah, loaned her his cell phone to make the initial report and that he consulted Facebook while Ali was on the phone with police to assist her in providing a name to authorities. Investigators said the pair then dodged attempts to reach them and lied when they were questioned.

The man identified by Ali as the potential bomber was at one time an international student at UCO. Fehaidah also attended the school at that time, prosecutors said. Investigators eventually discovered the man accused of the attack wasn’t in the United States at the time Ali made the report, Foster said.

Because Ali used several “hot words” connected with terror attacks, Edmond Police officials contacted the FBI, with Foster and other agents joining the investigation.

“We felt it was a viable threat — she gave detail of how the attack would take place; she said he knew people in Guantanamo, she talked about him being Jihad,” Foster testified.

It was Edmond Police’s move to bring in the FBI that led Ali, after agents and police had spoken several times with both her and Fehaidah, to confess the report was a hoax, Foster said.

“It was on Feb. 23, she (Ali) sent a text to one of the investigators confessing she had made it up,” Foster said. “She was shocked federal authorities became involved — they just never anticipated that development.”

Ali told investigators the man she accused of the bombing had said disparaging things about both her and Fehaidah, Foster said.

“They thought that it would result in either his arrest or scare him enough to leave them alone,” she said.

Instead, the pair was arrested in early February — Fehaidah in Oklahoma City and Ali in Nashville. Although Ali made the phone call, investigators and prosecutors both contended Fehaidah's alleged actions made him equally guilty in the plot.

“What he did and what he aided was a threat of the most violent nature,” Kumiega said during the Feb. 9 hearing. “In light of the international environment in September, these people were a little more sophisticated and educated in doing this, all for revenge.”

Foster, a member of the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force, agreed with Kumiega that September 2014 beheadings of an American journalist and British aid worker, as well as the 9/11 anniversary, made Ali's claims more credible and lifted Fehaidah's participation in the plan to that of someone who became a threat to national security.

“He was involved in terroristic threats,” she said. “You're trying to incite panic into people, that type of thing.”

Fehaidah's attorney, Paul Antonio Lacy, questioned why it took FBI agents almost four months to arrest his client, who was taken into custody Feb. 5. While Foster had no explanation, U.S. District Court Judge Suzanne Mitchell did grant Lacy's request to conditionally release Fehaidah on a \$25,000 bond pending trial. According to court documents, Ali was also released on her own recognizance until her trial.

Fehaidah, however, was not set free. U.S. Department of Immigration and Naturalization officials asserted its jurisdiction over the Saudi national, as questions remained about his legal status to remain in the United States as a student and possible work done by him at area nightclubs, which officials said was a violation of his F-1 visa. If, or when, ICE had determined Fehaidah's status, Mitchell ordered he be fitted with a GPS tracking device and subject to home detention, except for school and other limited purposes, and required Fehaidah to relinquish his passport to the court.

Bob Troester with the U.S. Attorney's office said Fehaidah would appear for a 3 p.m. hearing Monday to be presented with the new charges based on the March 3 indictment. Ali is set for a similar hearing March 31.

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