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UNITED STATES ATTORNEY CHUCK ROSENBERG

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“Virginia Jihad” Member Convicted of Perjury, Obstruction

(Alexnadria, VA) - Sabri Benkahla, 31, of Falls Church, Virginia, was convicted by a federal jury today of two counts of perjury before the grand jury, one count of obstruction of justice with respect to the grand jury investigation, and one count of making false official statements to the FBI. Chuck Rosenberg, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, and Joseph Persichini, Jr., Assistant Director in Charge, Washington Field Office, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), made the announcement. Sentencing for Benkahla has been set for April 27, 2007, before United States District Court Judge James C. Cacheris. Benkahla faces a maximum sentence of 25 years in prison.

United States Attorney Rosenberg stated, “Truthful and complete information is a cornerstone of our war on terror. We need and expect the truth; when we do not get it, as Mr. Benkahla now knows, we prosecute perjury and obstruction of justice aggressively.”

This investigation arose as part of the investigation of individuals attending the Dar al Arqam Islamic Center in Falls Church, Virginia. In June 2003, Benkahla and ten others were indicted by a grand jury in Alexandria for conspiring to commit various offenses including mounting expeditions to attack India in Kashmir and Russia in Chechnya in the course of training for jihad in Virginia and Pakistan. Among the defendants, Masaud Khan, Seifullah Chapman, Randall Royer, Ibrahim Al-Hamdi, Mohammed Aatique, Yong Kwon, and Khwaja Hasan, were alleged to have attended jihad training camps operated by the Pakistani terror group, Lashkar-e-Taiba, in 2000 and 2001. In September 2003, in a superseding indictment, Khan and Royer were charged with conspiring to wage war against the United States, aid the Taliban, aid Al-Qaeda, and Khan, Royer, Chapman, and Hammad Abdur-Raheem were charged with providing assistance to the Lashkar-e-Taiba; in that same indictment, Sabri Benkahla was charged with supplying services to the Taliban, and using a firearm in furtherance of that offense in connection with his alleged participation in a jihad training camp in Afghanistan in July 1999.

After Benkahla's motion to sever his case from that of his co-defendants was granted, he was tried separately. A bench trial was held in March 2004, and United States District Judge Leonie M. Brinkema acquitted Benkahla.

Following his acquittal, Benkahla was granted statutory immunity. Pursuant to his immunity agreement, he testified twice before the grand jury, and submitted to interviews with the FBI. Benkahla testified before a grand jury in Alexandria in August 2004 and again in November 2004, and was asked about the circumstances of his participation in jihad training camps or combat in Afghanistan or Pakistan in the summer of 1999. He further was asked about individuals that he knew who had participated in such jihad training or combat, or individuals he knew due to their connection to terrorism. These individuals included eight individuals from Dar Al-Arqam who either obtained jihad training from Lashkar-e-Taiba or otherwise associated with the group in Pakistan, another from Dar Al-Arqam who joined Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia in 2003, two specially designated global terrorists, and an individual suspected of being an aide to Abu Musab al Zarqawi and to Al-Qaeda of Iraq.

Of the individuals associated with Dar Al-Arqam, Randall Royer and Ibrahim Al-Hamdi attended jihad training camps run by Lashkar-e-Taiba in Pakistan in 2000. Seifullah Chapman was at those camps on 9/11; Yong Kwon, Khwaja Hasan, Muhammed Aatique, and Masaud Khan left the United States to go to those camps immediately after 9/11 upon the urging of Ali Al-Timimi in order to obtain training to fight against the American troops they expected soon to invade Afghanistan. In 2002, Ahmed Abu Ali joined Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia.

Lashkar-e-Taiba was designated a terrorist organization by the United States in December 2001. After that time, Ali Asad Chandia, Masaud Khan, and Seifullah Chapman assisted Lashkar-e-Taiba official Muhammad Ajmal Khan in his attempts to acquire for the organization materials including software to control an unmanned aerial vehicle, kevlar, and night vision goggles.

Today, Benkahla was convicted of making materially false statements both in his grand jury appearances in 2004, as well as to the FBI in 2004. These false statements included his denial of his involvement with an overseas jihad training camp in 1999, as well as his asserted lack of knowledge about individuals with whom he was in contact.

The trial that concluded today revealed that the grand jury and FBI sought in 2004 to question Benkahla about his contacts with Ibrahim Buisir of Ireland, and Manaf Kasmuri of Malaysia, both of whom are designated by the United States as Specially Designated Global Terrorists, as well as those with Ahmed Abu Ali, his friend and fellow student at the Islamic University of Medina, until both were arrested by Saudi authorities in June 2003. Further, the trial revealed that the grand jury and FBI sought to question Benkahla about his contacts with an individual suspected of being Malik al-Tunisi, a facilitator for the al-Zarqawi terrorist network in Iraq.

The trial also for the first time publicly revealed that, in 2004, Masoud Khan told the FBI that Lashkar-e-Taiba had previously solicited him to case a chemical plant in Maryland.

Before today's verdict, a total of twelve individuals have been convicted in connection with this case; one defendant, Caliph Basha Abdur-Raheem, was acquitted at trial in 2004. Moreover, cooperating witnesses in this case have testified in successful terrorism prosecutions of Faheem Lodhi in Australia and Mohammed Ajmal Khan in the United Kingdom.

Those previously sentenced include:

- Ali Al-Timimi - a US citizen - July 13, 2005, to life in prison for soliciting treason, and counseling and inducing others to wage war against the United States, and use firearms and explosives in furtherance of those offenses.
- Masaud Khan - a US citizen - July 29, 2005, to life in prison for conspiring to wage war against the United States, providing material support to Lashkar-e-Taiba, and using automatic weapons in furtherance of crimes of violence.
- Seifullah Chapman - a US citizen - July 29, 2005, to 65 years in prison for conspiring to provide material support to Lashkar-e-Taiba, violate the Neutrality Act, use firearms in furtherance of crimes of violence, and using an automatic weapon in furtherance of crimes of violence.
- Ahmed Abu Ali - a US citizen - March 29, 2006, to 30 years in prison for conspiracy to provide material support to al Qaeda, providing material support to a al Qaeda, contributing services to al Qaeda, receiving funds and services from al Qaeda, conspiracy to assassinate the President of the United States, conspiracy to commit aircraft piracy, and conspiracy to destroy aircraft
- Randall Royer - a US citizen - April 9, 2004, to 20 years in prison for aiding and abetting the use and discharge of a firearm during and in relation to a crime of violence, and of aiding and abetting the carrying of an explosive during the commission of a felony.
- Ibrahim Al-Hamdi - a Yemeni national - April 9, 2004, to 17 years in prison for unlawfully possessing a firearm, possessing a firearm during and in relation to a crime of violence, and with carrying an explosive - specifically, a rocket-propelled grenade - during the commission of a crime.
- Ali Asad Chandia - a US citizen - August 25, 2006 to 15 years, for conspiracy to provide material support to Lashkar-e-Taiba, and providing material support to Laskar-e-Taiba.
- Yong Ki Kwon - a naturalized US citizen - November 7, 2003, to 11 years, 6 months for conspiracy to commit an offense against the United States, use of a firearm in connection with a crime of violence, and transferring a firearm for use in a crime of violence.
- Khwaja Mahmood Hasan - a naturalized US citizen - November 7, 2003, to 11 years, 3 months in prison, for conspiracy to commit an offense against the United States, and use of a firearm in connection with a crime of violence.

- Muhammed Aatique - a Pakistani national - December 12, 2003, to 10 years, 2 months, for aiding others in commencing a military expedition against a friendly nation, and using and discharging a firearm in relation to a crime of violence.
- Hammad Abdur-Raheem - a US citizen - July 29, 2005, to 52 months in prison for conspiring to provide material support to Lashkar-e-Taiba and violate the Neutrality Act. Abdur-Raheem is pending resentencing because the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit granted the government's appeal from the district court's decision to sentence Abdur-Raheem substantially below the applicable sentencing guideline range.
- Donald Thomas Surratt - a US citizen - November 7, 2003, to 3 years, 10 months, for conspiracy to commit an offense against the United States, and transporting a firearm in interstate commerce with reason to know a felony would be committed with it.

The case was investigated by the FBI, Washington Field Office. Assistant United States Attorney Gordon D. Kromberg and Department of Justice Trial Attorney John T. Gibbs prosecuted the case for the United States.

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