

FSB Official Testifies in U.S. Conspiracy Case

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EUGENE, Oregon — A former Russian counterterrorism agent testified Tuesday that an Islamic charity that once had its U.S. headquarters in the state of Oregon was financing Islamic fighters battling the Russian army in the breakaway republic of Chechnya.

Under cross-examination, however, Colonel Sergei Ignatchenko acknowledged that the names he had of Al-Haramain Islamic Foundation officials tied to terrorism did not include defendant Pete Seda, also known as Pirouz Sedaghaty. “I never knew about him, I never heard about him,” he said.

Ignatchenko, now head of communications for the Russian Federal Security Service, testified via live video feed from former KGB headquarters in Moscow as a prosecution witness in the U.S. District Court sentencing of Seda.

Ignatchenko testified that his agency had information that Al-Haramain financed a terrorist

training camp in Chechnya and was in contact with the leaders of Muslim fighters but did not know the specific source of the funds.

“We didn’t know which country it came from,” he said.

Judge Michael Hogan postponed sentencing, saying he needed a couple of weeks to prepare a written response to legal issues, particularly whether to apply the so-called terrorism enhancement that would give Seda the maximum eight years in prison for his convictions for tax fraud and conspiracy.

A former Ashland, Oregon, peace activist and tree surgeon, Seda is an Iranian-born, naturalized U.S. citizen and a co-founder of the Al-Haramain Islamic Foundation in the United States.

He was convicted last month of tax fraud and conspiracy for helping another official of Al-Haramain smuggle \$150,000 to Saudi Arabia in 2000. The tax fraud charge refers to efforts to cover up the trail of the money.

Though Seda has never been charged with terrorism, prosecutors are seeking the maximum sentence of eight years in prison by offering evidence that Seda intended the money to support guerrillas fighting against a country with which the United States was at peace.

Defense lawyers contend that he should be freed on probation, having already served enough time in jail awaiting trial and since his conviction.

Ignatchenko testified that while he ran counterterrorism activities in Chechnya between 1997 and 2000, his agency found evidence tying Al-Haramain to Islamic fighters in Chechnya. It included pay vouchers taken from the computers of mujahedin leaders, and a recording of a telephone conversation in which an unidentified Chechen told the head of Al-Haramain about an impending attack on Russian forces.

Ignatchenko said the tape had been destroyed as part of a Russian policy of destroying recordings after five years.

In an appeal to the judge, Seda said he has worked all his life to promote peace, understanding and mercy.

“I rejected terrorism all my life and it is not compatible to my belief,” Seda said. “Islam is a religion of justice, peace and forgiveness. Terrorism is and always has been rejected by me and my faith.”

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