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# The Islamic Society of North America: Active, Influential and Rooted in the Muslim Brotherhood

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CAMERA Special Report

Erin Dwyer and Eric Rozenman  
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## Introduction

**T**he Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) describes itself as the nation's "largest mainstream Muslim community-based organization". It claims to provide "a common platform for presenting Islam, supporting Muslim communities, developing educational, social, and outreach programs and fostering good relations with other religious communities and civic service organizations".

Credited by news media as the oldest, largest, and most politically influential Muslim-American organization, the ISNA's generally positive public image includes interfaith outreach. This portrait likely helps it attract the 40,000 Muslims it says attend its annual conventions. Perceived respectability gives the ISNA influence over the Muslim-American agenda and may induce governmental agencies and news media to view the society as a moderate, mainstream representative of the U.S. Muslim community.

However, ISNA's roots trace to the Muslim Brotherhood, a radical Egyptian movement that seeks to spread *sharia* (Islamic law) globally. The Brotherhood was founded in the 1920's and doctrinally opposes Christianity, Judaism, modernity, and secularism. The Brotherhood's credo is "Allah is our objective. The Prophet is our leader. The Koran is our law. Jihad is our way. Dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope".

Muslim Brotherhood loyalists began to build an infrastructure for radical Islam in America starting with the Muslim Students Association (MSA) in 1963 ("Jihad, Inc", *National Review*, Dec. 7, 2009). Under MSA patronage "nearly every other Muslim organization (in America) was formed." Oubai Mohammad Shahbandar, a former MSA member, wrote in an "Open Letter of an Arab American Student" that, "We are told America's foreign policy is based on racist neo-imperialism; we are taught that national security is a foul epithet to be reviled; we are told the Jews and Israel are to blame for the hatred against us" ("Moderate' Muslims versus American-Muslims," *Muslim World Today*, Jan. 29, 2009). Prior to the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the

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MSA officially assisted in the fundraising of three Islamic charities: the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development, the Global Relief Foundation, and Benevolence International Foundation. All three were closed and designated global terrorist organizations by the U.S. Treasury Department after post-9/11 investigations.

U.S. Muslim Brotherhood leaders have said that the movement's goal is jihad aimed at destroying the United States from within (see below). To achieve this end American Islamic organizations were to be established under the Brotherhood's direction. ISNA was envisioned as an umbrella organization that would be the "nucleus for the Islamic movement in North America." Its subsidiaries such as the North American Islamic Trust (NAIT) were designed to manage Wahhabi-funded institutions and the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) to be the primary outreach agency for Subcontinental Muslims. Wahhabi Islam is the puritanical school dominant among influential Saudi clerics. Subcontinental Muslims geographically refers to Muslims of the religiously diverse Indian subcontinent. The region, commonly known as South Asia, includes India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

A Hudson Institute report titled, "The Muslim Brotherhood in the United States" (2009), portrayed the construction of a sophisticated covert organizational infrastructure in the United States that was reaffirmed in the 1991 document "An Explanatory Memorandum on the General Strategic Goal for the Brotherhood in North America". Authored by U.S. Brotherhood leader Mohammed Akram, the document was introduced

by prosecutors as evidence in the successful 2008 Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development (HLF) terror financing trial. Akram's memorandum explained that the goal of the Brotherhood in America was "Settlement":

The process of settlement is a "Civilization-Jihadist process" with all that the word means. The Ikhwan [Muslim Brothers] must understand that their work in America is a kind of grand Jihad in eliminating and destroying the Western civilization from within and "sabotaging" its miserable house by their hands and the hands of the believers so that it is eliminated and God's religion is made victorious over all other religions.

In order for Islam and its Movement to become "a part of the homeland" in which it lives, "stable" in its land, "rooted" in the spirits and minds of its people, "enabled" in the life of its society, [with] firmly established "organizations" on which the Islamic structure is built and with which the testimony of civilization is achieved, the Movement must plan and struggle to obtain "the keys" and the tools of this process ...

The Brotherhood's satellite organizations were created as a part of a two-fold strategy to infiltrate government and bend it to Islamist ideology. For example, the Brotherhood helped create Hamas (the Islamic Resistance Movement) as a Palestinian terrorist operation with social welfare components. Hamas' charter advocates the destruction of Israel and identifies the terrorist group as a Muslim Brotherhood entity in Article 2 while calling for the killing of all Jews worldwide in Article 7. American

Brotherhood spin-offs, such as ISNA, were created to function as advocacy groups.

The ISNA is a Brotherhood appendage often portrayed as a religiously moderate and socially positive advocacy organization. However, the society publishes a bi-monthly magazine called *Islamic Horizons* that, according to terrorism investigator and author Steven Emerson, “champions militant Islamist doctrine”. ISNA also continues to host conferences featuring speakers who advocate *jihad*, support terrorism and radical Islam, and express doubt whether al-Qaeda’s Sept. 11, 2001 attacks were carried out by Muslims.

ISNA publicly condemned the U.S. government’s post-9/11 seizure of Hamas’ and Palestinian Islamic Jihad’s American financial assets. This, though both groups had been designated terrorist organizations by the U.S. government in 1997. President Clinton then signed an executive order that highlighted “grave acts of violence committed by foreign terrorists that disrupt the Middle East peace process” and threatened U.S. national security (“Hamas’ Parent Comes to America”, *IPT News*, March 28, 2012. IPT is Steven Emerson’s Investigative Project on Terrorism).

Despite efforts to remove its name, the ISNA remained an unindicted co-conspirator in the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development (HLF) trial. The 2008 HLF retrial is the largest U.S. terror-financing case to date and resulted in the conviction of five HLF leaders found guilty of raising more than \$12 million in “blood money” to support overseas suicide bombings of Hamas. The five men were convicted on 108 counts ranging from money laundering to providing material support

to terrorists and received sentences ranging from 15 to 65 years in prison. Ghassan Elashi, a founder of the Texas chapter of the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR), another Brotherhood derivative, received a 65-year sentence.

ISNA and NAIT filed their motion for equitable relief from the government’s public naming of them as unindicted co-conspirators in June 2008, arguing that their inclusion on the list injured their community standing and public image. Department of Justice prosecutors opposed the erasure by filing a motion with the federal district court stating, “During last year’s trial, numerous exhibits were entered into evidence establishing both ISNA’s and NAIT’s intimate relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood, the Palestine Committee, and the defendants in this case”. On July 1, 2009 U.S. District Court Judge Jorge Solis ruled that “the government has produced ample evidence to establish the associations of CAIR, ISNA, NAIT, with the Holy Land Foundation, the Islamic Association for Palestine, and with Hamas.” In refusing to remove the groups names from the list, “the public”, Solis said, “may make its own judgment from evidence presented at the trial.”

ISNA asserts that it is an independent organization that “never was, and is not now, affiliated with or influenced by any international organizations including the Muslim Brotherhood”. However, leaders of the MSA, the primary organization for Brotherhood recruitment in the United States, founded ISNA.

## Origins

ISNA was established officially in Indiana on July 4, 1981 with the stated

purpose “to advance the cause of Islam and serve Muslims in North America so as to enable them to adopt Islam as a complete way of life.” The initial board of directors members were: Sayyed M. Syeed, Mohammad Naziruddin Ali, Talat Sultan, Imtiaz Ahmad, and Haroon Qazi—almost all of whom were associated with the MSA.

FBI records from the 1980’s obtained through the Freedom of Information Act indicate that the ISNA had a significant role in the Brotherhood’s U.S. activities and past “ISNA conferences provided opportunities for the extreme fundamentalist Muslims to meet with their supporters. The annual conferences are used for both religious and political purposes. The political purpose is to further the Islamic revolution, which includes providing anti-U.S. and anti-Israel publications and publications that support the war effort of Iran in the Iran-Iraq war [1980-1988].”

ISNA co-founders included Muzammil Siddiqi, Iqbal Unus, and Sami Al-Arian. Al-Arian later admitted in U.S. Justice Department deportation proceedings to being a Muslim Brotherhood member at the time the ISNA was founded. He pled guilty in 2006 to “conspiracy to make or receive contribution of funds, goods or services to or for the benefit of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, a Specially Designated Terrorist Organization”. Palestinian Islamic Jihad has conducted large-scale terror operations targeting Israeli civilians and strikes against military personnel primarily in Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. Upon Al-Arian’s arrest in 2003, ISNA released a statement criticizing the U.S. government for investigating him, allegedly because he

was a Muslim. During his sentencing, U.S. Judge James S. Moody, Jr. made the following remarks:

You are a master manipulator. You looked your neighbors in the eyes and said you had nothing to do with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. This trial exposed that as a lie. Your back-up claim is that your efforts were only to provide charities for widows and orphans. That, too, is a lie. The evidence was clear in this case that you were a leader of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. You were on the board of directors and an officer, the secretary. Directors control the actions of an organization, even the PIJ; and you were an active leader...

Your only connection to widows and orphans is that you create them.

Al-Arian was incarcerated for more than five years in the United States after his trial and faced deportation to Egypt. Al-Arian remains a U.S. resident but has had his citizenship revoked.

## **Funding**

ISNA is classified as a church for tax purposes and is not required to file Internal Revenue Service Form 990’s for transparency. However, funds from Saudi Arabia have been the ISNA’s primary source of financial support since its creation. According to Saudi government figures as reported by Alex Alexiev of the Hudson Institute, Riyadh provided \$48 billion to support Islamic activities abroad between 1975 and 1987. Dr. Mohammad Omar Farooq, an associate professor of economics and finance at Upper Iowa University, said that Saudi funds were a means by which Muslim Brotherhood activists in the United States attempted to control its subsidiary organizations.

“Saudi money was having a serious influence on ISNA during these periods [and] caused significant problems in various communities, where there were attempts to control *khutbah* [formal Islamic sermons given in weekly and annual rituals], activities, and services of those mosques and centers that were with the ISNA’s trust,” said Farooq.

A United Nations report, “Terrorism Financing: Roots and Trends of Saudi Terrorism Financing” submitted to the president of the U.N. Security Council in December 2002, explains that in the year 2000 alone, Saudi citizens’ contributions to various Islamist groups amounted to \$500 million with most donations covering salaries, pensions, and “terrorcare” services. David D. Aufhauser, former general counsel of the U.S. Department of the Treasury, estimated in “An Assessment of Current Efforts to Combat Terrorism Financing”, at a June 15, 2004 U.S. Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs hearing [108-683], that Saudis had spent more than \$75 billion in an effort to assert their country’s role as the champion of Islam. Aufhauser explained that they “did so by underwriting schools, mosques, call centers, and charities throughout the Islamic diaspora. Wherever there was need they came as teachers, as providers of social welfare and safety nets, and as holy men. But what they taught was unforgiving, intolerant, uncompromising and austere views of a faith that became kindling for Osama bin Laden’s match”.

A detailed account of the Saudi royal family’s efforts to spread Islam throughout the world was published in the March 1, 2002 English language-edition of the Saudi government’s weekly *Ain Al-Yaqeen* paper. Titled “Billions Spent by Saudi Royal Family

to Spread Islam to Every Corner of the Earth”, the article reads, “The cost of King Fahd’s efforts in this field has been astronomical, amounting to many billions of Saudi riyals. In terms of Islamic institutions, the result is some 210 Islamic centres wholly or partly financed by Saudi Arabia, more than 1,500 mosques and 202 colleges and almost 2,000 schools for educating Muslim children in non-Islamic countries...”

The nature of the Saudi Islamic campaign is examined in the June 14, 2004 “Update on the Global Campaign Against Terrorist Financing” Council on Foreign Relations report, which states, “As a core tenet of its foreign policy, Saudi Arabia funds the global propagation of Wahhabism, a brand of Islam that, in some instances, supports militancy by encouraging divisiveness and violent acts against Muslims and non-Muslims alike. ... Through the support for madrassas, mosques, cultural centers, hospitals, and other institutions, and the training and export of radical clerics to populate these outposts, Saudi Arabia has spent what could amount to hundreds of millions of dollars around the world financing extremism”.

Dr. Rachel Ehrenfeld’s essay “Their Oil is Thicker Than Our Blood”, first published in the 2011 book *Saudi Arabia & the Global Islamic Terror Network*, states that several Saudi financial institutions openly funded terrorist groups throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. In September 2000, Saudi Arabia conducted two telethons to raise funds for the families of Palestinian suicide bombers, including members of Hamas. The Saudi Committee for the Support of the al-Quds Uprising, based in Riyadh and run by then-interior minister Prince Nayef, reportedly

transferred “\$55.7 million mostly to the families of suicide bombers and to the families of imprisoned or injured Palestinian militants.” Records found in the offices of the Tulkarm Charity Committee specify 102 payments that were allotted to families of Hamas terrorists killed in “martyr operation[s].”

Some of ISNA's own members have voiced concerns regarding large donations from Saudi Arabia. In a videotape obtained by WTHR “Eyewitness News” during a 1994 ISNA national convention, one member questioned why the organization had accepted more than \$500,000 dollars in Saudi donations. “I don’t think Saudi Arabia is a good model for one of the largest organizations in the U.S.,” the member said, “I am concerned whether we are under their dictates or not” (“ISNA’s Ties to Terror,” NBC WTHR Television Indianapolis, Nov. 10, 2003). The society’s national director for the Office for Interfaith & Community Alliances, Sayyid M. Syeed, responded by claiming the money had come from non-extremist individual donations; not the government.

Syeed continued to avow in a 2004 interview that ISNA received no funds whatsoever from the “Saudi government or Saudi citizens with close ties to the royal family.” However, the International Assessment and Strategy Center’s “Extremism and the Islamic Society of North America,” a February 2007 report, explains that in November 2005 *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto) reported Saudi King Fahd gave \$5 million and an annual grant of \$1.5 million to the Islamic Centre in Toronto in 2002. The center also houses ISNA facilities and in 2005, the Saudi Islamic

Development Bank (IDB) announced a \$275,000 grant for ISNA’s high school, as well as a scholarship program. The article explains that the IDB was created in 1973 to foster economic development and social progress of member countries and Muslim communities according to the principles of *sharia* (Islamic law).

A December 2009 cable publicized by Wikileaks reveals a memo from United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stating, “Saudi Arabia remains a critical financial support base for al-Qaeda, the Taliban, Let (Lashkar-e-Taiba), and other terrorist groups, including Hamas.” The memo also reads, “Donors in Saudi Arabia constitute the most significant source of funding to Sunni terrorist groups

worldwide.” Stephen Schwartz, senior fellow with the Washington, D.C.-based Foundation for the Defense of

Democracies, noted ISNA’s relationship with Saudi exportation of Wahhabism in his June 2003 testimony to the U.S. Senate subcommittee on Terrorism and Homeland Security:

Shia and other non-Wahhabi Muslim community leaders estimate that 80 percent of American mosques out of a total ranging between an official estimate of 1,200 and an unofficial figure of 4-6,000 are under Wahhabi control ... Wahhabi control over mosques means control of property, buildings, appointment of imams, training of imams, content of preaching including faxing of Friday sermons from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and of literature distributed in mosques and mosque bookstores, notices on bulletin boards, and organizational and charitable solicitation ... The

### Saudi Arabian support for ISNA has worried members

main organizations that have carried out this campaign are the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), which originated in the Muslim Students' Association of the U.S. and Canada (MSA), and the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR). ("Islamism's Campus Club: The Muslim's Students' Association", *Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 2004).

ISNA tax records were requested in 2003 by the U.S. Senate Finance Committee. That same year Sens. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa) and Max Baucus (D-MT) of the committee listed the ISNA as one of 25 American Muslim organizations that "finance and perpetuate violence".

## ISNA Leaders

ISNA officials claim the organization has moved beyond its Muslim Brotherhood roots to evolve into a more "mainstream" American organization. However, many of its original leaders remain involved with Islamic fundamentalism.

- Muzammil Siddiqi was a co-founder of ISNA in 1981. He also served two terms as ISNA's president from 1997-2001. He has been heavily involved with other umbrella organizations under ISNA, including serving as chairman of the Religious Affairs Committee and Board of Trustees member to the North American Islamic Trust (NAIT). In July 2008 he spoke at a regional ISNA conference at which he stated that there are three sets of rules that American Muslims must follow, one of them being that *sharia* (Islamic law) is above laws of the land or organization. In the May/June 1986

issue of *Islamic Horizons*, Siddiqi wrote that Muslims have a duty to try to bring the country they live in to an Islamic state governed by religious doctrine:

Muslim jurists (*fuqaha'*), after careful consideration of various rules and principles of the Qur'an and *sunnah* [early Islamic traditions], said (several centuries ago), that in the world, there must exist two realms: Darul-Islam and Darul-kufr. Darul-Islam is the land where Islamic laws are applied, where Islam prevails in every aspect of life: social, economic, judicial, educational, political, national, and international. Everything is governed by Islam. Islam being a complete system of life, it gives guidance in every aspect of life and demands that every aspect be ruled and governed by the commands of Allah according to the *sunnah* of His Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Darul-Kufr, on the other hand, is a land where these principles are not accepted, where supremacy is not given to the laws of Allah and they are neither applied nor recognized in the lives of individuals or in society. A Muslim is, naturally, expected to reside in Darul-Islam. Wherever he is, he must try to establish Darul-Islam.

In the same article Siddiqi warned American Muslims that Islam was in danger of being diluted to a mere personal faith. "Islam is in danger of becoming a religion without *sharia* [religious law] just as Christianity is."

- Sayyid M. Syeed: an influential

member of ISNA's founding board of directors. He became ISNA's secretary-general in 1994 and kept the position until 2006 when he moved to head of ISNA's center for interfaith and community outreach. Previously he served as the secretary-general for the Association of Muslim Social Scientists, an ISNA constituent that is the fourth group mentioned on the Muslim Brotherhood's list of "our organization and the organizations of our friends", which was seized by federal investigators in the Holy Land Foundation case. While at ISNA he served on the executive boards of the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) [see CAMERA's Special Report "The Council on American Islamic Relations: Civil Rights or Extremism?"], a Muslim Brotherhood derivative, and the American Muslim Council (AMC). Syeed served on the board of advisory editors of the publication of the United Association for Studies and Research (UASR), the *Middle Eastern Affairs Journal*. Evidence in the HLF prosecution showed the UASR played a key role in the Muslim Brotherhood's U.S. support network for Hamas. All journal issues between 1993 and 2003 list Syeed on the masthead. In an interview with the *National Catholic Reporter*, Syeed was quoted comparing President Clinton's asset freeze on Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, banning financial support of the groups in 1995, to "another form of McCarthyism".

- Louay Safi directs the ISNA Leadership Development Center. He is also on the board of advisory editors for *Middle East Affairs Journal*.

Its editor, Ahmed Yousef, has served as spokesman for Hamas Prime Minister Ismael Haniyeh in the Gaza Strip. UASR was founded by Hamas political leader Mousa Abu Marzook and was a part of the Muslim Brotherhood-created Hamas support network in the United States. Safi was also the executive director and director of research at the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), which has been investigated for terror financing, including at least \$50,000 sent to a think-tank run by Palestinian Islamic Jihad board member Sami Al-Arian. Safi remains an unindicted co-conspirator in the prosecution of Al-Arian and can be heard in a 1995 telephone conversation intercepted by the FBI discussing with Al-Arian whether an executive order prohibiting financial transactions with terrorists would inhibit Al-Arian's work with PIJ. During the call Safi agreed with Al-Arian that "Zionists" controlled Washington. In support of *sharia*-mandate killings for those who leave Islam, Safi has said such slayings are "just punishment" if "the individual's desertion of Islam is used as a political tool for instigating a state of disorder, or revolting against the law of Islam. ("American Islamist Groups Shape Arab Revolutions," by David J. Rusin, *FrontPage Magazine*, July 31, 2012). He also became a representative of the Syrian National Council, a civilian umbrella group active in the revolt against Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad. According to Rusin, the SNC "is widely understood to be stacked with Islamists ...."

- Jamal Badawi: A member-at-large on

ISNA's board of directors. He was listed individually as an unindicted co-conspirator in the HLF trial, included among the individuals who allegedly raised money for the Hamas-tied charity. His number appears on the first page of a telephone book listing U.S.-based Muslim Brotherhood members submitted as evidence in the original HLF prosecution, which ended in a mistrial in November 2007. (The retrial in 2008 resulted in the convictions noted above.) Badawi was also a founding member of the Muslim American Society (MAS) a veritable arm of the Brotherhood in the United States. Abdurrahman Alamoudi was once one of the most politically influential Muslim Americans. He now is serving a 23-year prison sentence for acting as a financial courier in an international terrorism plot, having admitted to participating in an al Qaeda-inspired assassination plan. Alamoudi testified that "everyone knows that MAS is the Muslim Brotherhood" ("Enduring Link to ISNA Radical Past", Investigative Project on Terrorism News, May 8, 2012). In June 2006, Badawi led an Islamonline.net dialogue session called "Martyrdom in Islam: Let's discuss it." In the session, he compared Islamic suicide bombers to "freedom fighters" fighting Nazis or Japanese kamikaze pilots attacking Americans in World War II.

Former ISNA President Mattson discounted the possibility of homegrown terrorism

- ISNA Vice President Mohamed Magid downplayed the repression of largely black African Muslim

insurgents in the Darfur province that resulted in the deaths of several hundred thousand people and the displacement of several million. Magid claimed the Darfur genocide presided over by Sudan's Arab Islamist government was exaggerated and that "the word Arabs vs. Black African is a myth... what happened in this issue here, things escalated and people called it genocide. There is a fight, people have been displaced, people lost their homes and they need help but at the same time I want to say there is some kind of exaggeration of some of the problems".

- ISNA President Ingrid Mattson: As president from 2006-2010, Mattson discounted the existence of radical Islamists in the United States despite 2009's spike in homegrown extremism. The increase prompted anti-terrorism officials to label 2009 as the most dangerous year in the United States since 2001 ("Fear of Native Terror on Rise", *The Baltimore Sun*, Dec. 7, 2009). That year's rise of "lone wolf" terror operations included U.S. Army Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan, a Virginia-born psychiatrist, killing 13 people and wounding 29 others in a shooting at Fort Hood, apparently motivated by his Islamic extremist beliefs. Muslim convert Daniel Patrick Boyd's arrest for conspiring to support terrorists and kill combatants overseas and submitting false statements to customs and FBI agents regarding his travels to the Middle East was another 2009 "lone wolf" case. Prosecutors alleged that while overseas, Boyd

introduced young followers to a “life of martyrdom” (“From Suburban D.C. Childhood to Indictment on Terror Charges”, *The Washington Post*, July 29, 2009). As a professor of Islamic Studies at the Macdonald Center for Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations at Hartford Seminary, Mattson avoids criticizing Wahhabism. Rather than distancing the ISNA from Wahhabities, she publicly downplayed the school’s extremism. She has referred to Wahhabism as a “reform movement”, comparing its puritanical nature to the Protestant Reformation in Christianity. However, Wahhabi “reform” is anti-Western and religiously reactionary, close to if not the source of Islamic interpretations followed by Osama bin Laden and the 9/11 hijackers. Mattson has quoted the Malaysian Islamist Anwar Ibrahim who claimed that, “Bin Laden and his protégés are the children of desperation; they come from countries where political struggle through peaceful means is futile”(“Apologist or Extremist: Ingrid Mattson”, IPT, January 21, 2009). As a professor she has required her students to read Syed Abu’l-‘Ala Maududi’s *“The Meaning of the Qur’an”* and Sayyid Qutb’s *“In the Shade of the Qur’an”*. Maududi founded the Pakistani Islamist Party and Qutb was an anti-American, anti-Western, anti-Jewish Muslim Brotherhood ideologue executed by the Egyptian government in 1966. Qutb’s work has significantly influenced Sunni Muslim terrorism. Two weeks after 9/11 Mattson, then

Hamas leaders discussed using ISNA as a cover

ISNA vice president, asked reporters of religious news organizations to refrain from using the term “Islamic terrorism.”

## Ties with Hamas:

As noted above, federal prosecutors named ISNA an unindicted co-conspirator in the prosecution of five officials at the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development (HLF) that ended with guilty verdicts on 108 counts and prison terms for HLF leaders. Treasury and Justice department officials stated that the HLF, formerly the largest U.S. Muslim charitable organization, “masqueraded as a charity” but actually functioned to fund Hamas (“Terrorism Financing Case Back In Court”, *The Washington Post*, Sept. 21, 2008). The 1992 internal memo “Islamic Action for Palestine” submitted as evidence showed that HLF was a component of a broad Muslim Brotherhood conspiracy in the United States called the Palestine Committee, which served Hamas with “media, money and men.” ISNA is listed among “individuals/entities who are and/or were members of the U.S. Muslim Brotherhood”.

Financial ties between ISNA/NAIT and Hamas were chronicled in the first trial against the Holy Land Foundation. They included an expense voucher from NAIT for \$10,000 in the name of Mousa Abu Marzook. Another \$10,000 check on the same account was made out to Marzook’s wife, Nadia Elashi. Another check for \$30,000 was issued to the Islamic University of Gaza. The university is controlled by Hamas and employed former Hamas leader Dr. Abdel Aziz Rantissi, killed by Israeli forces in 2004, and current Hamas leader Dr. Mahmoud Al-Zahar as

professors. Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh was also a former dean at the Islamic University of Gaza.

During the original HLF prosecution, FBI agent Lara Burns testified about a telephone book of U.S.-based Muslim Brotherhood members found at the home of Ismail Elbarrasse, an unindicted co-conspirator and former assistant to Hamas leader Abu Marzook. On the first page of the phonebook under the title "Members of the Board of Directors" were 15 names. Among these are Ahmad Elkadi, Gadoor Saidi and Bassam Othman, all of whom were officers with ISNA or NAIT. Ahmad Elkadi, who is described as a "keen supporter of ISNA" on the society's web site ([www.ISNA.net](http://www.ISNA.net)), confessed to *The Chicago Tribune* ("A Rare Look at Secretive Brotherhood in America," Sept. 19, 2004) that from 1984-1994 he was the leader of the Brotherhood in the United States. Elkadi served on ISNA's executive council in 1984.

FBI surveillance transcripts of a 1993 meeting among Hamas leaders in Philadelphia at which attendees candidly discussed the use of ISNA as an official cover for their activities also were submitted into evidence by Burns (HLF Transcripts Burns 10-07-08). Defendant Shukri Abu Baker, HLF co-founder and CEO, is quoted on the wiretap transcript advising that it would be beneficial to have more traditional and secular American organizations to spread the Islamist message. According to the transcript, Baker and his associates envisioned an "alternative" organization "which can benefit from a new atmosphere, one whose Islamic hue is not very conspicuous." ISNA never argued that the evidence submitted in the HLF trial was "inauthentic." Instead, the society claimed that it was outdated.

ISNA never has renounced publicly terrorist groups such as Hamas or Hezbollah. In 1997 after Hamas officially was designated a terrorist organization by the U.S. government, Hamas leader Abu Marzook thanked ISNA in writing for supporting him through his "ordeal." Marzook had been detained at New York's JFK airport in 1995 and arrested after Israel sought his extradition. The ISNA also rallied to raise money for the once and future Hamas leader following his arrest. Abu Marzook wrote that ISNA's efforts had "consoled" him ("ISNA Admits Hamas Ties", *IPT News*, July 25, 2008). Abu Marzook was deported by the United States to Jordan in 1997 and rejoined Hamas' leadership in Syria, later moving to Egypt.

## Meetings and Speakers

ISNA-sponsored events often host speakers from other Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated groups. These speakers chronically distort facts, rationalize terror, and promote an Islamist agenda. Groups represented include: Muslim Students Association (MSA), the Muslim American Society (MAS), the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT).

FBI agents concluded that IIIT board members Jamal Barzinji and Yaqub Mirza were among "members and leaders of the Ikhwan [Muslim Brotherhood]" and that the IIIT itself was a Brotherhood arm. Still, ISNA maintains that its conventions are meant to be a "meeting place of people and ideas" to build "bridges of understanding and cooperation within the diversity that is Islam in America". Government agencies such as the FBI, departments of Justice, State and Homeland Security sponsor information booths and speakers at ISNA's annual conventions.

### **49th ISNA annual convention:**

Washington, D.C.

- ISNA announced that Rachid Ghannouchi, co-founder of Tunisia's Islamist Ennahda Party, was scheduled to speak at its annual convention in Washington, D.C. from August 31 to September 3, 2012. The Ennahda Party platform declares Israel an "alien entity planted in the heart of the homeland, which constitutes an obstacle to unity." In the past Ghannouchi has asserted, "there are no civilians in Israel. The population—males, females and children—are the army reserve soldiers, and thus can be killed." In 2002, he signed a joint statement with Hamas, Hezbollah and the Muslim Brotherhood endorsing jihad against "Zionists" that seek to "destroy the entire Islamic ummah [community of believers]".

### **ISNA 48th annual convention:**

Chicago, Illinois

- Yasir Qadhi led a forum, "Empowerment Through Engagement: Creating A Wholeness Society" at ISNA's 2011 national convention. A Holocaust denier, Qadhi recommended at his forum a book entitled, *The Hoax of the Holocaust*, and stated that the Jews "...want to destroy us."

### **ISNA 46th annual convention:**

Washington, D.C.

- Warith Deen Umar promoted his books on alleged Jewish conspiracies at ISNA's 2009 convention and advocated "more jihad." Umar also argued that Hurricane Katrina was a part of

God's wrath for turning against His laws by tolerating homosexuality. Umar's books were available for purchase at the convention.

### **45th ISNA annual convention:**

Columbus, Ohio

- Rick Hannis, a member of the Christian Peacemakers team, described the "amazing work" Hamas does in West Bank education and health care and the supposedly non-violent leaders of that organization. "Now most people only know about the militant part of Hamas. They don't know about the education or health care issues in the West Bank part. It really does amazing work".
- Hatem Bazian: a professor of Near Eastern Studies at the University of California Berkley blamed Palestinian terrorism on Israel. "The violence is not a genetic motivation or genetically defined in the Palestinians. The Palestinians don't wake up in the morning and think, 'Yeah, I'm inclined towards violence.' The Palestinians when they woke up they see that their land has been taken from underneath them, that they have to go through five or six checkpoints before they get to go to school, that they are no longer able to use the hospital, that they are seeing a new settlement being built every other day, and they wake up in the morning and see that it's a land grab day, all these factors, including the diminishing return of the so-called peace process."
- Jamal Dajani: panel moderator... "Palestinians are sick and tired

of dialogue. I mean they've been listening to dialogue for six decades. It is great to have people from different places and come and interfere and put themselves between the occupier and the victim, and Palestinians listening to promises, and they see their future disappear right in front of their eyes."

- Siraj Wahhaj, an unindicted co-conspirator in the 1993 World Trade Center (WTC) bombing, defended the convicted WTC bombers. Wahhaj was invited as an ISNA event main speaker. He contemplated an Islamic takeover of America, saying, "If only Muslims were clever politically, they could take over the United States and replace its constitutional government with a caliphate. If we were united and strong, we would elect our own emir and give allegiance to him. Take my word, if eight million Muslims unite in America, the country will come to us". [The "eight million" American Muslim figure, repeated by some, is significantly inflated according to several demographic surveys. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, projected 2.6 Muslims in the United States in 2010, approximately 0.8 percent of the population.]
- Hamza Yusuf Hanson, a main session speaker at ISNA's 2008 convention, also spoke at ISNA's 1995 annual convention, saying "the Jews would have us believe that God has this bias to this little small tribe in the middle of the Sinai desert and all the rest of humanity is just rubbish. I mean that this is the

basic doctrine of the Jewish religion and that's why it is a most racist religion". The conference theme was "Recapturing the spirit of Islam."

#### **44th ISNA annual convention:**

Rosemont, Illinois

- Parvez Ahmed: former national chairman of CAIR, defended "resistance" to occupation and tried to distinguish between terrorist groups like al-Qaeda and groups that also incorporate political sections such as Hamas and Hezbollah.

#### **43rd ISNA annual convention:**

Chicago, Illinois

- Kamran Memon, an attorney from Muslims for a Safe America rationalized al Qaeda's actions at ISNA's 2006 convention by saying: "some Muslims in the Muslim world decided that they were just not going to take it anymore. They were angry with our ongoing support for their enemies, so they began to attack American targets to pressure our government to change its foreign policy. ... But the U.S. government did not change its foreign policy, so those Muslims who decided that they weren't going to take it anymore attacked America on September 11th."

#### **ISNA Diversity Forum:**

January 14- January 16, 2011

- Imam Siraj Wahhaj, the CAIR advisory board member and unindicted co-conspirator in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, has been a speaker for ISNA's annual conventions and was a key speaker for the society's 2011 Diversity Forum. In the past Wahhaj

has referred to Osama bin-Laden's involvement in the 9/11 terrorist attacks saying, "I'm just not so sure I want to be one of the ones who say, yeah, he did it, he's a horrible man", in spite of bin-Laden's video pronouncements claiming responsibility for the attacks.

ISNA's pre-convention vendor statement requires all convention literature "must be pre-approved in writing by ISNA, in ISNA's sole and absolute discretion. Book selling vendors must complete enclosed form providing inventory of the literature to be sold at ISNA." Books and pamphlets obtained by the Investigative Project on Terrorism from ISNA's 2009 national convention show several works that met approval under "ISNA's sole and absolute discretion" including:

- *The Palestinians' Holocaust: American Perspectives* by Mauri' Saalakhan; a collection of essays that compares Nazi concentration camps to the Gaza Strip under Israeli control, deems the genocide in Darfur exaggerated and a consequence of Israeli provocation, and calls America's "Jewish-Zionist lobby" pervasive. This allegedly included control of U.S. Rep. Keith Ellison (D-Minn.), the first Muslim elected to Congress. In the chapter, "The Zionist Footprint in Iraq, Somalia, and Sudan," Saalakhan blames Israel for the U.S. invasion of Iraq:

"How does Israel factor into the equation? It is a known fact that Israel has a strong presence in different parts of the continent – especially in the Horn of Africa.

It is also a well-known fact that Israel – like the Islamophobes at the highest levels of the U.S. government – desire nothing more than controlled chaos in the Muslim world. This was the first thought that came to this writer's mind when Ethiopia (and the U.S.) attacked Somalia in December 2006";

- Leaflets condemning the federal convictions of five former Holy Land Foundation officials, convictions against the "Fort Dix Five" on charges of conspiring to kill U.S. soldiers, and the prosecution of al-Qaeda terrorist Aafia Siddiqui;
- Literature from the Muslim Legal Fund of America seeking donations for Siddiqui's defense fund. Siddiqui was charged with plotting to kill American soldiers and federal agents in Afghanistan;
- Reprints of letters from Hamas leaders Mousa abu Marzook and Ahmad Yousef stating the terrorist group's positions toward the United States and its refusal to recognize Israel's right to exist; and
- An essay by Laila Al-Arian, daughter of Palestinian Islamic Jihad board member Sami Al-Arian, describing the "chilling effect" the HLF verdict would have on the Muslim community: "With its propaganda-like quality, the evidence was clearly intended to provoke an emotional response. For example, jurors were repeatedly shown videos of grisly suicide bombings that none of the defendants were in any way connected to, or accused of

planning.”

## Interfaith and Outreach

ISNA publishes *Islamic Horizons*, described as a news and information magazine that purportedly is read by 250,000 people. *Islamic Horizons'* November/December 1995 issue featured an article titled, “Muslim Leader Hostage to Israeli Interests.” The leader, Abu Marzook, was characterized by the ISNA as a “member of the political wing of Hamas, disliked by the Zionist entity for its Islamic orientation, [who] continues to be held hostage in the U.S. at the whims of his Zionist accusers.” Hamas, as former U.S. Treasury official Matthew Levitt has noted, is a terrorist political and social organization whose “wings” are not separate but rather complementary parts of the movement’s structure. Hamas attacks, including suicide bombings, have been responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Israelis and foreign visitors.

In 2009, 28 imams and rabbis from 10 European countries visited New York and Washington to combat “Islamophobia” and break new ground on Muslim-Jewish relations. ISNA’s national director of interfaith and community alliances was one of three hosts. ISNA also mounted an unprecedented outreach to American Christians and Jews at its annual conference earlier that month by sponsoring a private interfaith reception for 400 leaders from various religions. ISNA spokesman Mohamed Elsanousi explained, “Muslims feel proud to welcome people of other faiths”.

As the primary endorser of Muslim chaplains assigned to federal prisons, ISNA selected imams to serve Muslim inmates. In April 2004 the Department of Justice’s Office of the

Inspector General issued a statement that, due to radical Islamic preaching within American penitentiaries, the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) would need to reevaluate its approved imams and reconsider the organizations that endorsed them. The ISNA and the GSISS’s [Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences] relationship to the BOP came under scrutiny after the Feb. 5, 2003 *Wall Street Journal* article “How a Muslim Chaplain Spread Extremism to Inmate Flock” reported that Warith Deen Umar, a Bureau of Prisons Muslim contractor and formerly a chaplain for the New York State Department of Corrections, defended the 9/11 terrorist attacks and supported terrorism. As noted above, he is the author of books promoting anti-Jewish conspiracy theories that have been sold at ISNA conventions. *The Journal* quoted Umar’s unpublished memoir praising the 9/11 hijackers, which claimed that, “even Muslims who say they are against terrorism secretly admire and applaud [the hijackers]”. As a prison chaplain for the nation’s fourth-largest state system since 1975, Umar’s Wahhabi teachings adopted a literal interpretation of the Quran and did not condemn terrorism against purported oppressors of Muslims, even if innocent people died as well.

In 2009, Dave Gaubatz, a former U.S. Air Force Office of Special Investigations agent, tried to enter an ISNA convention after registering and paying the fee. Upon his entrance Gaubatz was swarmed by ISNA personnel. One stated, “CAIR wants you out.” Gaubatz, the first federal agent in Iraq in 2003, returned to his car and was met by police officers carrying three photos of him. Provided by CAIR, the pictures show Gaubatz in Iraq holding guns and one with his face

superimposed onto a Nazi uniform.

Gaubatz was the senior project leader of the Mapping Sharia Project and claims to have conducted undercover investigations in more than 200 mosques. Later in 2009 Gaubatz's *Muslim Mafia: Inside the Secret Underworld That's Conspiring to Islamize America*, co-authored by Paul Sperry, was published. The book describes CAIR as a subversive organization connected to international terrorists. Gaubatz used material acquired by his son, Chris, who obtained an internship with CAIR. Chris Gaubatz wore an audio-video recorder on his clothing daily and took documents that he believed contained evidence of crimes committed by CAIR, such as violations of the Foreign Agent Registration Act and providing material support to terrorist organizations.

In 2010, American Muslims increased security at mosques, sought help from leaders of other faiths and aired ads emphasizing their loyalty to the United States in advance of the 10th anniversary of 9/11. ISNA held a meeting of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish leaders in Washington "to address the growing tide of fear and intolerance" ("U.S. Muslims Take Precautions for 9/11 Anniversary" *The Washington Times*, September 5, 2010). The insinuation of rising "Islamophobia"—used preemptorily by CAIR and others to deflect scrutiny of Islamic extremism in the United States—was belied, however, by federal crime tallies such as the FBI's 2009 annual Hate Crime Statistics. These reported that 71.9 percent of religiously motivated hate crimes targeted Jews and 71.5 percent of racially motivated offenders were anti-black. The statistics indicated no significant anti-Muslim upsurge in America.

One hundred and twenty five Muslims, Christians, and Jews gathered to discuss how to bring peace to the Middle East in connection with World Interfaith Week in 2011. ISNA's Sayyid Syeed was included as a speaker. Mohamed Magid [now ISNA's president] said, "Islam is a religion of peace, but unless people see more of our work, it will remain only a slogan. ... Your presence here today is a testament to our commitment to peace and dialogue."

ISNA's Muneer Fared criticized U.S. Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) for using the term "Islamic extremism". Fared argued, "If it's not our intent to paint everyone with the same brush then certainly we should think seriously about just characterizing them as criminals, because that is what they are." However, a 2008 U.S. Armed Forces Central Command "Red Team" report argued that divorcing Islamic influences from jihadist terrorism is a mistake ("Obama, Petraeus at Odds on 'Islam'", *The Washington Times*, July 12, 2010).

## Government Ties

In 2005, during her confirmation hearing for secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice commented that the United States previously "didn't understand, really, the structure of terrorist financing very well. We didn't understand the role of non-governmental organizations that sounded like they were for good purposes but were, in fact, carrying out or funding terrorist activities."

In 2009, Linda Douglass, a spokeswoman for President Obama's inaugural committee, described then-ISNA President Ingrid Mattson as having a "stellar reputation in

the faith community.” Douglas was explaining Mattson’s invitation to speak at President-elect Barack Obama’s inaugural prayer service, despite allegations that ISNA had ties to terrorists (“Prayer Speaker Linked to Hamas”, *Associated Press*, Jan. 18, 2009). Mattson has been the guest of honor at State Department dinners and spoken at a prayer service at the 2008 Democratic National Convention. Mattson and the ISNA were not indicted in the HLF case but prosecutors maintained they had “a wide array of testimonial and documentary evidence expressly linking” the society to Hamas and other radical Muslim organizations.

As noted above, federal agencies such as the FBI, departments of Justice, State and Homeland Security have participated in ISNA’s annual conventions. In 2009, the FBI decided to use ISNA as its “official point of contact with the American Muslim community”, according to the Investigative Project on Terrorism. The decision to make the ISNA the FBI’s endorsed contact point came over objections of case agents and supervisors investigating Muslim Brotherhood activity in the United States. In 2011 the FBI severed ties with ISNA’s fellow HLF unindicted co-conspirator CAIR after trial evidence questioned “whether there continues to be a connection between CAIR or its executives and Hamas.” (“FBI Replaces Brotherhood-Tainted Liaison with Brotherhood-Tainted Liaison”, IPT News, June 25, 2009).

In 2011, Department of Justice officials prevented the prosecution of unindicted co-conspirators in the HLF case, including ISNA. U.S. Attorney-General Eric Holder explained the decision to decline prosecutions by defending the Justice Department’s

“outreach” to Muslim groups. U.S. attorneys in Dallas reportedly were in favor of moving forward with a second round of post-HLF prosecutions (“Holder Admits DOJ Dumped CAIR Case”, *The National Review*, April 27, 2011). House Homeland Security Committee Chairman Peter King (R-NY) responded to Holder’s decision in a letter charging that “the decision not to seek indictments of the Council on American Islamic Relations (“CAIR”) and its co-founder Omar Ahmad, the Islamic Society of North America (“ISNA”), and the North American Islamic Trust (“NAIT”), was usurped by high-ranking officials at Department of Justice headquarters over the vehement and stated objections of special agents and supervisors of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, as well as the prosecutors at the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Dallas, who had investigated and successfully prosecuted the Holy Land Foundation case. Their opposition to this decision raises serious doubt that the decision not to prosecute was a valid exercise of prosecutorial discretion” (“Rep. Peter King Seeks Answers on DOJ Decision Not to Prosecute Islamists”, *National Review Online*, April 18, 2011).

In July, 2012 U.S. Reps Michele Bachmann (R-Minn.), Trent Franks (R-Ariz.), Louie Gohmert (R-Texas), Thomas Rooney (R-Fla.), and Lynn Westmoreland (R-Ga.) asked for investigations to determine if Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s deputy chief of staff Hama Abedin had undergone appropriate security clearance vetting. (“Boehner Decries ‘Dangerous’ Accusations”, *The Baltimore Sun*, July 20, 2012). Responding to criticisms of “McCarthyite” tactics of guilt by association, including from Republican Party leaders, Rep. Bachmann asserted

that Abedin obtained a high clearance despite her late father's, mother's, and brother's ties to the Muslim Brotherhood. Abedin's mother, Saleha Abedin, reportedly is co-leader of the Brotherhood's secretive women's auxiliary with Naglaa Mahmoud, wife of new Egyptian president and former Brotherhood senior official Mohammad Morsi. Rep. Bachmann said that she did not accuse Abedin of working on behalf of the Brotherhood but instead questioned whether the State Department issued her a security clearance without proper scrutiny ("Bachmann Accuses Muslim House Member of Brotherhood Ties", *USA Today*, July 20, 2012).

## Conclusion

In "The Muslim-American Muddle" (*National Affairs*, Fall, 2011) Peter Skerry, professor of political science at Boston College and a senior fellow at both Duke University's Kenan Institute for Ethics and the Brookings Institution, wrote that ISNA was "one of several national organizations dominating the political space of the Muslim-American mainstream." The others included CAIR, the Muslim American Society, Muslim Public Affairs Council and Islamic Circle of North America. All were "initiated and shaped by Islamists" but, according to Skerry, have since differed and evolved.

He says a recent Gallup survey indicates that "only a small segment of American Muslims (12 percent, at most) regard any of these organizations as representing their interests. Nevertheless, these groups define and articulate the Muslim-American agenda and they are where non-Muslim elites in the media, the government and the academy turn

for Muslim interlocutors."

This CAMERA Special Report argues that when members of the news media turn to ISNA, a more rigorous approach is required. ISNA sends mixed signals. Despite its public rejection of radical ideologies, the society has featured relationships with extremist leaders and organizations since its inception. The society has failed to renounce Hamas and Hezbollah and has accepted Saudi financial patronage. At least in speakers and material featured at annual conventions and other events, ISNA has tolerated antisemitism and maintained ties with Muslim Brotherhood figures and front groups.

The Brotherhood, as former U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross has written, "has an anti-Western, anti-Israeli, pan-Islamic ideology. It is a highly disciplined organization with a dictatorial bent that believes Islam must be the center of all life, including political life" (*USA Today*, June 13, 2012).

It is difficult to envision U.S. Catholic, Protestant or Jewish organizations with similarly extremist roots and continuing associations receiving such generally uncritical coverage as has frequently been the case with ISNA. Future reporting about the society, the United States' largest and one of its more influential Muslim-American organizations, requires a higher level of due diligence.

*Erin Dwyer is CAMERA's summer 2012 Washington research intern. Eric Rozenman is the committee's Washington director. Traci Siegel and Joseph Brewer, previous research interns, also contributed to this Special Report.*





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](http://www.camera.org)