

British cleric linked to Moussaoui sentenced to 7 years in prison

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THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LONDON — A firebrand Muslim cleric whose mosque was linked to Sept. 11 plotter Zacarias Moussaoui and "shoe bomber" Richard Reid was sentenced to seven years in prison Tuesday after being convicted of fomenting racial hatred and inciting followers to kill non-Muslims.

Terrorism-related charges against the one-eyed, hook-handed cleric Abu Hamza al-Masri also are pending in the United States. In Washington, Justice Department spokesman Bryan Sierra said: "The United States stands ready to resume the extradition proceedings against Abu Hamza when British law allows."

The jury found al-Masri guilty of 11 of 15 charges against him, including soliciting murder, stirring racial hatred, possessing a terrorist document and possessing threatening or

abusive recordings. Al-Masri, Britain's best-known Islamist orator, was sentenced to seven years in prison for soliciting murder, the most serious charge. He faced a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

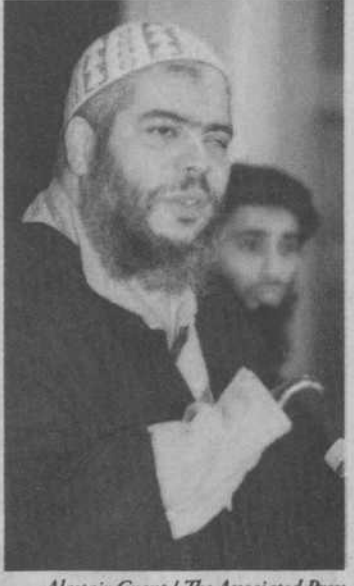
The cleric will serve his sentences on the other charges concurrently.

Judge Anthony Hughes told the cleric that he helped persuade his followers that they had a "moral and religious duty" to kill.

"You used your authority to legitimize anger and to encourage your audiences to believe that it gave rise to a duty to murder," Hughes told al-Masri.

Though asked to stand for the reading of the verdict, the 47-year-old cleric immediately sat down once the first guilty verdict was read out.

A supporter in the public gallery shouted "God bless you, Sheik Hamza!" as the cleric was led out of the courtroom. Others shouted to him in Arabic.



Alastair Grant / The Associated Press

A jury sitting at London's, Old Bailey Court convicted radical Muslim cleric Abu Hamza al-Masri on Tuesday of fomenting racial hatred and inciting followers to kill non-Muslims.

The cleric's attorneys said he planned to appeal. Muddassar Arani said al-Masri believed he was "a prisoner of faith, and this is a slow martyrdom for him." Al-Masri was the former

imam at London's Finsbury Park mosque, which gained notoriety through his fire-and-brimstone preaching and links to terrorist suspects Reid and Moussaoui, who admitted in April that Osama bin Laden ordered him to train to fly a jetliner into the White House. A U.S. federal court is now picking a jury that will decide Moussaoui's sentence.

Authorities in Britain and the United States claim al-Masri was at the center of a web of terrorist activity from the 1990s until police raided the mosque in 2003.

Al-Masri has been charged in the United States on an 11-count indictment with trying to establish a terrorist training camp in Oregon, conspiring to take hostages in Yemen and facilitating terror training in Afghanistan.

Under British law, the domestic charges took precedence over the extradition case.

The cleric, who claims

to have been maimed fighting Soviet troops in Afghanistan, became a high-profile radical and a hate figure for British tabloids, who called him "Hooky" and "Dr. Hook."

After he was expelled from the mosque by administrators in 2003, he led Friday prayers on the street outside until his 2004 arrest on a U.S. extradition warrant. He has been detained in the high-security Belmarsh prison ever since.

Al-Masri, whose real name is Mustafa Kamel Mustafa, faced 15 counts, including nine of soliciting the murder of others, "namely a person or persons who did not believe in the Islamic faith." One of the charges on which he was convicted added: "in particular Jewish people."

He also faced four counts of using threatening or abusive language designed to stir racial hatred, one count of possessing threatening or abusive

recordings and one count of possessing a document likely to be useful in terrorism — the "Encyclopedia of the Afghani Jihad."

He denied all charges. During the trial, which began Jan. 11, prosecutor David Perry said the cleric had preached "terrorism, homicidal violence and hatred" in sermons and speeches, many of which were recorded and played in court.

Prosecutors said police found 2,700 audiotapes and "a large quantity" of videotapes when they searched al-Masri's west London home in 2004.

Some of the tapes played for jurors had al-Masri praising the deadly October 2000 attack on the warship USS Cole and the sinking of the Russian submarine Kursk and telling followers: "Islam will never be dear to your hearts unless you sacrifice for it, until your blood comes out for it, your teeth get broken for it, you have enemies because of it."

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