

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT**

1/25/26

**DISTRICT OF ARIZONA**

United States Of America

v.

Qais Ahmad Tillawi

Case No.:

26-3004MJ

**CRIMINAL COMPLAINT**

I, the undersigned complainant, being duly sworn, state that the following is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief:

On or about the date of January 25, 2026, in the District of Arizona, the defendant violated:

49 U.S.C. § 46504 - Interference with flight crew members and attendants, and;

49 U.S.C. § 46314(a), (b)(1) - Entering an aircraft or airport area in violation of security requirements.

**See Attachment A, Incorporated by Reference Herein.**

I further state that I am a Special Agent from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and that this complaint is based on the following facts:

**See Attached Statement of Probable Cause Incorporated By Reference Herein.**

Continued on the attached sheet and made a part hereof:  Yes  No

AUTHORIZED BY: ABBIE BROUGHTON, AUSA *AB*

Jason Saitta, Special Agent, FBI

Name of Complainant

Sworn to before me and subscribed *telephonically* in my presence

January 26, 2026  
Date

HONORABLE MICHAEL T. MORRISSEY

United States Magistrate Judge

Name & Title of Judicial Officer

**JASON SAITTA**

Digitally signed by JASON SAITTA  
Date: 2026.01.26 11:32:47 -07'00'

Signature of Complainant

Phoenix, Arizona

City and State

*M Morrissey*

Signature of Judicial Officer

**Attachment A**

**COUNT 1**

On or about January 25, 2026, in the District of Arizona, the defendant, Qais Ahmad TILLAWI, while aboard Air France Flight number 069, an aircraft in the special aircraft jurisdiction of the United States, knowingly intimidated and interfered with the performance of the duties of the flight crew in violation of Title 49 U.S.C. § 46504.

**COUNT 2**

On or about January 25, 2026, in the District of Arizona, the defendant, Qais Ahmad TILLAWI, knowing that he did not possess a valid boarding pass to travel aboard an international bound aircraft, presented said boarding pass at the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) security screening checkpoint in violation of security requirements prescribed under section 44901, and proceeded to enter the sterile area of Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport and board Air France flight number 069 in violation of Title 49 U.S.C. § 46314(a), (b)(1).

**STATEMENT OF PROBABLE CAUSE**

I, Jason L. Saitta, being first duly sworn, hereby depose and state as follows:

**I. Agent Background:**

1. I am a Special Agent (SA) with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), United States Department of Justice, and have been so employed since June 2014. I am currently assigned to the Phoenix Field Office in Phoenix, Arizona. I am a member of the Violent Crime Task Force where I investigate violations of federal law that occur within the airport environment and onboard aircrafts. As a Special Agent of the FBI, my duties and responsibilities include conducting criminal investigations of individuals and entities for possible violations of federal laws, particularly those laws found in Title 18 and Title 49 of the United States Code.

2. My training in law enforcement includes agency specific training in all aspects of conducting federal criminal investigations, including the planning, preparation, and execution of search warrants. I am an “investigative or law enforcement officer of the United States” within the meaning of Title 18, United States Code, §2510(7), authorized to conduct investigations into alleged violations of federal law.

3. Through my experience and training, I know that it is a felony offense for any person on an aircraft in the special aircraft jurisdiction of the United States to knowingly intimidate or interfere with the performance of the duties of the flight crew member according to Title 49 U.S.C. § 46504

4. Through my experience and training, I know that it is a misdemeanor offense for any unauthorized person to enter the sterile area of an airport or aircraft, and to have passed through a Transportation Security Administration (TSA) security screening checkpoint without a valid boarding pass, a violation of security requirements prescribed under section 44901 which requires the TSA to

screen all passengers that will be carried aboard a passenger aircraft, according to Title 49 U.S.C. § 46314(a), (b)(1).

5. This affidavit is made in support of a criminal complaint and arrest warrant for Qais Ahmad TILLAWI ("TILLAWI ") for violations of Title 49 U.S.C. § 46504 - Interference with flight crew members and attendants and Title 49 U.S.C. § 46314(a), (b)(1) - Entering and aircraft or airport area in violation of security requirements. Your affiant has identified TILLAWI based on information from Phoenix Police Department officers, Air France employees, his physical description, date of birth, passport number, FBI number, several driver's license photographs, and an in-person interview by your Affiant.

6. The statements contained in this affidavit are based on your affiant's training and experience as a Special Agent as well as information provided to your affiant by other agents of the FBI, other law enforcement officers, and witnesses. This affidavit is intended to show merely that there is sufficient probable cause for the requested warrant and does not set forth all of your affiant's knowledge about this matter.

## **II. Probable Cause Statement:**

7. On or about January 25, 2026, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) received a phone call from the Phoenix Police Department Phoenix (PPD) stating that TILLAWI was in custody after being trespassed from Air France flight number 069 after refusing to disembark from the flight after being asked by Air France flight crew members.

8. Your Affiant and another FBI agent responded to Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport where they interviewed two Air France employees to include the station manager and customer service agent and the general manager for Worldwide Flight Services, who were involved in the situation and had interacted with TILLAWI.

9. During the interview, the Air France Station Manager stated TILLAWI had purchased a boarding pass online at approximately 2:00 PM on January 25, 2026. At approximately 2:04 PM TILLAWI checked in online for the flight. At approximately 2:19 the boarding pass was canceled by Air France with an annotation stating the purchase was made with an “unauthorized credit card”. Your Affiant later learned via Phoenix PD that TILLAWI arrived at Sky Harbor Airport via a rental car at 2:37 PM. TILLAWI abandoned the rental car curbside at Terminal 4, proceeded to and dispose of two jackets in a trash can before heading to the TSA security screening checkpoint. Despite having a canceled and invalid boarding pass, TILLAWI passed through the checkpoint and entered the sterile area of the airport at approximately 2:56 PM.

10. Air France Station Manager further stated that while TILLAWI was in the boarding area, an Air France passenger reported to an Air France employee that TILLAWI was acting suspicious however, that employee did not relay that information any further until TILLAWI was removed from the aircraft by Phoenix PD.

11. During an interview the Air France customer service representative stated that TILLAWI attempted to board the aircraft however, the system at the gate alerted that there was an issue with TILLAWI’s boarding pass. TILLAWI proceeded to the customer service representative who was checking and verifying boarding credentials. The customer service representative made repeated requests to see TILLAWI’s passport, however, TILLAWI would only show his passport from a distance and refused to hand it to the representative. Eventually, TILLAWI displayed his passport unnecessarily close to the representative’s face, and she proceeded to give a thumbs-up gesture for TILLAWI to withdraw his passport. The representative indicated that there were multiple passenger lists from which she could check to verify the validity of TILLAWI’s boarding pass. The representative admitted she checked one list and did not locate TILLAWI’s name but did not check other lists. During this process, TILLAWI proceeded to walk down the jet-bridge and boarded the aircraft. The representative believed that her co-

worker standing close by must have validated TILLAWI's ticket. The representative advised that her co-worker did not verify TILLAWI's ticket therefore, he boarded the aircraft without a valid ticket.

12. The Air France Station Manager stated that once onboard the aircraft, the flight crew noticed that TILLAWI did not take his seat but rather paced around the economy seating area of the aircraft, completing approximately two laps. At that time, the flight crew decided to approach TILLAWI and question his about his seat assignment. TILLAWI refused to speak with the flight crew and would not provide his name. TILLAWI displayed a digital boarding pass on his phone which reflected seat number 44D. When the flight crew checked TILLAWI's name against the flight manifest, his name did not appear. The flight crew became more concerned and notified the Captain about TILLAWI's presence on the aircraft. The captain proceeded to question TILLAWI about his presence aboard the aircraft, however, TILLAWI still refused to respond verbally. At that time, out of concern for the aircraft and the passengers, the captain ordered TILLAWI to disembark the aircraft. TILLAWI refused, without a verbal response, and typed on his phone, "Send the USA marshal". In response, the captain notified law enforcement and requested to have TILLAWI removed from the aircraft. Phoenix PD had the captain order all other passengers to get off the aircraft except TILLAWI so that he could be removed safely. Once the aircraft had emptied, Phoenix PD was able to safely remove TILLAWI from the aircraft. TILLAWI complied with PHOENIX PD's commands to exit the aircraft without further incident. Once off the aircraft, Phoenix PD attempted to question TILLAWI however, he continued to refuse to speak. TILLAWI showed responding officers his phone with the typed message requesting the marshals. The clearing of the aircraft caused an hour and 54-minute delay.

13. Your Affiant and another FBI agent called TILLAWI's brother, O. TILLAWI, who was physically located in Jordan. O. TILLAWI stated that TILLAWI attended Arizona State University and spoke fluent English. TILLAWI had been fired from his job at PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) in mid-2024, had an on-going drug addiction to include marijuana, mushrooms, and sleeping pills, and was

diagnosed with psychosis. TILLAWI had also mostly stopped verbally communicating to family and others except on rare occasion. According to his brother, in 2024, TILLAWI was detained at the Dubai airport for acting suspiciously, which included his refusal to speak to law enforcement. TILLAWI was temporarily committed to a hospital for mental health treatment in Dubai. Since that time, TILLAWI has traveled back and forth between the Middle East and the United States. TILLAWI has remained unemployed with no permanent residence, choosing to stay in hotels.

14. Through conversations with arresting officers, Your Affiant and another FBI agent learned that TILLAWI was traveling with approximately 20 credit cards or bank cards in true name, two California driver's licenses in true name, five Arizona driver's licenses in true name, a United States passport and passport card in true name, and Jordanian passport in true name, two Jordanian identification cards in true name, and Jordanian military service book in true name, and what appeared to fake employment identification badges from PWC, Ernst & Young, Deloitte, IBM, Accenture, GE Healthcare, and the U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs. Additionally, TILLAWI had over \$1,000 in cash and a Bank of America deposit receipt for \$1,320 dated January 25, 2026.

15. Your Affiant and another FBI agent interviewed TILLAWI at Phoenix PD's holding facility at Sky Harbor Airport. After being Mirandized, TILLAWI indicated via a head-nod and other physical gestures that he understood his rights and would communicate with interviewers via typed notes on the Notes App on his cellular phone. TILLAWI was asked why wouldn't communicate verbally and TILLAWI wrote that it's because of personal reasons. TILLAWI wrote that he is self-employed as a management consultant with special private projects. When questioned about the validity of his various previously discussed employee badges, he shrugged and would not provide any further details. When asked about the purpose of his flight that day to Paris, France, TILLAWI wrote he was going shopping. When asked about his financial resources, he wrote, I'm an American with access to financial services. When asked why he threw his jackets away upon arrival at the airport, TILLAWI wrote that he didn't

need them and that he was going to buy a new one in Paris. TILLAWI showed interviewers an email timestamped at 2:02 PM containing an image of his boarding pass. When asked about his permanent residence, TILLAWI typed that he stays in hotels and that he is a citizen of the world. When asked why he didn't take his seat after boarding, TILLAWI wrote that he travels frequently and tries to be on his feet, when possible, later adding that something was suspicious and wrong with his seat but he didn't know what. TILLAWI wrote that he did not understand why he was removed from the flight after being allowed to board. When asked why he wouldn't obey crew instructions, TILLAWI wrote that the flight crew refused to provide official identification. TILLAWI further wrote that he felt like his life was in danger would not elaborate. TILLAWI wrote that he did not comply with the flight crew's instructions because they were not U.S. Marshals and because he is an American citizen. When questioned about his health, TILLAWI wrote that he was healthy, did not take medication, and would not elaborate further.

16. Based on the fact that TILLAWI knowingly passed through the TSA security checkpoint into the sterile area of Sky Harbor Airport and boarded Air France flight number 069, using an invalid boarding pass on January 25, 2026, there is probable cause to believe that TILLAWI violated Title 49 U.S.C. § 46314(a), (b)(1) - Entering and aircraft or airport area in violation of security requirements.

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17. Based on the fact that TILLAWI, boarded Air France Flight number 069, an aircraft in the special aircraft jurisdiction of the United States, and knowingly intimidated and interfered with the performance of the duties of the flight crew through his refusal to answer questions or obey commands and refusal to disembark the plane when told, there is probable cause to believe that TILLAWI violated Title 49 U.S.C. § 46504 - Interference with flight crew members and attendants.

JASON SAITTA  
Digitally signed by JASON  
SAITTA  
Date: 2026.01.26 11:33:35 -07'00'

Jason L. Saitta  
Special Agent, FBI

Sworn and subscribed to before me this 26th day of January, 2026

*M Morrissey*

HONORABLE MICHAEL T. MORRISSEY  
United States Magistrate Judge