

Charges Dropped In Terrorist Case

By Tim Bryant

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A case heralded last year by FBI officials and federal prosecutors who said they had nabbed four terrorists here neared its end Tuesday when the government dismissed charges against the last defendant.

That defendant, Zein Isa, is on death row in Missouri for murdering his daughter, Tina Isa, in 1989. Isa, 62, has diabetes and is in poor health.

A prosecutor said the Justice Department had decided that federal crimes linked to Isa and the possibility of revealing classified information about terrorists didn't justify the cost of a long trial.

In addition, Isa's murder conviction in 1991 in St. Louis Circuit Court is unlikely to be reversed on appeal, said Assistant U.S. Attorney Kenneth R. Tihen, who helped prosecute the case.

Isa's three co-defendants in the federal case admitted last month that they were part of an international terrorist network. Authorities said

the three belonged to the Abu Nidal organization, a Palestinian terrorist group.

The three who pleaded guilty are Saif Nijmeh, 35, of Bridgeton; his brother, Luie Nijmeh, 30, of Dayton, Ohio; and Tawfiq Musa, 45, of Milwaukee. Their sentencing is scheduled for Oct. 21 in U.S. District Court. They were indicted March 31, 1993.

Prosecutors said the Nijmehs and Musa acted as money couriers and conduits of information.

Much of the case was built on secretly recorded conversations captured by microphones the FBI planted in the Isas' apartment on Delor Street. St. Louis prosecutors alleged that Isa and his wife, Maria Isa, murdered Tina for turning her back on Palestinian ways and becoming too Americanized.

Maria Isa was not charged in the Abu Nidal case. The Missouri Supreme Court affirmed her murder conviction for stabbing Tina but overturned the death penalty.