

Chicago Man Sentenced to Nearly 10 Years in Prison for Planning Travel to Somalia to Join al Shabaab in Jihad Combat

U.S. Attorney's Office
December 11, 2012

- Northern District of Illinois (312) 353-5300

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CHICAGO—A Chicago man was sentenced today to nearly 10 years in federal prison for planning to travel to Somalia in 2010 to engage in jihadist fighting for a foreign terrorist organization. The defendant, SHAKER MASRI, pleaded guilty in July to attempting to provide material support to al Shabaab, a designated foreign terrorist organization, knowing that it was engaging in terrorism. Masri, 29, a U.S. citizen, has remained in custody since he was arrested as he was preparing to leave the country in August 2010.

U.S. District Judge Sharon Johnson Coleman imposed the 118-month (nine years and 10 months) sentence that was agreed upon under the terms of Masri's plea agreement, and she placed the former resident of Chicago's Gold Coast neighborhood on supervised release for 20 years after he is incarcerated. There is no parole in the federal prison system and inmates must serve at least 85 percent of their sentences.

"Shaker Masri wanted to take the lives of human beings—including his own—to wreak havoc and advance a terrorist agenda. Through the hard work and dedication of a team of federal agents and prosecutors, he was stopped, and today's sentence ensures that those who would lend support to terrorist organizations will be punished," said Gary S. Shapiro, Acting United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois.

Mr. Shapiro announced the sentence with Thomas R. Trautmann, Acting Special Agent in Charge of the Chicago Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The investigation was conducted by the Chicago FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force, which consists of FBI special agents, Chicago police officers, and representatives from 20 federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies.

According to court documents, on July 19, 2010, Masri told an associate, who unknown to him was cooperating with law enforcement, that he not only intended to travel abroad to engage in a jihadist conflict as a combatant, but that he intended to volunteer for a suicide mission. Masri told this individual that he had two choices: either travel to Somalia to aid al Shabaab or to Afghanistan to aid al Qaeda, and Masri indicated that he had decided to travel to Somalia. Masri assured the cooperating source (CS) that he was determined to join a jihadist conflict and only needed funds to facilitate his plan. The CS responded that he had money to fund Masri's proposed travel, but only if he could join Masri in traveling to Somalia to join al Shabaab, and Masri agreed.

Masri admitted that he and the CS met to discuss their proposed travel on multiple occasions over the following two weeks. They discussed the logistics of traveling to Somalia, including prospective routes, dates, how to conceal their departure, the costs of the journey, the necessity of supplies, and the weapons they would need to acquire in Somalia. Masri warned the CS that they had to be careful to avoid drawing any attention to their proposed travel, the plea agreement states.

On July 23 and 28, 2010, Masri and the CS met to discuss their proposed travel. Masri suggested that, to avoid suspicion, they should avoid traveling directly towards East Africa. Rather, Masri suggested that they travel to southern California, where they could cross the U.S. border into Mexico. From Mexico, Masri explained that they could travel to and through a Central or South American country that did not work with United States' law enforcement before heading to East Africa. When asked by the CS how they would link up with al Shabaab once in Somalia, Masri assured the CS that the area of southern Somalia where they would be traveling was controlled exclusively by al Shabaab. Masri further assured the CS that, after arriving in Somalia, he expected they would be placed with a faction of al-Shabaab comprised of foreign fighters.

Masri admitted he knew that al Shabaab was a militant organization that had engaged in violent terrorist activity. He was also aware that al Shabaab's leadership had issued statements advocating terrorism, and he further knew that the United States had designated al Shabaab as a foreign terrorist organization. In

their July 23 meeting, Masri told the CS that once they embarked on their journey, they would be “wanted” men.

On July 29, 2010, Masri and the CS met at the CS’s home where they used the CS’s computer to purchase airline tickets to travel from Chicago to Los Angeles. Using a debit card provided by the CS, Masri purchased two one-way tickets to travel from Chicago’s Midway Airport to Los Angeles on August 4, 2010.

Masri told the CS that before they left, he needed to discard his laptop and purchase a new computer. Masri explained that he needed to destroy his computer because it contained incriminating information and the CS agreed to help. In the afternoon of August 3, 2010, Masri and the CS met to finalize preparations for their impending journey to Somalia. They went to a liquor store where the CS was to collect a purported debt that could be used to finance their trip. After purportedly obtaining \$18,000 in funds from the liquor store, Masri and the CS traveled to a retail store where they purchased a new laptop computer. Masri was arrested as he and the CS exited the store.

The government is being represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Joel Hammerman and Nicole Kim, with assistance from the Counterterrorism Section of the Justice Department’s National Security Division.