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ABC News

Pakistan Charges 5 Americans with Terrorism

One of the Charges Carries a Mandatory Sentence of Life in Prison

By NICK SCHIFRIN

March 17, 2010

Five young Americans were [charged with terrorism in Pakistan](#) today, almost four months after police say they tried to join terrorist groups and travel into Afghanistan to attack American troops.

A Pakistani court charged the [Virginia](#) natives with five counts, including conspiracy to commit terrorist attacks in Pakistan, planning to commit acts of degradation against the United States and Afghanistan, and directing each other to commit terrorist acts. The charge of intent to commit terrorist acts carries mandatory sentence of life imprisonment.

They pleaded not guilty to all the counts.

They are the highest profile overseas case of [more than a dozen recently arrested terrorists](#) or [would-be terrorists](#) who have [American citizenship](#), a trend that U.S. officials admit reflects a new threat of Islamic extremism created within the United States.

five men traveled from the Washington, D.C. area to Pakistan last fall after Pakistani police say they were contacted by a terrorist recruiter in [Karachi](#) on YouTube. Once they arrived, they

failed to join multiple terrorist groups in [Hyderabad](#) and [Lahore](#), Pakistan, before being arrested in the small town of Sargodha, where the hearing was held today.

The Americans' defense lawyers say they were planning to travel to Afghanistan to help Muslims affected by the war and had no intent to commit terrorism.

Hassan Dastagir Katchela, who defended the men in court today, accused police of fabricating evidence, citing one piece of communication between the men and a man named Saifullah, who police say recruited them via YouTube and then traded notes in a drafts e-mail folder inside a [Yahoo](#) account.

One message between Saifullah and the men "was written two days after the arrest," Katchela told ABC News.

He also accused police of "pressuring" the five men, who range in age from 19 to 25. He repeated an accusation that police had tortured the men, but said their treatment has dramatically improved.

He said the oldest suspect, Umar Farooq, has accused the jail superintendent of choking him. After that accusation, Katchela said, the treatment improved.

could not be reached on Wednesday night to respond to Katchela's accusations. He plans to bring witnesses from the United States to help try the case.

All five men were reported missing by their families in November, before they traveled to [Pakistan](#). One of the suspects, according to statements made by the [Council on American-Islamic Relations](#), left behind a 11-minute video showing scenes of war and saying Muslims around the world must be defended.

The men have been identified as [Ramy Zamzam](#) of Egyptian descent, Waqar Khan and Umar Farooq of Pakistani descent, and Aman Hassan Yemer and Ahmed Minni of Ethiopian descent.

Their trial is scheduled begin on March 31. Because of security fears, it will take place inside the jail where the men are being held.

A spokeswoman for the U.S. embassy in [Islamabad](#), Ariel Howard, said an American consular official attended to hearing. She declined to comment further.