

Osama_bin_Laden@Hotmail.com

Does Islamic outreach make an Oregon man a terrorist?

Do a man's religious views make him "a danger to the community"? This was the central question in federal court in Eugene last week when Pete Seda (also known as Pirouz Sedaghaty) appeared before Judge Thomas Coffin in a detention hearing. Though he is not officially charged as a terrorist, the word was used throughout the day in reference to Seda's Islamic charity.

"The discussion of religion is a rare event in a courtroom in the U.S. and I apologize in advance," said federal prosecutor Chris Cardani.

Seda, an American citizen born in Iran, returned the U.S. after almost five years living overseas — apparently in Iran and Syria. He returned to fight charges from a 2005 indictment accusing him of helping smuggle \$150,000 from Ashland to Saudi Arabia.

Slight and bearded, garbed in green jail garments, the 49-year-old Seda smiled at his family and supporters in the crowded courtroom.

He was detained at Portland International Airport upon his voluntary return Wednesday, Aug. 15, and taken to Lane County Jail. The five-hour hearing in Coffin's courtroom was to determine if he could be released until his trial. He is a flight risk and a danger to "the general U.S. population," Cardani argued.

Cardani referred to Seda as "the U.S.

head of the al-Haramain Foundation" from his Ashland office. Seda also ran a business as an arborist in Ashland.

al-Haramain is a "promoter of terrorism throughout the world," said Cardani. The foundation's money went to help Islamic Mujahideen ("holy fighters") in Chechnya, he contended. He accused Seda of supporting Muslim fighters in Kosovo and Afghanistan as well.

al-Haramain, a Saudi Arabian based charity, had its assets frozen in 2004 by the U.S. Treasury Department, which said it was funneling money to al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. The U.S. and the U.N. have identified 14 of al-Haramain's offices as "global centers of terrorism," according to Cardani. He referred to Seda's work with al-Haramain as "seeking to spread these bad things."

However, the money transfer occurred several years before al-Haramain was accused of terrorism. And according to professor As'ad AbuKhalil, a Middle-Eastern scholar who testified for the defense, the U.S. also funded the Mujahideen prior to 9/11.

Seda was "no more responsible," his attorney Larry Matasar said, "for the misdeeds of al-Haramain than Mr. Cardani is responsible for the misdeeds of the U.S. government."

One of the primary pieces of evidence against Seda was his group's work sending copies of a translation of the Qur'an used by

Wahhabi Muslims and known as the *Noble Qur'an* to prisoners in U.S. prisons. The witness to these activities was Daveed Gartenstein-Ross.

Gartenstein-Ross is Jewish by birth, converted to Islam in college and later became a Baptist. He is a "counter-terrorism consultant." He worked in Seda's al-Haramain office for several months during his Islamic phase in the late '90s. In his testimony he portrayed the *Noble Qur'an* as a "radical and dangerous" translation.

Excerpts from the volume that espoused jihad and violence against infidels were cited in court.

The largest distributor of the *Noble Qur'an* is the Saudi Arabian embassy in Washington, D.C., said AbuKhalil. Many Muslim charities use this version of the Qur'an because it is given for free by the Saudi government. It is also available on Amazon.com, and there is a copy in the Eugene Public Library. The defense presented a thank you letter from the Library of Congress saying they "deeply appreciated" their copy of the *Noble Qur'an*.

The other evidence against Seda was an email found on the Internet server from the website Islamtoday.com that Seda set up in Ashland. The site is used by Saudi sheiks to disseminate their religious views. Osama_bin_Laden_Muslim@hotmail.com

was the sender of the email; Seda was on the cc list.

"There's nothing funny about bin Laden but for me, as an expert, this was almost comical," said AbuKhalil. For bin Laden, who hasn't even used a phone line since the 1990s, to use his full name in an email is "unthinkable," he said.

A quick check by the *EW* revealed that it takes about two minutes for anyone to sign up for a Hotmail account under bin Laden's name. The Osama_bin_Laden_Muslim account was available.

The final testimony was from Ashland community members who called Seda "a positive force in the community" and said he had "consistently spoken out for peace, tolerance and understanding between religious groups."

Judge Coffin said, "To say the least, this has been a most unusual detention hearing," and added that he wasn't sure "what to make of the government's references to Chechnya and Kosovo."

He compared the accusations against Seda to a Christian who didn't believe in abortion versus one with the same beliefs who intends to blow things up. "It would be a stretch" he said, "for the government to argue that any anti-abortion Christian intended to be violent."

After asking Seda to disclose more information on his whereabouts while out of the country and to locate a missing copy of his U.S. passport, Coffin set a date for a status hearing for 9 am Monday, Sept. 10. He will decide at that time if Seda can go free until his trial.

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