

## **DETROIT IMMIGRANT LOSES IN TERROR CASE**

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A federal judge ruled that a Detroit man nabbed shortly after Sept. 11, 2001, has ties to terrorists and so can be deported to Syria.

Immigration Judge Robert Newberry said that Nabil Almarabh, a Syrian citizen who lived in Detroit, poses a national security threat because of his ties to men who worked with Al Qaeda. Almarabh's case received national attention the week after Sept. 11, 2001, when federal authorities said he was an associate of Osama bin Laden. Authorities were also concerned about his license to truck hazardous materials.

In a ruling released this week, the judge noted that in 1998, Almarabh lived in Boston with Riad Hijazi, a Palestinian who was convicted in September 2000 in a failed plot to bomb holy sites and a hotel during millennium celebrations in Jordan. Newberry also wrote that in the early 1990s, Almarabh lived in a guest house in Pakistan that was run by Makhtab al Khadimat, a group the FBI called the forerunner of Al Qaeda.

But Almarabh's defense attorney said that his client had ties with the same type of men that the U.S. government supported in its efforts to defeat the former Soviet Union in Afghanistan. He also noted that the U.S. government has not charged Almarabh with any terrorist crime.

Almarabh pleaded guilty last year to entering the United States illegally, and in September 2002, a judge sentenced him to 8 months in prison. At his sentencing, the government acknowledged that it had no evidence linking him to terrorism.

"We're disappointed with the decision," said Almarabh's attorney, Mark Kriger, on Tuesday. "It's extremely disappointing given the government's concession that he is not involved in terrorism."

Kriger said Almarabh was never tied to Hijazi's terrorist activity. Almarabh admitted that Hijazi lived with him for two months in Boston, but there is "no proof he was in any way associated with Hijazi's political and religious leanings," he said.

He said he will appeal Newberry's decision.

Born in Kuwait to Syrian parents, Almarabh moved to the United States in 1989 and worked as a cab driver and printer. In 1992, he traveled to Pakistan with the Muslim World League to help refugees from the Afghan war. At the time, thousands of Arabs and Muslims from around the world were in Pakistan. Government officials said some of them were there to train as terrorists.

The government said that while he was in Pakistan, Almarabh associated with Al Qaeda members and learned terrorist techniques. But Kriger said that his client merely took security training to help defend himself.

In 2001, Almarabh tried to enter the United States illegally. A Canadian judge released him on bond, and he fled to the United States. He was picked up by authorities after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. Almarabh served his 8-month sentence at a federal detention center in Chicago.

He was later moved to the Monroe County Jail, where immigration officials keep detainees. There, he has pressed his case to be allowed to stay in the United States, fearful of being persecuted in Syria if deported.

He tried to persuade Newberry that he would be harmed in Syria because the United States has claimed he is tied to terrorism. The judge ruled there was no evidence he would be harmed.