
The Council on American Islamic Relations: Civil Rights, or Extremism?

CAMERA Special Report

April, 2008

by Eric Rozenman and Meredith Braverman

Second edition, June, 2009

Introduction

Ghassan Elashi, 55, and Shukri Abu Baker, 50, were founding members of the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development, once the nation's largest Muslim charity. Elashi and Abu Baker each were sentenced to 65 years in prison on May 27, 2009. Three other foundation members were sentenced to lesser terms in the retrial of a federal case charging HLF with funneling more than \$12 million to Hamas (Associated Press, "Muslim Charity Members Sentenced," *The Washington Post*, May 28, 2009). Hamas (the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement) was designated a terrorist organization by the U.S. government in 1995. Elashi, a founder of the Texas chapter of the Council on American Islamic Relations, was convicted in another Hamas-related case in 2004 (see below).

The Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) claims to be a leading U.S. civil rights group — an Islamic version of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) or the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). It describes its mission as enhancing understanding of Islam, protecting civil liberties, and empowering American Muslims.

But unlike the NAACP and ADL, CAIR has been listed by the Justice Department as an unindicted co-conspirator in a terrorism funding trial (the Holy Land Foundation case). Unlike those groups, its alumni include former officials and staffers who have been convicted on terrorism-related charges. Unlike the NAACP or ADL, CAIR's co-founders had ties to an international religious extremist movement, the Muslim Brotherhood. Founded in Egypt in 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood has influenced many Sunnis with its anti-Western, anti-Jewish, anti-modern and anti-secular ideology. Its credo is "Allah is our objective. The Prophet is our leader. The Koran is our law. Jihad i our way. Dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope. The Brotherhood, Hizb al-Ikhwan al-Musulimin, inspired or spawned extremist off-shoots including al Qaeda and (Hamas).



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On one hand, CAIR representatives have conducted “sensitivity training sessions” for law enforcement personnel and have participated in interfaith meetings across the country. Council members have met with Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush.

On the other hand, CAIR co-founder and former board chairman, Omar Ahmad, once declared that the Koran, the Muslim book of scripture, “should be the highest authority in America, and Islam the only accepted religion on Earth” (*San Ramon Valley Herald*, Calif., July 4, 1998). Though five years later Ahmad denied making the statement, the newspaper stood by the accuracy of its reporter. In that talk to a local Muslim group, Ahmad also reportedly urged American Muslims to be open to U.S. society but not to assimilate to it.

CAIR’s spokesman, Ibrahim Hooper, was quoted as saying that he “wouldn’t want to create the impression that I wouldn’t like the government of the United States to be Islamic sometime in the future” (*Minneapolis Star Tribune*, April 4, 1993).

The FBI cut ties with CAIR in March 2009 based on evidence in the HLF trial, pending resolution of questions about connections between council executives or staff and Hamas. Andrew C. McCarthy, former Asst. U.S. Attorney for Southern New York, and lead prosecutor of Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman and 11 others for the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, claims that “incrementally establishing *sharia* [Islamic religious law] is the central imperative of CAIR and several other organizations to which our government has recklessly been reaching out for years, since long before the 9/11 attacks.

In sum, administrations of both parties, and executive branch agencies including the FBI, have taken the position that government’s only legitimate concern is the comparatively tiny cohort of terrorists who construe Islamic scriptures to

command mass-murder attacks. Not only have we averted our eyes from the ideology that motivates jihadism. We have affirmatively anointed as Muslim ‘moderates’ the purveyors of this ideology, who are anything but moderate. Worse, the effect has been to empower anti-American elements at the expense of authentic Muslim moderates and reformers who crave liberty. (“CAIR’s Well-Deserved Expulsion,” *National Review Online*, March 24, 2009.)

Soon after Osama bin Laden’s al Qaeda hijacked four American airliners on Sept. 11, 2001 and attacked New York City’s World Trade Center and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., murdering approximately 3,000 people, CAIR posted a photograph on its Web site. The picture showed the burning Twin Towers. Accompanying text suggested that those wishing to make contributions for humanitarian assistance should donate to the Holy Land Foundation (HLF).

In December, 2001 the U.S. government froze the assets of (and effectively closed) the foundation, charging it with providing “financial and material support to the terrorist organization Hamas” (“Shutting Down the Terrorist Financial Network,” Department of Justice press release, Dec. 4, 2001). At trial in 2007, the Justice Department claimed that HLF funneled more than \$12 million to Hamas. The U.S. government designated Hamas as a terrorist organization in 1995 and it was in connection with the HLF trial that the Justice Department named CAIR an unindicted co-conspirator. CAIR filed an amicus brief asking that the department’s designation be dropped.

The judge declared a mistrial after several jurors objected to the jury foreman’s declaration of a unanimous verdict of acquittal. According to Steven A. Emerson, executive director of The Investigative Project and producer of Public Broadcasting Service’s 2001 documentary *Terrorists Among Us; Jihad in America*, jury sources claimed that a

pro-Hamas juror intimidated and harassed colleagues, refusing to allow them to review evidence. The retrial, noted above, resulted in convictions in November 2008.

Civil rights group, or deceptive promoter of a version of Sunni Islamic supremacy? Advocate for American Muslims, or public relations front for Middle Eastern *jihadis*?

Origins

CAIR was founded in 1994 by Omar Ahmad and Nihad Awad. Ahmad became chairman and Awad executive director. Both had been members of the Islamic Association for Palestine, sometimes also known as the American Muslim Society. Established in Chicago in 1981, IAP founders included Mousa abu Marzook, of Hamas, and Sami al-Arian, of Palestinian Islamic Jihad. IAP, in turn, has been described in court cases as a North American off-shoot of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Hamas crimes include scores of suicide bombings that resulted in the deaths of several hundred non-combatant Israelis and foreigners. Abu Marzook, who once lived in the United States, now is based in Damascus, Syria with other Hamas leaders.

Al-Arian is the former University of South Florida professor who, after years of denial, pled guilty in 2006 to raising money for and supporting Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Also designated a terrorist group by the U.S. government, Islamic Jihad has murdered more than 100 Israelis and others. CAIR called al-Arian's deportation "an additional burden on a family that has suffered tremendously over the past few years" of investigation and trial. Earlier in the year, CAIR officials attended a California fundraiser for al-Arian ("Terror's U.S. Breeding Ground," March 23, 2006, *New York Post* Online Edition).

CAIR spokesman Ibrahim Hooper worked for IAP before joining the council's staff. The association

was "identified as a 'front group' for the terrorist group Hamas," by Steve Pomerantz, former chief of the FBI's counter-terrorism section ("The Real CAIR," by Joseph Farah, *WorldNet Daily*, April 25, 2003). Farah also quotes another ex-FBI counter-terrorism chief, Oliver "Buck" Revell, calling IAP "a front organization for Hamas that engages in propaganda for Islamic militants."

In 2004, a U.S. district court case found IAP linked to Hamas and liable in a \$156 million suit for the murder of a U.S. teenager, David Boim in Israel. In 2007, the U.S. Court of Appeals, Seventh Circuit, reversed the verdict, a decision celebrated by CAIR. However, Jeffrey Breinholt, writing at Counterterrorism Blog on Jan. 2, 2008 pointed out that the appeals verdict said supplemental evidence offered by the Holy Land Foundation "could not have defeated the primary evidence" established by the trial court that HLF did fund Hamas. Breinholt forecast that on reconsideration, the trial court would permit the Boim family to present requisite proof to sustain the original verdict.

At a forum at Florida's Barry University in 1994, Awad declared himself to be a supporter of Hamas. At a youth session that was part of IAP's convention in Chicago in 1999, Ahmad praised suicide bombers who "kill themselves for Islam."

Constituents and Money

CAIR claims to be a national organization representing "7 million American Muslims." The seven million figure may originate in a 2001 estimate made by Islamic studies Prof. Ihsan Bagby, CAIR board member.

But Dr. Tom W. Smith discounts it. Smith directs the General Social Survey at the National Opinion Research Center of the University of Chicago and is author of the study, "Estimating the Muslim Population in the United States." He says "the best adjusted, survey-based estimate puts the total Muslim population at 1,876,000."

According to Smith, “since the September 11 terror attacks, the news media has used estimates of the Muslim population in the United States of 5 million to 8 million, with an average of 6.7 million or 2.4 percent of the total population.” However, “none of the 20 estimates during the last five years is based on a scientifically-sound or explicit methodology.”

A 2007 Pew Research Center survey estimated the number of Muslims in the United States at 2.35 million.

Is CAIR representative of U.S. Muslims, regardless of their numbers? Dr. M. Zuhdi Jasser, director of the American Islamic Forum for Democracy, formed in March, 2003 by a group of Muslim professionals in Arizona’s Phoenix Valley, said “this is the untold story in the myth that CAIR represents the American Muslim population. They only represent their membership and donors.”

The late Seifeldin Ashmawy, publisher of the New Jersey-based Voice of Peace, “dismissed CAIR as the champion of ‘extremists whose views do not represent Islam,’” (“What Americans think about Islam,” by Daniel Pipes, *The Jerusalem Post*, July 30, 2003). In that same commentary, Pipes — author of *Militant Islam Reaches America* (2002, W.W. Norton & Co.), founder of the Philadelphia-based Middle East Forum think tank and frequent critic of CAIR — notes that “Tashbih Sayyed of the Council for Democracy and Tolerance, calls CAIR ‘the most accomplished fifth column in the United States.’”

If CAIR nevertheless enjoyed a high and relatively positive news media profile, it might be because of the council’s financial wherewithal.

In “Scrutiny Increases for a Group Advocating for Muslims in U.S.” (*New York Times*, March 14, 2007), Neil MacFarquhar reported that “CAIR has raised suspicion by accepting large donations from individuals or foundations closely identified with Arab governments,” in particular, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Additionally, MacFarquhar wrote that the council “has an annual operating budget of around \$3 million, and the group said it solicited major donations for special projects, like \$500,000 from Prince Alwaleed bin Talal of Saudi Arabia [investor, part owner of Rupert Murdoch’s Newsworld media empire, and donor to Islamic causes] to help distribute the Koran and other books about Islam in the United States, some of which generated controversy.”

CAIR distributed a version of Islamic scripture titled *The Meaning of The Holy Quran*, a Saudi-approved edition first published by Abdullah Yusuf Ali in 1934. It was banned in 2002 by the Los Angeles school district because of anti-semitic commentary accompanying the text (“CAIR distributes Quran banned as anti-Semitic,” *WorldNet Daily*, June 2, 2005).

An *Arab News* article by Javid Hassan (“Media Campaign in US to Dispel Islamophobia,” June 21, 2006), reported that CAIR announced “it would be launching a massive \$50 million media campaign involving television, radio and newspapers as part of its five-year program to create a better understanding of Islam and Muslims in the US.” In order to fulfill Executive Director Awad’s proposals of \$10 million dollars annually for five years, the council required outside donations. Awad stated that CAIR was “planning to meet Prince Alwaleed ibn Talal for his financial support to our project. He has been generous in the past.” A *Washington Times* report (June 12, 2007) estimated CAIR’s 2001-2005 revenue at nearly \$18 million.

Terrorism ties

On June 6, 2006 CAIR’s Ohio affiliate “honored one of the unindicted conspirators in that 1993 World Trade Center bombing, Siraj Wahhaj, a Brooklyn, N.Y. imam who had also served as a defense witness at the trial of one of the men convicted for that terrorist attack, the

'Blind Sheikh' Omar Abdel-Rahman" according to writer Patrick Poole ("CAIR's Blood Money," March 13, 2007, FrontPageMag.com). The 1993 World Trade Center assault killed six people and injured many others. Before immigrating, Abdel-Rahman had served time in an Egyptian prison in connection with the 1981 assassination of Egyptian President Anwar as-Sadat. CAIR's 1996 report on anti-Muslim discrimination quoted Abdel-Rahman's lawyers "as saying that his trial was unfair," *The Washington Post* noted ("Bush's Courting of Some Muslims Criticized; White House Cautioned to Avoid Groups, Individuals Who Defend Terrorism," Nov. 18, 2001).

Poole wrote that more than 400 supporters attended the Ohio CAIR event, which raised approximately \$100,000. He suggested that the honoree's background might have been unknown to many participants, but not to CAIR leaders. They named Wahhaj to the group's advisory board. According to Poole, CAIR national spokesman Hooper "has gone so far as to call Wahhaj 'one of the most respected Muslim leaders in America,'" although CAIR's Web site no longer posts that statement.

CAIR's Florida affiliate featured Wahhaj as a speaker at its 2007 annual banquet.

As for other individuals with ties to CAIR and terrorism:

- ◆ The U.S. government indicted the council's former civil rights coordinator, Randall Royer, on charges of, among other things, helping al-Qaeda and the Taliban battle American troops in Afghanistan, and recruiting for and otherwise assisting Lashkar-e-Taiba, a jihadist group responsible for numerous killings in Indian Kashmir and the rest of India. In 2004, he was sentenced to 20 years in prison after pleading guilty to various firearms charges.

- ◆ Ghassan Elashi, founder of CAIR's Texas chapter, was convicted in

2004 "of knowingly doing business with Mousa Abu Marzook, a senior Hamas leader," noted Pipes and Sharon Chadha ("CAIR Founded by Islamic Terrorists?" July 28, 2005 FrontPageMag).

- ◆ Bassem Khafagi, CAIR's former community relations director, was arrested for involvement with another group, the Islamic Assembly of North America, suspected of aiding sheiks opposed to the Saudi Arabian government and linked to al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

- ◆ Rabih Haddad, once a CAIR fundraiser, was arrested on terrorism-related charges and deported from the United States. Haddad co-founded another group, the Global Relief Foundation, and served as its president until 2000. According to the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, Haddad had worked for Makhtat al-Khidamat, an al Qaeda precursor organization, in Pakistan in the early 1990s.

- ◆ Mousa Abu Marzook, once a CAIR official, as noted above, was designated specifically by the U.S. government in 1995 as a "terrorist and Hamas leader."

In connection with the 2007 trial of the Texas-based Holy Land Foundation, CAIR was listed as one of three main Islamic organizations in America to conspire to support and actually to support Hamas. Court filings gave "scant details, but prosecutors described CAIR as a present or past member of the U.S. Muslim Brotherhood's Palestine Committee and/or its organizations" ("Islamic Groups Named in Hamas Funding Case," *New York Sun*, June 4, 2007). The government listed the Islamic Society of North America and the North American Islamic Trust as "entities who are and/or were members of the U.S. Muslim Brotherhood."

The Washington Post reported that "the [Holy Land Foundation] indictment charges that the foundation in

part directed money to take care of the families of suicide bombers, an action to 'effectively reward past, and encourage future, suicide bombings and terrorist activities'" ("Case Against Islamic Charity Opens," Aug. 25, 2007).

CAIR sues, then settles

"CAIR's War from Within" by Andrew Whitehead and Lee Kaplan (FrontPageMag, Mar. 9, 2004) stated that "CAIR's new headquarters in D.C. were financed with an interest-free loan from the Saudi Islamic Development Bank." Additionally, Whitehead alone wrote of what he described as CAIR's attempt to ruin the career of an army officer and nurse who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. According to Whitehead:

Captain Edwina (Tiger) McCall, U.S. Army, returned from honorable service in Landshtul, Germany, where American soldiers wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan are treated, on Feb. 10, 2004. She always had received the highest scores on evaluations and had extremely strong recommendations of support for a promotion from her supervisors.

She also had participated in an online discussion board where others were speaking out against the U.S. military presence in Iraq and in favor of militant Islamic goals and organizations. "Many of those with whom she chatted called her 'ignorant' for believing the U.S. was trying to help the people of Iraq. During her exchange she alluded to the incarceration of Japanese-Americans and foreign nationals during World War II, however offensive, as having a purpose."

On Dec. 4, 2003, CAIR's Hooper sent a letter to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, stating, "It is my unfortunate duty to bring to your attention bigoted anti-Muslim comments sent to our office by an officer in the U.S. military." Hooper then listed several comments by Capt. McCall he felt were "Islamophobic." Whitehead's view was

that "the United States is fighting a 'War on Terror'. The enemy is militant Islam. Why did the Secretary of Defense listen to the lies and distortions of a group that has a history of supporting this ideology?"

Whitehead founded a Website, www.anticair.com, whose name explains its mission. CAIR responded by filing a defamation lawsuit.

According to Pipes, "the lawsuit alleges that CAIR is the victim of 'libelous defamation' because of five Anti-CAIR statements in particular" ("Why Is CAIR Suing Anti-CAIR?" FrontPageMagazine, April 6, 2004). Pipes and Chadha summarized the original statements CAIR claimed to be actionable, in another FrontPage Mag article, mentioned above ("CAIR Founded by "Islamic Terrorists?") These were:

- ◆ "Let there be no doubt that CAIR is a terrorist supporting front organization."
- ◆ Second, "[CAIR] seeks to overthrow constitutional government in the United States."
- ◆ Three, [CAIR] is an organization funded by Hamas supporters."
- ◆ Fourth, "CAIR was started by Hamas members."
- ◆ Fifth, "CAIR...was founded by Islamic terrorists."

On June 20, 2005 CAIR amended its original motion and reduced its libel claims. The only two which remained were that CAIR is a terrorist-supporting front organization and that it seeks to overthrow constitutional government in the United States.

Reed Rubinstein, of the Greenberg and Traurig international law firm, represented Anti-CAIR pro bono. On April 21, 2006, the Anti-CAIR Web site reported a "mutually agreeable settlement," the terms of which are confidential.

According to a *New York Sun* article, Rubinstein did say that “CAIR’s interest in settling the suit intensified late last year just as a judge was considering whether the group should be forced to disclose additional details about its inner workings, including its financing and its alleged ties to Hamas and other terrorist groups” (“CAIR Settles Libel Suit Against Critic,” March 24, 2006).

Rubinstein said continuing the suit “would have opened up CAIR’s finances and their relationships and their principles, their ideological motivations in a way they did not want to be made public.”

Pipes and Chadha concluded in “CAIR Founded by ‘Islamic Terrorists?’” that “CAIR’s filing an amended motion has two apparent implications: that CAIR has tacitly acknowledged the truth of Whitehead’s deleted assertions; and that those assertions can now be repeated with legal impunity.” Those are that CAIR:

- ◆ Was founded by Hamas members.
- ◆ Was founded by Islamic terrorists.
- ◆ Was funded by Hamas supporters.

‘Continuing the suit would have opened up CAIR’s finances...’

Pipes and Chadha speculated further why CAIR may have dropped its defense of those three claims.

The first asserted that “[CAIR] is partially funded by terrorists.” According to the authors, in August, 1999 the Saudi-based Islamic Development Bank, the same organization which provided indemnities for families of Palestinian suicide bombers who attack Israelis, gave CAIR \$250,000. The International Institute of Islamic Thought, a Virginia-based organization with links to the Muslim Brotherhood, provided CAIR with \$14,000 in 2003, according to IIIT tax filings.

The second charge CAIR dropped as libelous from its suit was

that “CAIR receives direct funding from Islamic terrorist supporting countries.” This may have been of concern to CAIR because of a Saudi connection. The Saudi-sponsored charity, the World Assembly of Muslim Youth, announced in 1999 that it “was extending both moral and financial support to CAIR to help construct its \$3.5 million headquarters in Washington, D.C.”

The third objection dropped was to the charge that “CAIR has proven links to ... Islamic terrorists.” This may have been deleted due to the fact that five current or past officials or employees have been arrested, convicted or deported on charges related to terrorism. (See pages four and five.)

Civil rights or intimidation?

In 2000, Prof. Khalid Duran co-authored a book called *Children of Abraham: An Introduction to Islam for Jews*. The work, praised by Jordan’s Prince Hassan among others, was part of an American Jewish Committee program for interreligious understanding.

On April 4, even before publication, CAIR attacked the book and Duran. Although he held a doctorate in Islamic studies from a German university and had taught as a visiting professor at Temple, American, and other U.S. universities, Duran found his credibility under fire and himself accused by the council of association with “Muslim bashers” (“Fatwa Alert: Sheik calls for blood of Arab author who wrote book on Islam for Jewish readers,” *New York Jewish Week*, July 6, 2001).

On May 4, 2000 the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Wafd* reported on “CAIR’s accusations that Duran was tarnishing Islam’s image.” The paper called on Islamic legal scholars to act on “CAIR’s distress call.” A week later, the U.S.-based pro-Hamas *Al-Zaytunah* detailed Duran’s alleged defamation. The CAIR-precipitated avalanche continued. On

June 6, in the Jordanian weekly newspaper *Al-Shahed*, Sheik Abd Al-Munim Abu Zant, a leader of the extremist Islamic Action Front, called for Duran's "blood to be shed."

A leader of the AJC's inter-religious efforts and originator of the Children of Abraham project, Rabbi A. James Rudin, described CAIR's behavior this way:

"[It] railed against Duran's assertion that 'Islamists' (Muslim religious extremists) are using the ancient faith of Islam to advance a strident anti-Western, anti-democratic, and anti-Jewish political agenda throughout the world" ("*Can American Jews & Muslims Get Along?*" *Reform Judaism*, Winter, 2001). According to Rudin, "extremist Islamic groups with a radical political agenda, such as CAIR, the American Muslim Council (AMC), and the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), all of whom support the Islamist cause and Muslim radical states, have exploited the fact that moderate Muslims have no institutional and communal representation."

Duran and Whitehead were not the only targets for CAIR's wrath. The article "Intimidation by lawsuit" (*Arizona Republic*, March 30, 2007), reported on the infamous case of the "flying imams": "Last November, six Muslim imams were returning to the Phoenix area from a conference in Minneapolis when they were removed from their US Airways flight for what passengers, crew and airline personnel described as suspicious activity, which included reports of chanting 'Allah' in the gate area and, once on board, switching their seat assignments and asking for seat belt extenders that they didn't need"

CAIR sued on the imams' behalf in U.S. District Court in Minnesota, alleging civil rights violations. The "flying imams" lawyer was Omar T. Mohammed, president of CAIR's New York chapter. Arsalan Iftikhar, the council's national legal director, raised the specter of "paranoia, false reporting, bigotry and witch hunts at 32,000 feet" in a hyper-

bolic *USA Today* guest editorial. Iftikhar claimed "the fact that we have to coin the new phrase 'flying while Muslim' is indicative of the unraveling of our national social fabric" ("False reporting is wrong," March 27, 2007).

The case drew national attention. M. Zuhdi Jasser, director of the American Islamic Forum for Democracy, offered to raise money to pay for the legal defense of the "John Doe" passengers who reported what they saw as suspicious actions by the imams. The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, a nonprofit legal organization that litigates religious-liberty cases, usually on behalf of those who believe their First Amendment right to freedom of religion has been violated, denounced CAIR's suit as a media stunt.

The report, "Liberty advocates back 'John Does'" (*Washington Times*, Aug. 2, 2007), by Audrey Hudson, quotes the Becket Fund as asserting that "the case against the John Does should be dismissed because no law could or should be construed to punish them for reporting a possible terrorist attack to airline authorities." Becket also stated that "this harassment is nothing less than legal terrorism — an attempt to change public behavior by threatening to impoverish and destroy at random the lives of those whom plaintiffs see as their enemies. These claims should not be entertained."

CAIR's support for the imams' suit against "John Doe" passengers and crew who may have reported their actions and its charges of "Islamophobia" and "flying while Muslim" led to congressional action. Shield legislation was passed, and signed by President Bush, to protect citizens who notify authorities of potentially terrorist-related activities. The law allows "John Doe" passengers wrongly sued to recover legal fees.

On August 22, federal court in Minneapolis accepted a request by imams Omar Shahin, Ahmed Shqeirah, Didmar Faja, Mahmoud Sulaiman, Marwan Sadeddin and Mohamed Ibrahim

Marwan Sadeddin and Mohamed Ibrahim to drop the “John Doe” passengers. US Airways and Minneapolis airport workers remained as subjects of the suit (“Imams drop lawsuit against ‘Doe’ passengers; Claim still targets airline for Muslims’ removal from flight,” *Washington Times*, Aug. 23, 2007).

About the same time the council attacked the Anti-Defamation League. The American Jewish Committee — in some respects a competitor of ADL’s — charged in an Aug. 21, 2007 statement that “CAIR characteristically seeks to cast any criticism of itself as an attack on Islam, claiming that such critiques amount to ‘Islamophobia’ and an effort to marginalize the Muslim community. In truth, CAIR is engaged in a course of conduct harmful to the great bulk of the American Muslim community by suggesting that to respect Muslims one must tolerate apologetics for terrorist organizations and avoid confronting, as ADL notes, CAIR’s ‘murky associations with radical organizations and individuals.’”

Reliable source?

CAIR “has published a media guide to proper reporting on Islamic issues. It’s pure propaganda,” *Investor’s Business Daily* wrote (“Islam for Dummies,” Dec. 20, 2007),

“designed to whitewash the radical Islamist threat.” According to IBD, “what the media could really use is a guide to CAIR’s own questionable agenda.”

Critics have charged that the council has shown a tendency to embellish statistics about hate crimes. According to the article, “Fort Dix: The Backlash that Wasn’t” (*FrontPageMagazine.com*, May 2007), by Robert Spencer, “a nationwide survey by the Washington-based Council on American Islamic Relations ... counted 1,972 incidents of anti-Muslim bias in 2005, up from the 1,522 in 2004.” It added, however, that Pipes

and Chadha “studied an earlier CAIR hate crimes report in 2005 and discovered that ‘of twenty “anti-Muslim hate crimes” in 2004 that CAIR describes, at least six are invalid.’ These included one incident of a bombing outside a mosque for which no police report exists, and which seems not to have taken place at all; one of an arson attack against a and two incidents of Muslim store owners destroying their own stores.”

CAIR’s 2005 “Unequal Protection” report struck another observer as statistical spinning. Several graphs registered “dramatic increases in reported civil-rights and hate-crimes cases.” But Daniel Mandel, director of the Zionist Organization of America’s Center for Middle East Policy and a fellow in history at Melbourne University, found that “the reality is rather different.” Writing in *National Review* (“Crying Wolf,” March 13, 2006), Mandel charged that “fabricated incidents and frivolous complaints have abounded in these reports and others like them Turning to the most serious crime — murder — of eight reported by CAIR in the year following September 11, 2001, all but one had ambiguous motives and on investigation could not

be attributed to anti-Muslim motivation.”

Three years earlier, John Leo, in *U.S. News & World Report* (“Pushing the bias button,” June 2, 2003)

observed that “the Council on American-Islamic Relations and other lobbying groups are reporting a rising tide of anti-Muslim bigotry and a massive increase in anti-Arab crime in America. Obvious questions: What rising tide? What massive increase?”

Leo cited former Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan that “the reason we haven’t heard or read about an upsurge in the crimes is that ‘by and large, the big backlash never occurred.’” Though all anti-Muslim incidents are deplorable, the FBI’s reported 481 such incidents in 2001 was less than half the

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number of reported anti-Jewish incidents, Leo noted.

FBI figures for 2006 showed 2,640 reported hate crimes against black Americans, 1,195 based on sexual orientation, 967 against Jews, 890 targeting whites, 576 against Hispanics, and 156 targeting American Muslims.

So “why do CAIR and other groups push the ‘bias’ button so hard?” Leo asked. “Well, the victim stance works. It attracts press attention and has made the ‘bias against Muslims’ article a staple of big-city dailies. It encourages Muslims to feel angry and non-Muslims to feel guilty.” It raises money, gets congressional attention, “and by positioning all future criticism as bias, it tends to intimidate or silence even the most sensible critics.”

The possibility that CAIR exaggerates hate crime statistics to flog self-serving but false propaganda about American Muslims besieged by mounting “Islamophobia” deserves news media scrutiny. So does CAIR’s rejection of calls that it clearly condemn not just terrorism in general but Hamas and Hezbollah terrorism in particular. After a Hamas attack in 2002, murdering 29 people at a Passover seder in Netanya, Israel, CAIR criticized that act of violence “in the Middle East” but refused to criticize Hamas or mention the Jewish state by name.

Early in April, 2004, four American contractors were ambushed and killed in Fallujah, Iraq. Their bodies were mutilated and burned. Two of the corpses were left hanging from a bridge. CAIR issued a statement condemning the desecration of the corpses as un-Islamic. CAMERA’s Washington, D.C. office then called CAIR’s headquarters and asked if the organization condemned the killings themselves, not just the desecration of the bodies. A CAIR staffer promised to check and respond. When no reply was received several hours later, CAM-

Appearing to oppose terrorism while attacking terrorists’ critics

ERA placed a second call and again was promised a response. None came.

“If CAIR were sincere and straightforward in its opposition to terrorism, it would cease apologizing for terrorism in Israel, which it blames on the Jews, and in Iraq, which it blames on the U.S.-led coalition,” the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Islamic Pluralism declared in the first number of its “Wahhabi Watch” postings, one day after the London transit system bombings (“In the Shadow of London,” July 8, 2005). “It would end its long-standing effort to identify our religion with its political ideology.” Wahhabism is the name of the fundamentalist Sunni Muslim theological interpretation based in Saudi Arabia and reflected to some extent in the Muslim Brotherhood.

When syndicated columnist and WTOP-FM (Washington, D.C.) commentator Cal Thomas warned of Islamic radicals in the West after a terrorist attack in Glasgow, Scotland and a foiled attack in London, CAIR blasted him for “Islamophobic” remarks. But the group itself

“did not condemn the actions of the Islamic terrorists in Britain,” columnist Joel Mowbray wrote (“CAIR’s duplicitous ways,” *Washington Times*, July 12, 2007). “CAIR has mastered the art of appearing to oppose terrorism, while at the same time leading the charge against those who seek to thwart it

“If a Muslim is the victim of a possible hate crime or has been subjected to a religious slur, CAIR is there. There is nothing wrong with that, of course. And the group is well within its rights when it routinely rails against the United States and Israel.

“What CAIR does not do, though, is denounce Islamic fundamentalists who promote a paranoid worldview in which America and Israel are the enemies of Islam”

The article, “Sen. Boxer Rescinds Award to Islamic Activist” (*Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 6, 2007), by Asraf Khalil

pointed out that “in recent years the council has drawn a carefully calibrated line on terrorism — strongly criticizing individual attacks and suicide bombings but refusing to label Hamas or Hezbollah as terrorist organizations.”

Boxer, a California Democrat, “withdrew a ‘certificate of accomplishment’ that the California Democrat had awarded to CAIR official Basim Elkarr. Sen. Boxer cited concern over the group’s relationship with terrorist groups.” The senator’s rescinding of the award reportedly was a result of “troubling details about the organization.” “It’s the volume of things, not any one thing,” she said. “There’s a long list” (“House GOP challenges Muslim meeting in Capitol,” *The Washington Times*, Mar. 13, 2007).

In response to negative coverage, CAIR officials have accused some reporters, news media and politicians of fostering “Islamophobia.” The council has closed meetings or barred certain reporters from press conferences.

For example, according to Christian Broadcasting Network correspondent Ericka Stakelbeck’s report, “CAIR Fears CBN News” (March 13, 2007), “as CBN attempted to cover a CAIR press conference announcing that the six ‘peace-loving’ Muslim imams removed from a US Airways flight in Minneapolis last November have filed a lawsuit against the airline and Minnesota’s Metropolitan Airports Commission,” the network’s reporter was ejected by CAIR spokesman Hooper.

In Hooper’s words, “we have long barred the Christian Broadcasting Network from our news conferences because of their long, long history of vicious, anti-Muslim bigotry. And we have no motivation to promote that kind of intolerance.”

CBN News is not the only network to be dismissed from a CAIR function or conference. Also among the ousted is *The Washington Times*’ Hudson. According to Stakelbeck’s CBN report, Hudson’s crime was “calling into

question the legitimacy of the six ‘peace-loving imams’ sob story.”

In a FrontPageMag article (“CAIR KO’s ‘24’,” Dec. 4, 2006), writer Henry Mark Holzer asserted that “in addition to its incessant intimidating complaints about the alleged violation of ‘Muslim civil liberties’ CAIR has enabled unfounded accusations and allegations to become substantiated within American society.”

Doing Hollywood and D.C.

Holzer charges that “in 2005, CAIR met with Fox representatives and the producers of the television series 24 to discuss their concerns that the show was portraying a ‘Muslim’ family at the heart of the terror plot and deception.” According to Holzer, such a plot format was “not surprising — because while most Muslims are not terrorists, most terrorists are Muslims— [and series protagonist Jack] Bauer’s principal enemies have been Muslims. Art imitates life.”

In the writer’s view, “although Bauer is smart, resourceful, and ruthless in his patriotic determination to keep America safe, neither he nor Fox TV were tough enough to withstand pressure” from CAIR. Bauer, played by actor Kiefer Sutherland, was forced to make a nationally televised statement that amounted to censorship. In Holzer’s opinion, the statement “was craven political/commercial cowardice, in the face of yet another successful intimidation by the Council on American-Islamic Relations.”

Before wringing an apology from “Jack Bauer,” CAIR had gone after the films *True Lies* (1994), *Executive Decision* (1996), *The Siege* (1998), and *Rules of Engagement* (2000), according to journalist and screenwriter Bridget Johnson. That was all before Sept. 11, 2001, and though “nowhere, even in those films with Arab terrorist characters, was it stated or even implied that all Arabs are terrorists. According to CAIR ... not a single Muslim can be portrayed on film as

a terrorist — no matter how many good Arabs even out the pack — without putting American Muslims in danger from rabid neighbors who internalize Sunday matinees. But that's just not reality Censorship by special-interest groups [is] a threat to all the creative community stands for" (*The Wall Street Journal Online*, "Hollywood's Last Taboo," July 13, 2005).

In September, 2008 the New York-based Clarion Fund distributed 28 million copies of "Obsession: Radical Islam's War Against the West," a 60-minute video documentary, as newspaper inserts to homes in potential swing states. CAIR filed complaints with the Federal Election Commission and Internal Revenue Service, accusing the non-profit group of violating election and tax laws by promoting the Republican nominee, Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), over the Democratic nominee and eventual winner, Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.). "It's a mind-boggling massive campaign It's inappropriate as a non-profit for the Clarion Fund to do," said CAIR's Ibrahim Hooper ("Group Swamps Swing States With Movie on Radical Islam," *The Washington Post*, Oct. 26, 2008).

"Obsession" originally aired on Fox News in 2006. The Clarion Fund claimed the 2008 distribution was meant to coincide with the seventh anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001 World Trade Center and Pentagon terrorist attacks. It called on CAIR "to end its smear campaign against the documentary CAIR, an organization that refuses to denounce Hamas and Hezbollah, cannot refute the accuracy of 'Obsession,' so it has decided to attack The Clarion Fund in hopes of discrediting the film," said Raphael Shore, the documentary's producer and founder of the fund.

Other CAIR attempts include a threatened lawsuit against the Young America's Foundation, a nonprofit agency that owns the late President Ronald Reagan's Santa Barbara ranch. Accord-

ing to the *Washington Times* ("CAIR vs. the Reagan Ranch," Aug. 3, 2007), YAF's "offense" was "inviting author and terrorism analyst Robert Spencer to speak at a conference yesterday afternoon for a lecture titled 'The Truth About the Council on American-Islamic Relations'." Free speech, or attempted intimidation? "A more normal advocacy organization would seek to debate its opponents," the item noted. "Sadly, this litigiousness is commonplace for CAIR, whose activities could be scarcely more different from its mission statement."

In "CAIR blames White House for boosting 'Islamophobia'" (*Washington Times*, July 18 2007), by Audrey Hudson and Sara A. Carter, Parvez Amed, chairman of the CAIR national board, said, "policies driven by fear will be naturally irrational. Thus in this state of irrationality, the Bush administration, often through their surrogates, have resorted to fear-mongering."

Kate Starr, spokesman at the National Security Council, rejected the CAIR accusations. Starr asserted that the Bush "administration has worked hard to improve mutual understanding and cooperation between America and people in Muslim countries" and that "this is a point the president underscored in his remarks at the Islamic Center in Washington."

A *Washington Times* editorial ("Enabler speak," July 19, 2007) bears quoting at length: "The Council on American-Islamic Relations has outdone itself. This week its chairman, Parvez Ahmed, accused the Bush administration of 'Islamophobia,' fomenting anti-Muslim sentiment and creating a climate of irrationality and fear about Islam. He then delivered this instant classic in doublespeak: 'The new perception is that the United States has entered a war with Islam itself.'

"This is not new, and it's not some disembodied 'perception.' It is CAIR's view, and it has been CAIR's view for years. Mr. Ahmed and friends

actually share this perception that the United States is at war with Islam, and they want to promote it. Don't be fooled.

"We won't even go into the great extent to which President Bush stresses in virtually every major speech on terrorism that the enemy is terrorists waving a Muslim banner, not Islam. It evidently does not matter that the United States is spilling its soldiers' blood and expending national treasure in Iraq to save the country from al Qaeda and from its own radical butchers. It does not matter that the United States undertook the most effective international humanitarian mission in memory to Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim nation, in the wake of the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami. Both situations build on a recent history of intervention on behalf of Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo and in defense of a Muslim nation, Kuwait, against Saddam Hussein's depredations.

"All that matters is that some people hostile to the United States who dismiss these achievements believe that the country and its president are 'Islamophobic.' This is then used by CAIR to scare up the notion

"We'd like to second David Keene, chairman of the American Conservative Union, who spoke at the same event as Mr. Ahmed. 'If CAIR wants respect as representing the best of Islam to the West, it must shun the role of enabler by siding with the enemies of terror and intolerance wherever they are found,' Mr. Keene said. Well put.

"Instead, we get spurious accusations about 'Islamophobia' and intimations that the problem is the United States, not the radical Islamist terrorists."

Summary

In the United States, scores of organizations describe themselves as civil

rights groups. They often claim to speak in the name of both particular minorities and on behalf of all Americans. The activities of some, including ADL and the NAACP, extend back nearly a century.

CAIR describes itself as one more such group, as American as apple pie and pita. But the facts cited above suggest origins as a spin-off of a fund-raising arm, if not front for, terrorists. Another editorial, from *Investor's Business Daily* ("CAIR Revealed," August 31, 2007) put it this way:

"For the first time, evidence in a major federal terror case puts CAIR's current executive director — Nihad Awad — at a Philadelphia meeting of alleged Hamas leaders that was secretly recorded by the FBI. After the Associated Press last week reported the bombshell, CAIR denied claims of ties to Hamas. 'That's one of those urban legends about CAIR,' said Parvez Ahmed, CAIR's chairman. 'It's fed by the right-wing, pro-Israeli blogosphere.'

"In fact, the evidence was revealed by an FBI agent who testified at the terror-financing trial under way in Dallas [the Holy Land Foundation case]. Her name is Lara Burns Burns placed both Awad and his ethnic-Palestinian pal Omar Ahmed, who founded CAIR with Awad, at a Philly meeting last decade where she says Hamas leaders and supporters hatched a plot to disguise funds for Hamas suicide operations as charity for HLF."

IBD concludes that "many of the things CAIR's leaders claim and what we later learn from the factual record don't square CAIR claims to be the voice of American Muslims. If so, it's been an especially loud one. But it has lost its credibility to speak honestly for any legitimate cause."

Seven years earlier, long before evidence given in the HLF trial, Mustafa El-Hussein, secretary of the Ibn Khaldun Society, an Islamic cultural organization, anticipated the *IBD* editorial. In an Op-Ed headlined "Misjudged Muslims," (*Washington Times*, Dec. 17, 2000),

El-Hussein wrote that “many of us in the Muslim community have been continually frustrated by self-appointed leaders who spew hatred toward America and the West and yet claim to be the legitimate spokespersons for the American Muslim community. These groups openly sympathize with Hamas, which the State Department has labeled a terrorist group, and Hezbollah, a Shi-ite group responsible for acts such as the bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut.

“Most Muslims, if they have even heard on American Muslim Council, the Council on American Islamic Relations, Muslim Public Affairs Council, and other such Islamist groups, regard these self-appointed spokesmen as impostors. Indeed, there is a great deal of bitterness that such groups have tarnished the reputation of mainstream Muslims, who do not share their sympathies with Middle East terrorist groups [S]chisms in the Muslim community today belong to a very different category [than those within U.S. Christian and Jewish communities]. They are between mainstream Muslim immigrants who come to these shores to embrace America, and those who front for a radical political movement, referred to as Islamists ... Those in the media who decry the bias against Muslims are not doing mainstream Muslims any favors. They should look at the record of statements of those Islamist leaders and label them the hate-mongers that they are. Only then will we hear the authentic and moderate voice of the American Muslim community.”

On June 12, 2009 Steven Emerson’s The Investigative Project Web site noted that “dozens of people in Minneapolis protested outside a CAIR ice cream social for discouraging local Somalis from cooperating with the FBI. The protesters were friends and family of a local teenager believed to have been killed by terrorists in Somalia.

“The CAIR-Minnesota chapter, like other CAIR chapters nationally, has been on a campaign against the FBI, accusing it of improper investigative behavior and advising people not to speak with agents without a lawyer present. FBI officials in Minneapolis have been investigating the disappearance of at least 20 Somalis from the Minneapolis area, including one who blew himself up in a terrorist attack last fall.

“Then last week, Burhan Hassan reportedly was killed in a terrorist attack in Mogadishu. The Minneapolis Star-Tribune quoted the teen’s uncle, Abdirizak Bihi, explaining the frustration with CAIR: ‘We don’t want anyone to come into our community and tell us to shut up.’ Bihi said. ‘Law enforcement will not be able to do anything without information from the community.’ About 50 people attended the rally, waving signs and hollering, ‘CAIR out! Doublespeak out!’

“This is significant because members of the local Muslim community are taking on CAIR. It robs the organization of its standard response, which is to blame the messenger

“Minneapolis’ Somali Muslim community is experiencing firsthand why. As the *Star-Tribune* story concluded:

“Osman Ahmed, another relative of Hassan, said some in the family believe CAIR has aligned itself too closely with mosques where some believe the missing boys may have been influenced to leave.

“‘They are supporting the groups we suspect of recruiting our kids,’ Ahmed said. ‘We refuse to be silent.’”

CAIR largely has enjoyed a pass from major American news media. Many have accepted the council’s self-portrait and creating its spokesman as credible and above scrutiny, uncritically disseminated its pronouncements. This CAMERA Special Report strongly suggests that closer examination is overdue.

Eric Rozenman is CAMERA's Washington director. Meredith Braverman was CAMERA's Washington research intern, summer, 2007. Research intern David Krusch did preliminary work on this paper.



Committee for Accuracy in
Middle East Reporting in America
PO Box 35040
Boston, MA 02135

Tel: 617-789-3672

Fax: 617-787-7853

www.camera.org