

MURDER TRIAL'S FOCUS IS OFTEN ON THE VICTIM

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As the first-degree murder trial against Raed Jihad wraps up in Detroit Recorder's Court, there are times when it is hard to tell who's on trial -- Jihad or his alleged victim, reputed cocaine lord **Harry Kalasho** .

Defense lawyers have portrayed Kalasho and his alleged cocaine gang as drug smuggling bombers armed with AK47 assault rifles.

Assistant prosecutor Kenneth Simon concedes that the characterization is probably true, but he said that does not automatically clear Jihad of murder. Instead, Simon has presented a picture of Jihad as a man on a relentless mission of revenge to get Kalasho any way he could.

According to Simon's case, Jihad killed Kalasho in a vendetta after he volunteered his services as a federal drug informant to "clean up 7 Mile Road" and break the Kalasho's alleged hold on the community.

Jihad, 20, is charged with first-degree murder in the February 1989 shooting of Kalasho, reputedly the leader of a major cocaine gang and linked to at least two contract killings and several bombings.

The trial itself has become a week of name-calling confrontations between lawyers trading accusations and questioning motives. On Tuesday, Simon and defense lawyer David Griem went head-to-head in front of Judge Richard Hathaway with the jury removed from the courtroom.

Simon accused Griem of "sleazy tactics" and "lying to this court." Griem, challenging Simon to take both of their conduct before the Attorney Grievance Commission, charged that the prosecutor had become "too close to this case."

As the attorneys sparred before the judge, Kalasho's mother, Basima kept up a steady stage-whispered defense of her son's name: "Harry was not a murderer. Why do they say these things?"

The attorneys shook hands in the hallway Wednesday and exchanged words of mutual professional praise, but they returned to their sniping by the afternoon, with Griem accusing Simon of "a pattern of misconduct."

Testimony in the trial has linked Kalasho and his associates to at least two slayings, including one in which Kalasho allegedly offered a \$10,000 bounty if the victim was beheaded.

The jury has heard that Kalasho's associates and several relatives have been charged with drug conspiracies and other violations. The jury heard that one of Kalasho's brothers was convicted of buying a fully automatic AK47.

Simon's case rests on allegations that Jihad wanted to get Kalasho because Jihad believed Kalasho was behind the killing of Jihad's older brother in 1983 and the 1988 murder of a close friend, Salaam Gaggo, in Southfield.

Federal agents testified that Jihad volunteered to inform on Kalasho when they met at a court hearing. The agents said Jihad's informing was motivated by his belief that Kalasho had a hand in the two killings. But they said he offered other, altruistic reasons as well.

U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agent Louis Palombella testified that he had his doubts when Jihad said he "wanted to clean up 7 Mile Road" and break up the Kalasho gang.

"I personally felt it was unreasonable" that Jihad could sweep drug and murder gangs from his 7 Mile-Woodward neighborhood, Palombella testified.

"I did not believe he was sincere," said Palombella.

While in police custody as Kalasho died, Jihad told detectives he did not shoot Kalasho and that he was being framed by Kalasho's gang.

Jihad ended his police statement with a hand-written postscript: "I hope Harry feels better," Jihad wrote, "I was praying for him at night in jail."

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