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District of New Jersey

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Former Inmate Admits Role in Scheme to use Drones to Smuggle Contraband into Fort Dix Federal Prison

NEWARK, N.J. – A Hudson County, New Jersey, man today admitted participating in a conspiracy to use drones to smuggle contraband, including cell phones and tobacco, into the federal correctional facility at Fort Dix, and to possessing heroin and fentanyl with the intent to distribute, Acting U.S. Attorney Rachael A. Honig announced.

Jason Arteaga-Loayza, aka “Juice,” 30, of Jersey City, New Jersey, a former inmate at Fort Dix, pleaded guilty by videoconference before U.S. District Judge Susan D. Wigenton to one count of conspiracy to defraud the U.S. Bureau of Prisons and one count of possession of heroin and fentanyl with the intent to distribute. Arteaga-Loayza, who was on federal supervised release at the time of the offenses, also pleaded guilty to violating the terms of his supervised release.

Three other men, Adrian Goolcharran, aka “Adrian Ahoda,” aka “Adrian Ajoda,” aka “Adrian Ajodha;” Nicolo Denichilo; and Johansel Moronta also have been charged with participating in the scheme to use drones to smuggle contraband into Fort Dix prison.

According to the documents filed in this case:

Arteaga-Loayza, an inmate at Fort Dix from June 2017 to September 2018, participated in multiple drone deliveries of contraband into Fort Dix after his release from prison. Between October 2018 and June 2019, Arteaga-Loayza arranged for Goolcharran, with Denichilo’s assistance, to fly drones over Fort Dix and drop packages of contraband into the prison, where it was sold to inmates for a profit. The packages that Arteaga-Loayza smuggled in included cell phones, cell phone accessories, tobacco, weight loss supplements, eyeglasses, and various other items. Arteaga-Loayza, with Moronta’s assistance inside of the prison, took inmate requests for specific items of contraband and oversaw the collection of payments. Arteaga-Loayza also collected contraband for upcoming drone drops and stored it at his residence in Jersey City.

Arteaga-Loayza and his conspirators took various steps to prevent BOP officials from detecting and intercepting the contraband. They planned drone drops during the late evening hours or overnight when the drones were less likely to be seen. Goolcharran, the drone pilot, with Denichilo’s assistance, flew the drones from concealed positions in the woods surrounding the prison. The lights on the drones were covered with tape to make it more difficult for prison officials to spot the drones.

Arteaga-Loayza and his conspirators used cell phones, including contraband phones concealed within the prison, to coordinate the drone drops. A contraband cell phone used by Moronta, who was an inmate at Fort Dix, contained text messages with Arteaga-Loayza about the collection of profits from the sale of the contraband inside of the prison. In one exchange, Moronta messaged Arteaga-Loayza about an inmate, “Ok so I am tell him 10 phones and 100 baco [i.e. tobacco] he has to pay 10 bands and 500 on each phone?” Arteaga-Loayza responded, “And well even give him an ounce of weed tell him.” One of Arteaga-Loayza’s cell phones contained messages between him and Goolcharran coordinating drone drops. For example, in April 2019, Arteaga-Loayza sent Goolcharran marked-up aerial photos of Fort Dix to show Goolcharran where to drop the

contraband. In another exchange, Arteaga-Loayza sent Goolcharran a message asking, “U think that u cud do something 2m.” Goolcharran replied, “2m too windy 20mph.”

During a search of Arteaga-Loayza’s residence on June 27, 2019, agents found a kitchen closet containing packages of empty cell phone boxes, including a package with empty cell phone boxes that had been shipped to Arteaga-Loayza the day before a drone drop on Oct. 30, 2018, cell phone chargers, empty boxes of SIM cards, and several cell phones. The kitchen closet also contained a Bugler tobacco box, consistent with the tobacco recovered in earlier drone drops. Arteaga-Loayza also had a suitcase in his bedroom that contained his driver’s license, 20 packets of Suboxone Sublingual Film, a prescription opiate, and a plastic bag containing over 21 grams of a substance containing heroin and fentanyl. Following the search of his home, Arteaga-Loayza moved and did not inform his probation officer of his whereabouts.

Arteaga-Loayza faces a maximum penalty of five years in prison and maximum fine of \$250,000 for the conspiracy count, and 20 years in prison and a \$1 million fine for the narcotics count. Arteaga-Loayza also faces a maximum penalty of two years in prison for violating the terms of his supervised release. Sentencing is scheduled for Sept. 9, 2021.

Acting U.S. Attorney Honig credited agents of the U.S. Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General, Cyber Investigations Office, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Keith A. Bonanno; Detachment 307, Office of Special Investigations, Department of the Air Force, under the direction of Special Agent Nick Kaplan; and the U.S. Department of Transportation Office of Inspector General, Northeast Region, under the direction of Acting Special Agent in Charge Daniel Helzner, with the investigation leading to the charges.

She also thanked Federal Bureau of Prisons personnel at Fort Dix, under the direction of Warden Lamine N’Diaye; special agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge George M. Crouch Jr. in Newark; special agents of the U.S. Attorney’s Office, under the direction of Supervisory Special Agent Thomas J. Mahoney; and officers with the Pemberton Borough Police Department, under the direction of Chief Edward Hunter; Pemberton Township Police Department, under the direction of Chief David King; and Chesterfield Township Police Department, under the direction of Chief Kyle Wilson, for their assistance.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Cari Fais and Jeffrey J. Manis of the Office’s Special Prosecutions Division in Newark.

The charges and allegations contained in the criminal complaints issued against the remaining defendants are merely accusations, and they are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.