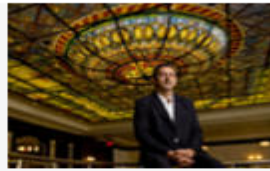


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# Is Ayad Mejid a terrorist, a pedophile or a victim?

Article

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NATIONAL SECURITY REPORTER

## Who is Ayad Mejid?

Authorities have investigated him for terrorist connections and labelled him a pedophile and, although a court hasn't determined his guilt or innocence, he says those stigmas have already ruined his life.

If Canada's spy service is correct, Mejid, a 45-year-old Muslim leader and Brampton father of three, once lived a double life as Abu Banan, an online Islamist propagandist preaching hatred against the West.

If Toronto police prove their case, Mejid is guilty of possessing child pornography they allege he downloaded.

But his lawyers claim that Mejid, a Canadian citizen from Kirkuk in Iraq, is instead a victim of dirty spy tactics in retribution for his refusal to work as an informant for the Canadian Security Intelligence Service.

He alleged in an interview with the *Toronto Star* that the last time he spoke to a CSIS agent he was told, "This is your last chance to work with us or life is going to change."

The case was back in a Toronto court yesterday before Justice Salvatore Merenda at the start of a preliminary hearing in which Mejid is facing one charge each of possessing and accessing child pornography. Merenda granted a defence request to delay the proceedings until next Monday.

Whatever the outcome of the preliminary hearing, the province's Ministry of the Attorney General has imposed a perplexing policy to keep secret the details of this case. While a publication ban on pre-trial hearings is customary in criminal cases, the ban regulates what can be reported, but should not prohibit access to court documents. But a *Star* reporter was repeatedly denied requests to read the publication ban and the rest of the case file.

"There's a publication ban, trust me," Marion Marrone, a manager of the Finch Ave. W. courthouse told the reporter last week. Brendan Crawley, a spokesperson for the attorney general's office, confirmed in an email that the file could not be viewed.

The case is also unlike the dozens that Toronto police's child exploitation unit investigates each year. It didn't start as a police probe but began years earlier when CSIS, the federal agency that does not have the power to arrest but is mandated to protect Canada's national security, began monitoring Mejid's online activities and then asked to meet with him.

"They show me some pictures and tell me, 'Do you know this guy? Do you know that guy? Do you have a relationship with this guy?' " Mejid said recalling a meeting he had with agents in 2005. "I said, 'Do you have anything on me?' They say, 'No, because the people listen to you, we want to work with you.' "

He declined their offer but met again with them. He said he had nothing to hide so he handed over his computer and took a lie-detector test in a hotel room near Toronto's airport.

After a couple of years without contact, Mejid claims the agents approached him after the 2007 arrest of Said Namouh, a Moroccan-born permanent resident living in Montreal.

Namouh was charged with conspiracy and other terrorism-related offences, allegedly in connection with the online Global Islamic Media Front, a group that distributes video clips of suicide bombings and martyrdom videos. His trial is ongoing.

"(The agent) gave me one piece of the newspaper and I said, 'I don't know him.' They say, 'We know you don't know him but if you go there, work with us. We will pay you money,' " Mejid claimed.

He again surrendered his computers and says that shortly after, in October 2007, was charged with possession of child pornography – his arrest announced in a high-profile news conference where Toronto police released his picture.

Mejid has not been charged with terrorism offences and claims he has no knowledge of any child pornography.

"They can't find anything in my house, in my place, in my car (on terrorism)," he said. "So they do this ... I want them to clear my name."

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