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Palestinian, Brought To U.S., Is Held In '82 Plane Bombing

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Mohammed Rashid, a soft-spoken man who Federal investigators say is one of the Middle East's most dangerous terrorists, has been brought to the United States amid high secrecy to face charges for a 1982 airline bombing that killed a Japanese youth.

Mr. **Rashid**, 51, pleaded not guilty here today to a nine-count Federal indictment that includes charges of murder, sabotage, assault and placing bombs on aircraft. As for how and where he was caught, a Justice Department spokesman, John Russell, said, "We're not disclosing anything -- absolutely nothing."

The mystery surrounding Mr. **Rashid's** apprehension seemed appropriate for a man who prosecutors say has crisscrossed the world using a variety of aliases and fake passports to plant bombs meant to kill total strangers in the name of the Palestinian cause.

For years, Federal investigators have sought Mr. **Rashid** for the Aug. 12, 1982, bombing of a Pan American World Airways liner that killed Toru Ozawa, 16, on a flight from his native Japan to Honolulu. The victim bled to death before the plane could land.

Fifteen other people were injured in the blast, which the authorities say Mr. **Rashid** set off with a time-delayed bomb he planted while traveling with his wife and their son on an earlier leg of the flight, from Hong Kong to Japan.

That 1982 bombing may be all but forgotten, in light of subsequent terrorist attacks on the air and on the ground, but law-enforcement officials consider it the first terrorist bomb attack on an airline.

The indictment accuses Mr. **Rashid** of placing a bomb two weeks later on another Pan Am plane. That bomb was found before it exploded, but investigators said its wiring matched that found on a hair-thin sliver found in Toru Ozawa's body.

The indictment says Mr. **Rashid** belongs to the terrorist 15th of May organization and was a high-ranking aide to the group's leader, **Abu Ibrahim**. The group was based in Baghdad, the indictment says, and it was in the Japanese Embassy there that Mr. **Rashid** and his wife submitted false visa applications that helped Mr. **Rashid** carry out the bombing that killed the Japanese youth.

Mr. **Rashid's** wife, Christine Pinter, who is sometimes known as Fatima, is also accused in the indictment. She is still at large, Mr. Russell of the Justice Department said today.

Mr. Russell said the Government would seek a sentence of life in prison for Mr. **Rashid** rather than the death penalty. That fact may indicate that a nation turned Mr. **Rashid** over to the United States, since other nations typically ask Washington to promise not to execute defendants when it hands them over, Mr. Russell conceded. There were rumors early this evening that Mr. **Rashid** had been handed over by Egypt.

The indictment charging Mr. **Rashid**, his wife and **Abu Ibrahim** was returned in 1987. Mr. **Rashid** was arrested on a false-passport charge in Greece in 1988, but the authorities there refused a United States request to extradite him.

A Greek court convicted Mr. **Rashid** in 1992 of the fatal airline bombing, and he was sentenced to 18 years in prison. That sentence was reduced to 15 years by an appeals court, and Mr. **Rashid** was released in 1996 for good behavior. Mr. **Rashid** then flew to Cairo and was deported to Tunisia.

The arraignment today before Judge Aubrey Robinson in Federal District Court here suggested that Mr. **Rashid** had not been long in American custody. The hearing was delayed nearly an hour, until the arrival

of Mr. **Rashid's** lawyer, Tony Miles of the Federal Public Defender's office. Mr. Miles apologized to Judge Robinson for not wearing a suit coat, explaining that he had had to rush to court.

Mr. **Rashid**, a baldish, slightly built man, answered questions through an interpreter, talking in Arabic. Mr. **Rashid** said he was a Palestinian who had been "thrown out" of his country in 1948, when Israel was founded.

Mr. **Rashid** and the prosecutors agreed on one thing, in a sense. Describing his nationality, Mr. **Rashid** said, "I have been a vagabond between the Arab countries."

Exactly, the prosecutors said, so he should not be granted bail under any circumstances. The judge set a hearing for Friday on that issue.

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