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2 men sentenced for plot to support terrorists

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RIVERSIDE, Calif. - Two Southern California men who were recruited in a scheme to send them to Afghanistan to kill U.S. troops were sentenced Monday to federal prison for conspiring to provide material support to terrorists.

Miguel Alejandro Santana Vidriales, 24, of Upland, received a 10-year sentence and Arifeen David Gojali, 24, of Riverside, got five years, the Riverside Press-Enterprise reported. Each also will have a decade of supervised release.

Both had pleaded guilty to the conspiracy charges and cooperated with prosecutors.

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The FBI began tracking the men and two others after Santana returned from visiting his mother in Mexico in 2012 with a copy of a jihadi magazine in his possession. They and a third man, Ralph Deleon, of Ontario, California, were arrested the same year as they headed to Mexico to catch a flight to the Middle East.

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A fourth man, Sohiel Omar Kabir, of Pomona was later arrested in Afghanistan.

Prosecutors said Deleon, 26, and Kabir followed the teachings of violent jihad by Anwar al-Awlaki, a U.S.-born cleric who was a key al-Qaeda figure and was killed by a CIA drone strike in Yemen in 2011.

Kabir, 37, had converted Deleon and Santana to Islam after meeting them at a hookah bar. Deleon later recruited Gojali to the group.

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Kabir, a naturalized U.S. citizen born in Afghanistan, was the ringleader and made arrangements for Deleon and the others to join him in his native country, prosecutors said.

Deleon, a citizen of the Philippines who was a lawful permanent U.S. resident, got the other men in shape, took them for target shooting practice with AK-47 assault rifles and prepared for combat by playing paintball, prosecutors said.

An FBI informant in the group secretly recorded their conversations.

Kabir and Deleon were convicted last fall of conspiracy. Last month, they were sentenced to 25 years each in federal prison.

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