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# Imam Accused of Supporting Terrorism Begins Testimony

Mark Hamblett, New York Law Journal

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The London-based imam accused of providing material support and resources to al Qaida, the Taliban and Yemeni hostage takers, told a jury Thursday that he lost his hands in a 1993 explosion while working as a contractor for the Pakistan military.

Mustafa Kamel Mustafa, who is facing a life sentence for charges that include inciting young men to violent attacks, testified that many people in London, where he would ultimately be a leader at the radical Finsbury Park mosque, assumed he "was a hero" when they saw his arms. "People see me as a person who was injured in Afghanistan and Pakistan," he said.

Mustafa, 56, whose attempt to deliver his own opening argument was rejected by Southern District Judge Katherine Forrest ([See Profile](#)) three weeks ago, took the witness stand during the second day of testimony, laughing at one point over the absurd stories that circulated about his injuries.

The imam denied every accusation in the indictment and then moved into his career as an engineer that took him to Afghanistan for construction and relief work in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's exit in 1989. He became emotional at one point, while discussing the massacre of Muslims in Bosnia.

The testimony was part of defense attorney Joshua Dratel's lengthy direct examination which allowed the Egyptian-born cleric—a charismatic orator who allegedly conspired with hostage takers in Yemen and terror training camp followers in Oregon and Afghanistan—to expound on his Islamic beliefs, including his evolving view that the term "jihad" means more than just an internal struggle and can also mean the need for Muslims to physically defend themselves as they suffered a "slow-motion Holocaust."

Mustafa explained his first trips to Afghanistan starting in 1990 and the shifting state of play for the Mujahideen—the young Arab and Muslim men who traveled to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets and remained there after the Soviets left to ensure the collapse of the puppet communist regime.

"Did you ever pick up a weapon in any way during this time?" Dratel asked. "Were you ever involved in fighting yourself?"

Not against the Soviets, Mustafa replied, but "in the times when there [were] still communists, there [were] a couple of times ... a couple of bullets."

Mustafa said he became an advocate for the fighters in Pakistan after "George Bush the father said 'I'm going to disperse the Mujahideen everywhere'" when the communists lost power in 1992. As an advocate, Mustafa said he argued before a Pakistani judge to prevent deportations during the "crackdown" on the former fighters and helped them get jobs.

It has been widely reported that Mustafa lost his arms doing humanitarian work in Afghanistan. But Thursday, in an account likely to be challenged on cross next week by Southern District Assistant U.S. Attorneys Edward Kim, John Cronan and Ian McGinley, Mustafa said he continued to get contracting work. He said he was working for the Pakistani army on a military project involving liquid explosives and earthworks in the city of Lahore when the testing went horribly wrong.

"And I just felt the explosion...I didn't go out immediately and, after that I went into a coma," he said. "Went I [came out] of the coma I [knew] I had lost my arms."

He said he was questioned by Pakistani authorities as to whether he intentionally ignited the mixture and he insisted that it was an accident. The explosion happened in a neighborhood where Pakistan security officers and their families lived.

Mustafa said he was told by one of his Pakistani questioners, "we are not going to make any arrests so just don't embarrass us."

He said there were all kinds of stories about how he lost his hands, and he chuckled as he related one of them: "Some people said I went to Saudi Arabia and I was caught stealing ... and that they cut off my hands."

Upon his return to London and a year-long rehabilitation, he said the "crackdown on Arabs being dispersed all over Europe" caused problems for them and their families. It was then he began pursuing a dream of a true Islamic state, founding "Supporters of Sharia" to advocate for Islamic law and Muslim solidarity, he said.

"I was starting to deal with the cause and not the symptoms ... it was disease with so many symptoms," he said. "There is no Islamic state for people and their needs ... a state that keeps the faith and keeps them physically well."

Under Dratel's questioning, Mustafa denied Supporters of Sharia ever sent money, materials or men to terrorists.

Being questioned a second time about the Srebrenica massacre of 8,000 Bosnian Muslims in 1995, which Mustafa visited right after the event, he again became emotional.

He said the massacre helped make him "believe in the training for young people" on how to fight and defend themselves. He also said the superpowers "don't fight against each other, "they only fight against the weak."

"That's the law of the earth," he said. "It's a big jungle. You have to strong."

As the direct of Mustafa ground on, and the defendant talked about whether there could be an

Islamic state in Bosnia, Forrest called a break, and Kim objected to the wide-ranging testimony and its relevance.

Forrest said the testimony was relevant because the government had introduced the same subjects through tapes of Mustafa's statements and the witnesses it presented.

"You look at me, Mr. Kim, like I'm crazy," Forrest said. "These are his views and he has to be able to put them into context."

She said she would give the jury a "carefully crafted instruction" that, when Mustafa gives his views on something like Bosnia or Chechnya, these are his views and they may be right or wrong, but they are his views.

"But you guys opened the door to just this. You can't introduce Chechnya, Bosnia and Afghanistan and expect him to stay it away from it," an animated Forrest told the prosecutors.

"It is relevant, you made it relevant. Nobody made it irrelevant but you."

Mustafa's direct examination is expected to continue into Monday.

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