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## U.S. citizen David Coleman Headley admits role in Mumbai attacks

By [Carrie Johnson](#)  
Washington Post Staff Writer  
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An American man who scouted targets for the deadly 2008 Mumbai terrorist strike pleaded guilty Thursday to a dozen criminal charges and agreed to help prosecutors and intelligence analysts probing other likely targets overseas.



David Coleman Headley is considered one of the most dangerous and knowledgeable terrorist operatives apprehended on American soil. (Verna Sadock/associated Press)

David Coleman Headley, 49, could spend the rest of his life in prison in exchange for prosecutors not pursuing the death penalty. National security experts consider Headley, who was arrested in a Chicago airport in October, one of the most dangerous and knowledgeable terrorist operatives they have apprehended on American soil.

In Philadelphia, a woman who used the Internet handle "JihadJane" appeared in a federal courtroom Thursday and pleaded not guilty to charges that she was involved in a separate plot to kill a Swedish artist. Colleen Renee LaRose, 46, who allegedly told her co-conspirators that she could work under the radar of law enforcement because of her blond hair, light eyes and small frame, is scheduled for trial in May.

The plea hearing in a Chicago federal courtroom offered new details on the Mumbai plot that killed more than 160 people, including six Americans. An earlier mission was aborted, court papers said, because of choppy waters in the city's harbor. Headley acknowledged attending training camps sponsored by the Pakistani extremist group Lashkar-i-Taiba and changing his name from Daood Gilani to avoid scrutiny in [India](#). He made five trips to Mumbai, where he videotaped possible targets and used a global-positioning device to help the plotters, who went on to attack the Taj Mahal and Oberoi hotels, a Jewish cultural center and a train station in November 2008, prosecutors said.

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Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. said the plea was a way to achieve justice and secure intelligence about terrorist activities, using "every tool available to defeat terrorism, both at home and abroad."

Headley also outlined his role in a plan to

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kill a cartoonist and other employees at a Danish newspaper that had published derogatory drawings of the prophet Muhammad. He allegedly met twice last year with a retired Pakistani military official, Abdur Rehman Hashim Syed, and Ilyas Kashmiri, who was in direct contact

with senior al-Qaeda leaders. Both men are charged with Headley in the case, but neither is in U.S. custody.

Kashmiri allegedly told Headley that the attackers should behead the newspaper employees and throw their heads out the building windows to draw a response from Danish authorities, court papers said. The "elders," or al-Qaeda leaders, expressed interest in a rapid strike, according to the plea agreement.

Under the terms of the deal, Headley can secure a reduction in his prison sentence for ongoing cooperation with authorities and intelligence analysts in the United States and overseas. He will not be extradited to India, Denmark or [Pakistan](#) for the conduct described in the court papers, Justice Department officials said.

John Theis, a lawyer for Headley, said in a telephone interview that his client had been "cooperating from day one" of his arrest, Oct. 3 -- "not only about this case, but on other things, he's been providing substantial value." He added that the information, which includes insights into other possible al-Qaeda targets, may have saved lives in India and Pakistan.

A fresh analysis published by the New America Foundation by scholar Stephen Tankel says that Lashkar-i-Taiba remains "an appealing destination for Western militants" and "a gateway to al Qaeda and others . . . that are actively seeking wannabe Western jihadis to train for terrorist attacks back home."

Headley, the son of an American woman and a Pakistani diplomat, is one in a string of U.S. citizens arrested in connection with alleged terrorist plots in recent months.

According to an official familiar with the investigation, the FBI last summer knew only Headley's first name, "David," and his intent to fly internationally.

Using this information and an incomplete travel itinerary and timeline, U.S. Customs and Border Protection was able to place him on a watch list for questioning. When Headley returned to the United States Aug. 5, CBP inspectors in Atlanta pulled him aside for added scrutiny and developed significant leads, which they passed on to the FBI. The bureau put Headley under surveillance after CBP let him back into the United States.

*Staff writer Spencer S. Hsu contributed to this report.*

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