

Former UTD Student Gets Six Years

BY ROBERT WILONSKY

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On Friday, in a court ruling that went with little local notice, a federal judge sentenced a former student at the University of Texas at Dallas to six and a half years in prison for his involvement with the so-called "Houston Taliban." Syed Maaz Shah, 20, had a full four-year scholarship to study electrical engineering at UTD, but he was **busted late last year for firing an Armalite M-15 assault weapon during two camping trips with three other foreign students at an alleged jihad training camp.** The property in Willis, north of Houston, was owned by the Islamic Society of Greater Houston.

As Dallas' Only Daily reported in May, **when he was convicted**, the Pakistani on an expired student visa had been banned from using firearms. But in February, Shah wrote **a letter to the *UTD Mercury*** in February, offering a defense that would make the National Rifle Association proud:

"I was invited by my friends to go camping and have a good time, and that's what we had. Isn't it mind-boggling that someone can be placed in

prison for merely going to a shooting range? ... I mean, for God's sake, we live in Texas ..."

Ah, the old Second Amendment defense. But Shad allegedly had hair-raising jihadist literature on his dorm computer, including a file called "Statue of Liberty in Burka," and told the FBI he was training for "what may come" and called the U.S. military presence in Iraq an "invasion." A co-defendant pleaded guilty to gun charges and admitted to raising money for the Taliban. Shah was convicted on two counts of "alien in possession of a firearm affecting interstate commerce."

Dallas lawyer Frank Jackson told the judge that the government had used an informant and an undercover officer to snare his client in a covert operation and then inflated simple weapons charges into terrorism, according to the *Houston Chronicle*.

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Sun., Oct. 1, 12:00pm

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Sun., Oct. 1, 12:00pm

Dallas Mavericks vs. Milwaukee Bucks

Mon., Oct. 2, 7:30pm

The covert FBI special agent claimed that Shah had held up his passport to other members of the group and said, "Do you want to see the passport of a terrorist?"

Shah said it was all a cultural misunderstanding. The FBI didn't understand what words like jihad really mean. To Shah, jihad was a personal struggle he dealt with by volunteering hundreds of hours to helping the homeless and hungry. The Holy Land Foundation officers offered much the same defense

during the federal trial, which is wrapping up in a Dallas federal court. Closing arguments in that case began yesterday. --Glenna Whitley



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