



Written by on March 17, 2010

Pakistan Indicts Five Americans for Terrorism

Major news sources reported on March 17 that five U.S. men who were arrested in Pakistan in December were charged this day with plotting terrorist attacks in Pakistan, charges that could lead to possible life sentences. The Los Angeles Times reported that the men, ages 18 to 24, are U.S. citizens of Pakistani, African, and Egyptian descent who lived within blocks of each other in Alexandria, Virginia.



A Reuters report said that the five were detained in December in the town of Sargodha, 120 miles southeast of Islamabad, and have been accused of contacting militants online and plotting terrorist attacks.

Hassan Dastagir, a defense lawyer for the men, told reporters that the charges brought against his clients included fundraising for terrorist acts.

"The court brought charges of terrorism against my clients and fixed March 31 for the next hearing in which the prosecution would produce evidence and witnesses," he told Reuters by telephone from Sargodha.

Dastagir said the men pleaded not guilty and described the charges as "lies."

An AFP report quote defense lawyer Shahid Kamal, who told reporters, "Charges have been laid against all the accused. All these charges are terrorism-related. The offenses are punishable by life imprisonment."

"A total of seven charges have been laid against them. They include funding a banned or proscribed organization and helping out a banned organization.

"One of the charges is conspiring to carry out a terrorist attack within Pakistan or an allied country," he added.

The AFP journalist observed:

Although the Pakistani government is a close U.S. ally in the war on Al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, the country is gripped by widespread anti-Americanism where many blame deteriorating security on the alliance.

Washington has put the government and military under major pressure to do more to eliminate Islamist networks that have carved out havens in the country's northwest and infiltrate Afghanistan to attack Western troops.

The *Washington Post* reported that the arrests came at a time when there is "growing concern in the United States over home-grown terrorism." The report cited U.S. and Pakistani officials who initially said the men would probably be deported back to Northern Virginia, where they are under investigation



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by the FBI. But U.S. law enforcement officials now say that although their probe will continue, no charges in an American court are pending — and that federal investigators will wait to see what develops in Pakistan.

"I don't see that there is any restriction on bringing charges in the United States because they've been brought in Pakistan. Does it make sense to do so? I don't know," one federal law enforcement official told the Post, on condition of anonymity because the investigation is ongoing. "Our hands are a little tied because they have custody of the men."

The *Post* reported that the men — Umar Chaudhry, 24; Ramy Zamzam, 22; Ahmad A. Minni, 20; Waqar Khan, 22; and Aman Hassan Yemer, 18 — have told the Pakistani court that they neither sought nor established contact with extremist groups and traveled to the region only to help other Muslims.

They have also said they were being tortured in jail, and Zamzam told reporters before an earlier hearing that the men were jihadists, "not terrorists ... and jihad is not terrorism."

A BBC report said that the men have claimed they were tortured in custody, and that U.S. officials directed the abuse, but prison officials have denied the accusations.

The U.S. embassy in Islamabad, which has also dismissed the allegations, confirmed that a U.S. consular official attended the March 17 hearing.

There is considerable irony in these reports about the government of Pakistan about to try terrorist suspects who, despite their Muslim heritage, possess neither Pakistani, nor Iraqi, nor Afghan citizenship — but U.S. citizenship.

In his statement to the nation on Sept. 11, 2001, President George W. Bush said:

America was targeted for attack because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world.... The search is underway for those who are behind these evil acts. I've directed the full resources of our intelligence and law enforcement communities to find those responsible and to bring them to justice. We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them.

The phrase "those who harbor them" was a warning to the leaders of foreign nations — almost exclusively Islamic Middle Eastern nations — that we would hold foreign governments accountable for the actions of terrorists who operated from within their borders.

Yet, the five young men being charged with attempting to help terrorist organizations in Pakistan had all of the advantages of freedom and opportunity growing up in Virginia as U.S. citizens. Are we to believe that they fit President Bush's profile of those who targeted America because "because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world"?

Furthermore, have our own intelligence agencies maintained the same high standards President Bush demanded of foreign nations in his 2001 speech? Which nation granted visas to the 9/11 hijackers? Which nation's intelligence agencies ignored pre-9/11 warnings from within their own ranks that one or more of the 9/11 hijackers had terrorists ties and should be apprehended and deported?

We were led to believe, after 9/11, that all terrorists hailed from Middle Eastern Muslim countries and that we must put pressure on those nations to apprehend those terrorists and, if that failed, send our troops halfway around the world to seize control of those nations, remove their governments, and install governments better suited to our purposes.



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This strategy, supposedly, would keep us safe from terrorism.

But now, we find ourselves in the embarrassing position of having one of those suspect Muslim nations apprehend and try five young men accused of aiding terrorists who are not natives of the Middle East, but are U.S. citizens from an affluent suburb of our nation's capital!

Should Pakistan send troops to Virginia to install a government better able to detect and control terrorists in our midst?

Obviously not, but as we conduct our war on terrorism it might be wise to recall one biblical parable about casting the first stone and another about casting out the beam in our own eye.

Photo: Pakistani police officers with detained American terrorism suspects in Sargodha, Pakistan: AP Images



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