

The FBI Plot to Entrap Somali Youth

By WAMM Newsletter



The mothers of the defendants, with a grandmother, hold photos of their sons in front of the United States Federal Courthouse in Minneapolis. They cannot understand how their sons, who have never harmed anyone, face life in federal prison.

Photo: Mary Beaudoin

Headlines across the country screamed: "Minnesota's Terror Trial." Guled Ali Omar, Mohamed Abdihamid Farah, and Abdirahman Yasin Daud, three young men from immigrant Somali families, were alleged to be part of a plot to travel to Syria in order to join the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria/the Levant (ISIS/ISIL). In a nation in the grips of a post-9/11 culture of Islamophobia, the "conspiracy" was said to involve at least 10 young Somali men (some still in their teens), all residents of the Twin Cities.

The young men were charged with providing material support to a designated foreign terrorist organization. An even more serious charge, conspiracy to murder outside the United States, was later added, requiring the prosecution to prove the young men actually intended to kill for ISIL. The latter charge carries a possible life sentence.

The arrests began in February 2015 and continued throughout the year. All the young men have been in custody since being arrested. Six of the nine in jail succumbed to the enormous pressure that the threat of life in prison exerts and pleaded guilty to lesser charges before the trial started; the possibility of shorter sentences convinced two of them to testify against the three who decided to go to trial.

All three: Omar, Farah, and Daud, who put their fates in the hands of a jury, were found guilty of conspiracy to murder outside the United States for a foreign terrorist

organization, as well as guilty of material support. An all-white jury deliberated for a mere two and half days before turning in its verdict.

The prosecution's goal throughout the trial was to smear the defendants by association: they knew one another from high school, first year of community college, basketball courts and the Somali community. From the prosecution's opening argument power point (every slide on a black "ISIL" flag backdrop), to an abundance of "exhibits" showing numerous shocking ISIL videos depicting gruesome killings of captured enemies halfway across the world, the prosecution insinuated that the three young defendants were planning to do the same thing. In response, Farah's attorney, Murad Mohammad characterized his client's behavior as that of "an immature young man reacting to graphic videos. It does not translate to any agreement or conspiracy to kill anyone or provide material support."

There was never any real proof that these young men would actually kill for ISIL. Attorneys for the three described each defendant as "a talker, not a doer" and said that the government couldn't produce any evidence that they ever used or attempted to obtain weapons or planned or conspired to kill another person or group. How anyone prove something that didn't actually happen?

To bring serious charges against the youth, the government had to show that the youth were "predisposed" to do something. The FBI set up a sting operation to ensnare them. To assist with it, they engaged 20-year-old Abdirahman Bashir, whose family had moved from California to Minnesota several years earlier. Four of Bashir's cousins had gone to fight for ISIL and had been killed in Syria. Bashir had planned to go to Syria, himself, and had pushed for the young men to go, too. He was under surveillance and had lied to a grand jury. He agreed to cooperate with the FBI and then acted as the star witness in the trial.

Daud's attorney, Bruce Nestor, cross-examining him said: "Cooperating with the government isn't just about the past. You've got to get other people in trouble. You have to produce." Cooperating with the FBI, Bashir had begun to secretly record the young men early in 2015. (Among other incentives, Bashir was paid \$119,000 for transcribing the recordings.)

Feeling they were under surveillance and believing that they had no future in this country, Omar, Farah, and Daud began to talk of leaving. Wary and worried, their parents took their passports away. Bashir chided them about not having courage to obtain false passports and leave for Mexico and from there for Syria. The FBI was orchestrating in the background: Bashir said, "When I was in San Diego the agents had a fake passport and they said go back and show the guys." Bashir then put Omar, Farah, and Daud in contact with an agent posing as a Mexican black market operator named Miguel who said he could furnish false passports. "Miguel" told them he would buy Daud's 2008 car to pay for the cost.



*Faduma Hussein (mother of Guled Omar), Ayan Farah (mother of Mohamed Farah), and Frahiyo Mohamed (mother of Duad Mohamed) outside the federal courthouse in Minneapolis, still hoping to find justice for their sons from an all-white jury.
Photo: Mary Beaudoin*

Glenn Bruder, Omar's attorney said, "Guled Omar gave a number of reasons he was reluctant to travel but you [the witness Bashir] encouraged him to travel to Syria." About travel plans, Guled Omar had said at times: "That's a big fail." "You're going to be another statistic." "I don't think it's a good idea" and when he took the witness stand for his own defense, Omar said that conversations about fighting in Syria were just talk, the result of fluctuating thoughts and bravado boasting among young men (sometimes under the influence of marijuana supplied by Bashir).

Omar never actually left Hennepin County, but Farah and Daud traveled with the FBI collaborator and met "Miguel" in a San Diego warehouse where they were greeted with flashbang grenades and a heavily armed SWAT team of a dozen men. Farah and Daud were arrested in the sting operation—a dramatic scene recorded and played for the jury. Omar was arrested in Minneapolis for being a "co-conspirator."

Thus Guled Ali Omar, Mohamed Abdihamid Farah, and Abdirahman Yasin Daud became entrapped by a system that targets vulnerable people—young, low income, people of color from immigrant families—especially Muslims, who can be depicted as the scary "other" to stoke fear and provide justification for the vast Homeland Security and FBI apparatus, and U.S. foreign policy in the war on terror. It is likely that the young men will be held up by the government as examples of the necessity for the Countering Violent Extremism program (CVE), which focuses on Muslims as though they are inherently dangerous.

The gravely worried mothers and fathers, who attended the trials faithfully day after day, are left to wonder how their beloved sons can face possible life in federal prison

when they never actually did anything or caused harm to anyone. Neither can anyone else who believes in fairness and justice.

Many WAMM members were at the courthouse in support of the defendants and their families. Karen Schraufnagel, who contributed to this article, is the founder of Minnesotans Against Islamophobia and a member of the WAMM Middle East Committee.

For more information and how to stop Islamophobia and defend the Muslim Community, see:

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