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TERRORIST SENTENCED TO 20 YEARS IN PRISON FOR PROVIDING MATERIAL SUPPORT TO AL QAEDA

Haroon Aswat, 41, was sentenced today by U.S. District Court Judge Katherine B. Forrest of the Southern District of New York to 20 years in prison for terrorism offenses relating to Aswat's efforts to establish a terrorist training camp in the United States. Assistant Attorney General for National Security John P. Carlin and U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara of the Southern District of New York made the announcement.

Aswat was extradited to the United States from the United Kingdom on Oct. 21, 2014. Aswat pleaded guilty on March 30, 2015, to one count of conspiring to provide material support to al Qaeda and one count of providing material support to al Qaeda.

"Haroon Aswat provided material support to al Qaeda and plotted to establish a terrorist training camp on American soil," said Assistant Attorney General Carlin. "Aswat was arrested more than 10 years ago, and his sentence is the result of the tireless and persistent efforts of law enforcement to hold accountable all those who wish to harm the United States, whether at home or abroad, no matter how long it takes."

"Haroon Aswat, with his co-conspirators, sought to establish a terrorist training camp on American soil, and traveled to Afghanistan to receive training from al Qaeda," said U.S. Attorney Bharara. "Arrested abroad in 2005, Aswat fought extradition for nearly 10 years, but faced with overwhelming evidence against him, pled guilty in Manhattan federal court to providing material support to al Qaeda shortly after arriving here. Aswat's conviction and the sentence imposed today – along with the other recent terrorism prosecutions by this Office, including of Sulaiman Abu Ghayth, Abu Hamza, and Khaled al Fawwaz – serve as further proof that justice in international terrorism cases continues to be delivered in American civilian courts."

According to the allegations contained in the indictment, statements made at related court proceedings including today's sentencing, court filings and evidence presented at prior trials:

In late 1999, Aswat, along with co-defendants Mustafa Kamel Mustafa aka Abu Hamza, Ouassama Kassir and Earnest James Ujaama, attempted to establish a terrorist training camp in the United States to support al Qaeda, which has been designated by the U.S. Secretary of State as a foreign terrorist organization. Aswat conspired with Abu Hamza, Kassir and Ujaama to establish the terrorist training camp on a rural parcel of property located in Bly, Oregon. The purpose of the Bly camp was for Muslims to receive various types of training – including military-style jihad training – in preparation to fight jihad in Afghanistan. As used by the conspirators in this case, the term "jihad" meant defending Islam against purported enemies through violence and armed aggression, including, if necessary, by using murder to rid Muslim holy lands of non-believers in Islam.

In a letter faxed from Ujaama in the United States to Abu Hamza in the United Kingdom, the property in Bly was described as a place that “looks just like Afghanistan,” and the letter noted that the men at Bly were “stock-piling weapons and ammunition.” In late 1999, after transmitting the faxed letter, Abu Hamza directed Aswat and Kassir, both of whom resided in London and attended Abu Hamza’s mosque there, to travel to Oregon to assist in establishing the camp. On Nov. 26, 1999, Aswat and Kassir arrived in New York, and then traveled to Bly.

Aswat and Kassir traveled to Bly for the purpose of training men to fight jihad. Kassir told witnesses that he supported Usama Bin Laden and al Qaeda, and that he had previously received jihad training in Pakistan. Kassir also possessed a compact disc that contained instructions on how to make bombs and poisons. After leaving Bly, Aswat and Kassir traveled to Seattle where they resided at a mosque for approximately two months. While in Seattle, Kassir, in Aswat’s presence, provided men from the mosque with additional terrorist training lessons – including instructions on different types of weapons, how to construct a homemade silencer for a firearm, how to assemble and disassemble an AK-47 and how an AK-47 could be altered to be fully automatic and to launch a grenade. On another occasion, with Aswat sitting by his side, Kassir announced to the men in Seattle that he had come to the United States for martyrdom and to destroy, and he informed his audience that some of them could die or get hurt.

Aswat subsequently linked up with al Qaeda and received training at al Qaeda’s al Faruq training camp in Afghanistan, which was al Qaeda’s primary training camp and where recruits were trained in topics that included military tactics, weapons and explosives. Aswat remained in Afghanistan after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and after the United States invaded Afghanistan. A ledger recovered in September 2002 from an al Qaeda safe house in Karachi, Pakistan, listed a number of individuals associated with al Qaeda, including Aswat. The al Qaeda safe house was used by Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, al Qaeda’s chief operational planner and the alleged planner of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

At the time of Aswat’s arrest in Zambia in 2005, he had a computer with him that contained, among other things: a book on survival skills in the event of a nuclear, biological and chemical weapon detonation; the “Anarchist Cookbook,” which contained instructions on how to make bombs and hack into computers; a hand-to-hand combat instruction manual, which noted that its purpose was to “teach you how you can kill another person with your own two hands;” the “Close Combat Textbook;” and the “Big Book of Mischief,” which also contained detailed and extensive instructions on how to make explosives.

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Aswat was convicted of one count of conspiracy to provide material support to al Qaeda, and one count of providing material support to al Qaeda. In addition to the term of imprisonment, Judge Forrest sentenced Aswat to 20 years and imposed a \$200 special assessment. Judge Forrest also ordered that Aswat be removed from the United States to the United Kingdom following the completion of his sentence.

Abu Hamza and Kassir were previously convicted for their roles in attempting to establish a terrorist training camp in the United States. On May 12, 2009, after a four-week jury trial in the Southern District of New York, Kassir was found guilty of charges relating to his efforts to establish the terrorist training camp in Bly and his operation of several terrorist websites. On Sept. 15, 2009, U.S. District Judge John F. Keenan of the Southern District of New York sentenced Kassir to life in prison.

On May 19, 2014, after a four-week jury trial in the Southern District of New York, Abu Hamza was found guilty of charges relating to his role in the conspiracy to establish the terrorist training camp in Bly, as well as his role in a hostage-taking in Yemen in 1998 that resulted in four deaths and his support of violent jihad in Afghanistan in 2000 and 2001. On Jan. 9, 2015, Judge Forrest sentenced Abu Hamza to life in prison.

Assistant Attorney General Carlin and U.S. Attorney Bharara praised the outstanding efforts of the FBI's Manhattan-based Joint Terrorism Task Force, the U.S. Marshals Service and the Metropolitan Police Department of London. The Criminal Division's Office of International Affairs also provided significant assistance.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys John P. Cronan, Ian McGinley, Shane T. Stansbury and Edward Y. Kim of the Southern District of New York, and Trial Attorney Erin Creegan of the National Security Division's Counterterrorism Section.

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