

Palestinian Guilty of Bombing U.S. Jet International law: Athens court ruling bolsters Greece's anti-terrorist stand.

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A Greek court, guided by the long arm of American law, meted out justice Wednesday in memory of a Japanese schoolboy murdered by a terrorist bomb on a U.S. jumbo jet nearly a decade ago.

By a 2-1 vote, the three-judge court found Palestinian Mohammed Rashid, 41, guilty of the premeditated murder of 15-year-old Toru Ozawa aboard a Pan Am plane flying between Tokyo and Honolulu in 1982. Another 15 people were injured in a blast that the court blamed on Rashid in sentencing him to 18 years' imprisonment.

"The decision is political, and, in essence, condemns the Palestinian struggle," Rashid asserted. "I was simply the scapegoat for American pressure."

His lawyers promised an appeal of his conviction, which climaxed a 10-year manhunt.

Rashid's conviction, and the three-month trial itself, markedly strengthens Greece's anti-terrorist credibility among its European allies and the United States.

Conservative Prime Minister Constantine Mitsotakis, whose Parliament member son-in-law was murdered by a Greek terrorist in 1989, declined an American request to extradite Rashid. He ordered the trial conducted, instead, in Athens, at the risk of offending Greece's prickly Arab neighbors.

The case against Rashid was tried by Greek prosecutors on evidence largely assembled by American agents. They began their hunt when the damaged jet limped to a landing. By the time the verdict came Wednesday, the airline was defunct, and so was the Baghdad-based Palestinian terrorist group "May 15," for which Rashid was convicted of planting the bomb.

Rashid has been in jail here since being arrested at Athens airport in 1988 by Greek police on a tip from the United States. Traveling on a forged Syrian passport at the time of his arrest, Rashid claims to be a victim of mistaken identity.

Rashid-whose trial was conducted under a new law that authorizes prosecution for crimes committed abroad-insists that he is really Maj. Mohammed Hamden, 43, in the armed wing of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Supported at his trial by testimony from two senior PLO officials, he says he was leading Palestinian fighters against Israel in Lebanon when the bombing occurred.

During the trial, three FBI agents presented evidence they had assembled over six years against Rashid, whom the United States also suspects of an attempt to bomb a Pan Am jet in Brazil in 1982, and the 1986 attack against a TWA flight near Athens that killed four people.

The most damning prosecution witness against the tall, taciturn Palestinian, though, was Adnan Awad, 53, a Palestinian who surrendered to U.S. officials in Switzerland in 1982 after being ordered to place a bomb in a hotel there at the behest of May 15, which he said had close ties to Iraq. Awad, who has lived under FBI protection ever since, told the Greek judges that he and Rashid had been colleagues in May 15.

One FBI bomb specialist testified that the bomb Awad was to have exploded in Switzerland was virtually identical to the one that killed Toru Ozawa over the Pacific that same year.

Rashid, who served three years in Greek jails from 1973 to 1976 for possession of hashish, will remain at a high-security prison outside the Greek capital awaiting the outcome of his planned appeal.

[Illustration]

PHOTO: Found Guilty: A court in Athens found Palestinian Mohammed Rashid guilty in the 1982 bombing of a U.S. jumbo jet. The explosion aboard the Pan Am plane, which was bound for Honolulu, killed one person and injured 15 others. Rashid was sentenced to 18 years in prison. The conviction goes a long way toward bolstering Greece's anti-terrorist credibility. At right, Rashid as he left the courtroom. / Agence France-Presse

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