



THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE  
EASTERN DISTRICT *of* PENNSYLVANIA

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**Department of Justice**

U.S. Attorney's Office

Eastern District of Pennsylvania

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Yemeni Man Indicted on Charges of Lying to Joint Terrorism Task Force About Supporting Anti-American and Anti-Semitic Armed Insurgency**

PHILADELPHIA – United States Attorney William M. McSwain announced that Gaafar Muhammed Ebrahim Al-Wazer, 25, of Altoona, PA, was charged by Indictment with three counts of making false statements to Task Force Officers with the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Philadelphia Joint Terrorism Task Force. The defendant was previously arrested at his home in Altoona on November 7, 2019, pursuant to a Criminal Complaint, and has been detained since then, following a finding by U.S. Magistrate Judge Marilyn Heffley that he presented a risk of flight and danger to the community.

According to the Indictment and Criminal Complaint, FBI counterterrorism investigators questioned Al-Wazer, a Yemeni citizen, on May 17, 2016 about his affiliation with the Houthi movement, known formally as Ansar Allah. Ansar Allah is the armed rebel group that toppled Yemen's government and has fought in an ongoing civil war there for years. Al-Wazer allegedly denied to the FBI that he was aligned with the Houthi movement, whose motto is "Allah is the greatest of all, Death to America, Death to Israel, Curse upon the Jews, Victory to Islam," and further denied that he had ever fired a weapon or participated in military or militia training.

To the contrary, however, the court documents allege that a search of Al-Wazer's Facebook account revealed numerous postings and photographs in which he extolled and praised Ansar Allah, its objectives and its fighters who were killed in battle against the Yemeni government and its Saudi and U.S.-backed forces. In these postings, Al-Wazer was armed with automatic weapons (including a rocket-propelled grenade launcher). Al-Wazer's Facebook account allegedly included a posting of a photograph of him and others bearing automatic assault rifles and pledging that they would stay on the path of jihad and wishing death to the United States and Israel and victory to Islam. In another posting, Al-Wazer again bears a machine gun in a photograph, which is accompanied by a pledge to Ansar Allah to the death.

"Just as when Al-Wazer was arrested and detained in November 2019, today's Indictment demonstrates that lying to counter-terrorism officers in the course of their official duties is a crime," said U.S. Attorney McSwain. "Al-Wazer was welcomed into our country for the educational opportunities available here, and he is entitled to hold and express his political and religious beliefs as freely as anyone else in this country -- no matter how vile and disgusting they are. But what he cannot do is lie to federal officers when directly questioned

about his activities and beliefs. I want to thank our partners in the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force for their continued vigilance in this case."

"People have the right to their own beliefs — the FBI isn't the 'thought police,' nor do we want to be," said Michael J. Driscoll, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's Philadelphia Division. "But lying to federal agents about your ideology and your actions is illegal, for good reason. If the people we interview feel they can deceive us with impunity, false information will hobble vital investigations. We can't allow the mission of our Joint Terrorism Task Force to be derailed like that. The stakes are just too high."

"Let the indictment of Al-Wazer serve as an example that lying to federal officers is a federal offense, and those who do so will be held accountable to the fullest extent of the law," said Brian A. Michael, Special Agent in Charge of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Philadelphia. "HSI and our law enforcement partners are committed to pursue justice against those who seek to harm our country and our citizens."

If convicted, the defendant faces a maximum possible sentence of five years' imprisonment, three years of supervised release, a \$250,000 fine, a \$100 special assessment, per count.

The case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Philadelphia Joint Terrorism Task Force, and is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Nelson S.T. Thayer, Jr.

An indictment, information or criminal complaint is an accusation. A defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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**Topic(s):**

Counterterrorism

**Component(s):**

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