



America the Vulnerable

In October 1995, six months after the deadliest terrorist attack ever in America, a mild-mannered professor and director of an Islamic think tank in Tampa, Florida left the United States to take a more exalted job in Syria — as maximum leader of Islamic Jihad, one of the world's most violent and notorious terrorist groups. Are the two events — the Oklahoma City bombing and the departure of Ramadan Abdullah Shallah — connected? There is good reason to think so. And there is good reason for believing that the bombing that took 168 lives in America's heartland is also tied to the 1993 terrorist bombing of the World Trade Center that killed six and wounded over 1,000 in America's financial, commercial, and communications capital — New York City. The mastermind of that conspiracy was Pakistani electronics engineer Ramzi Yousef, operating out of the Philippines with backing from Iraq.

One reason for Ramadan Shallah to break his carefully crafted cover was the assassination (presumably by the Israeli Mossad) of Islamic Jihad chief Fathi Shikaki. Shallah and Shikaki had founded the terrorist group while students at Zagazig University in Egypt in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Shallah has now taken his fallen comrade's place.

But there were other reasons for leaving the U.S. when he did. U.S. authorities, prodded by embarrassing media revelations, were beginning to look into his ties and activities. In Tampa, Ramadan Shallah posed as an adjunct professor of economics at the University of South Florida (USF) and an administrator of a USF-affiliated think tank, the World Islam Studies Enterprise (WISE).

Also working with Shallah at USF and WISE was Khalil Shikaki, Fathi's brother, who now, reportedly, is a professor at An Najah University in the West Bank. Still another major, direct connection between WISE and Islamic Jihad is Basheer Nafi, who was described by WISE in 1991 as "director of WISE from London." However, he was also an original founder of Islamic Jihad and was believed by some observers to be the likely candidate to succeed Shikaki. When that task fell to Shallah, Nafi stayed in the U.S., working at the International Institute for Islamic Thought in Herndon, Virginia, which WISE has listed as its largest source of financial support. Nafi was deported in 1996.

Among the many other organizations under investigation by federal authorities as possible fronts for terrorist groups is the Islamic Committee for Palestine (ICP), run by Osama "Sami" Al-Arian, a USF computer science professor who, immigration officials charge, arranged visas for both Shallah and Nafi so that they could be hired under the guise of research associates and professors. An investigation by the INS found that Al-Arian had failed to list his own ICP and WISE affiliations, as is required by law, in his application for citizenship. It was also learned that he had illegally registered to vote. Based on these violations, the INS initiated deportation proceedings against him. At the same time, deportation proceedings were begun on WISE executive director Mazen Al-Naijar, who earned a doctorate in engineering at USF under a visa authorities say was obtained illegally through a sham marriage. Like his brother-in-law, Al-Arian, Dr. Al-Naijar also registered to vote illegally. One likely motive for the illegal registration, say INS officials, is that together with a Florida driver's license it provides acceptable proof of U.S. citizenship (and, therefore, ease of travel) in the Caribbean, Mexico, and Canada, areas where terrorist groups have been building large networks. Over and over again, terrorist groups have demonstrated a deadly proficiency at taking advantage of America's almost nonexistent immigration controls.

Most disturbing, however, is that investigations into the WISE/ICP-related terrorist activities probably wouldn't have come about except for the investigative journalism of the *Tampa Tribune's* Michael



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Fechter, who has written a series of articles on the terror connections in South Florida, and Steven Emerson, whose PBS documentary, *Jihad in America*, lifted the lid on the terror network's "legitimate" fronts in the U.S.

One of the New York Trade Center bombing connections is found on Al-Arian's telephone records showing calls to Fawaz Damra and Siraj El-din Yousif, both named by federal authorities as terrorist suspects. Yousif, a Sudanese diplomat expelled from the U.S. in 1996, is believed to have provided information to the bombing conspirators. The telephone records reportedly also show repeated calls to the Sudanese Embassy and the Iranian Interest Section in Washington. Sudan, which was added to the U.S. State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism in 1993, has been closely allied with Iran and an open supporter of Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah, and Hamas. It was host to Osama bin Laden until 1996 and is believed to be still providing sanctuary and assistance to his terror network.

Another connection between the South Florida institutions and the Trade Center bombing is found in the featured speakers at WISE and ICP events. One of the most prominent speakers was Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman, now serving a life sentence for his leadership role in the bombing plot. (See "Enemies and Assets," THE NEW AMERICAN, March 3, 1997.) Another is Hassan Turabi, considered by some Mideast intelligence experts to be the real power behind the throne in Sudan. Others include Islamic Jihad co-founder and "spiritual leader" Sheik Abdel Aziz-Odeh, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nazrallah, and Tunisian terrorist Rashid El-Ghanoushi, convicted of plotting to kill Tunisia's president and overthrow the government. In a speech to an ICP conference, Sami Al-Arian praised Ayatollah Khomeini, Anwar Sadat's assassin Al Islambuli, and El Sayyid Nosair, the convicted assassin of radical Rabbi Meir Kahane and co-conspirator in the Trade Center bombing.

One of the more intriguing developments in the WISE/ICP investigation is a communication between Khalil Shikaki and Ramadan Shallah in which the now-head of Islamic Jihad made a cryptic reference about carrying out a "project" for one "Abu Omar." Abu Omar is the *nomme de guerre* for PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat. A number of important circumstantial links connect Arafat to the Trade Center bombing. One of the convicted bombers, Ahmad Ajaj, who entered the U.S. with Ramzi Yousef, had been arrested in Israel for smuggling arms to Hamas and the PLO's Fatah. Sultan El Gawli, a close friend of bomber El Sayyid Nosair, had served prison time for buying plastic explosives for the PLO.

According to current mythology, our "peace partner" Arafat has become a "moderate" and is now beset by the radical Hamas, Hezbollah, and Islamic Jihad over which he has no control. In reality, as *Soviet Analyst* editor Christopher Story has noted, "Hamas (and its subdivisions) is and always has been an integral component of the umbrella organization known as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which reports directly to Moscow." Additional support for that view came when Hamas official Mousa Abu Marzook and his wife were arrested in New York at JFK Airport. Marzook's address book contained the private telephone numbers of Yasir Arafat, George Habash, and other Marxist terrorists with whom this "fundamentalist" is supposedly in deadly conflict. In 1996, during one of his public relations "crackdowns," Arafat put on a show of searching for Hamas military chief Mohammed Dief. Arafat's man assigned to head the unsuccessful "search," Colonel Mohammed Dahlan, a childhood friend of Dief, was seen sipping coffee with the "fugitive" terrorist supervisor.

Hamas, also known as the Islamic Resistance Movement, states in Article 26 of its Covenant: "Islamic Resistance Movement's stand towards the PLO is that of the son towards his father, the brother towards his brother, and the relative to relative, suffers his pain and supports him in confronting the enemies...." Article 27 of the Hamas Covenant states: "The Palestine Liberation Organization is the closest to the



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heart of the Islamic Resistance Movement.” Hamas leader Sheikh Mahmoud Zahar has said of the PLO-Hamas relationship, “Like the wings of a bird, they must work together.” And so they have.

One day after the Oklahoma City bombing, Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) notified the FBI of testimony Steven Emerson had given before her subcommittee about threatening remarks that a radical Islamic leader had made at a conference attended by 3,000 in Oklahoma City in 1992. The speaker was Kamal Helbawi, a Hamas leader based in Pakistan. Helbawi told the conferees: “Oh brothers, the Palestinian cause is not a conflict of borders and land only. It is not even a conflict over human ideology. And not over peace. Rather it is an absolute clash of civilizations, between truth and falsehood, between two conducts: One Satanic, headed by the Jews and their conspirators; and the other religious, carried by Hamas, the Islamic people in general and the Islamic movement in particular.”

Oklahoma City has played host to other leaders associated with Hamas, ICP, WISE, and other suspected terrorist fronts. And evidence developed by this magazine and other investigators indicates that locally based and foreign individuals associated with these long-established terrorist networks were involved in the April 19, 1995 bombing. Unless officials are pressured to conduct an honest and thorough investigation, more atrocities and tragedies are sure to follow.



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