

Stiffer sentence sought for Hale - U.S. prosecutors say plot to kill judge was a crime of terrorism

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White supremacist Matthew Hale, convicted last year of soliciting the murder of U.S. District Judge Joan Lefkow, should get a stiffened sentence because he committed a crime of terrorism, prosecutors argued Wednesday in a court filing two weeks before his sentencing.

Prosecutors didn't disclose what sentence they will seek for Hale but said he faces up to 40 years in prison by statute. If prosecutors succeed, Hale will be the first defendant in Chicago's federal court to have his sentence boosted for committing a crime of terrorism.

In 2003, prosecutors sought as much as 20 years in prison for Enaam Arnaout, a former Islamic charity boss, because of his alleged terrorism ties, but a federal judge found the evidence insufficient. Arnaout had pleaded guilty to funneling relief money to Islamic fighters in Bosnia and Chechnya. He was sentenced to 11 years and 4 months in prison.

A federal jury convicted Hale last April of soliciting his security chief, who was secretly working with the FBI, to kill Lefkow because of her 2002 order to change the name of his group after it lost a trademark-infringement suit.

Hale, who has been jailed since his arrest in early 2003, is scheduled to be sentenced on April 6.

On Feb. 28, Lefkow's husband, Michael, and mother, Donna Humphrey, were found slain in the basement of the Lefkow house. As a result of his conviction for soliciting Lefkow's murder, Hale and his followers were the focus of investigators until Bart Ross, whose medical malpractice lawsuit had been thrown out by Lefkow, confessed to the murders in a suicide note.

In Wednesday's court filing, Assistant U.S. Atty. M. David Weisman said the government will seek to boost Hale's sentence because federal sentencing guidelines make clear that his solicitation of Judge Lefkow's murder "was a crime of terrorism."

Under the guidelines, the killing or attempted killing of "officers and employees of the United States" can constitute a federal crime of terrorism, the government said.

U.S. District Judge James T. Moody, brought in from Indiana to preside over the trial, will impose the sentence.

In court papers, Hale has contended he should be sentenced to no more than 8 years in prison. He also is seeking a sentence reduction because of the extraordinary conditions of his confinement.

Since shortly after his arrest, Hale has been in a federal jail in the South Loop under special administrative measures usually reserved for terrorist suspects. His contact with visitors and other inmates is limited, the government said in its filing.

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