



Jail Time for Jihadists

Posted GMT 5-29-2009 15:55:32

In a major blow to terrorism financing on American soil, the founders of the Holy Land Foundation, once the nation's largest Muslim charity, were both sentenced this week to sixty-five years in prison for funneling at least \$12.4 million in charitable contributions to the terrorist group Hamas. The decision, which can still be challenged by appeal, also has important implications for the nation's most prominent Islamic organization, the Council on American-Islamic Relations, as well as for American Muslims in general.

The HLF founders, Shukri Abu Baker and Ghassan Elashi, were convicted in November 2008 of aiding a terrorist organization by sending money to Hamas. The two were also convicted of tax fraud and money laundering.

Nevertheless, the defendants maintained that the HLF was really a charity organization. So far from funding terrorism, they were distributing urgent financial aid to needy individuals and orphans in the West Bank and Gaza -- a claim that reprised the now-defunct HLF's purported mission of aiding "human suffering through humanitarian programs that impact the lives of the disadvantaged."

This week's sentencing was the strongest rejection to date of the HLF defendants' "humanitarian" cover story. As David Kris, assistant attorney general for national security, put it, "These sentences should serve as a strong warning to anyone who knowingly provides financial support to terrorists under the guise of humanitarian relief."

It's not clear, however, that some Muslims close to the case have gotten the message. Instead of reacting with revulsion at the idea of a Muslim charity aiding a group that glories in the murder of Israeli civilians, they have tried to portray the defendants as the real victims.

Abu Baker's daughter, Zaira Abu Baker, sounded the notes of victimization that Islamic jihadists and their allies invariably sound when found guilty of aiding the spread of jihad and Islamic supremacism. "I've been with my dad 100 percent of the way," she said. "I saw the work he did. He devoted his life to helping needy children. But after 9/11, I guess, there's hysteria. They pick and choose people, and unfortunately it's us."

Another defendant, Mufid Abdulqader, who received a twenty-year sentence, also claimed victim status. "I never imagined," he complained, "I'd be put in jail for taking people out of their jail of poverty and starvation."

Still other defendants, in an appeal for leniency, told their life stories before their sentences were handed down.

However, if their intention was to distract the focus from their involvement in financing terrorism, they did not succeed. U.S. District Judge Jorge Solis would have none of it. "You weren't convicted of singing," he told Abdulqader. "You weren't convicted of freedom of expression. You were convicted of supporting Hamas."

This week's sentencing also draws attention to several other Islamic organizations associated with the HLF defendants. Besides working with the HLF, Ghassan Elashi was the founder of the Texas chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations. His HLF conviction is his third: In July 2004 Elashi was convicted of shipping computers illegally to two state-sponsors of terrorism, Libya and Syria. Then, in April 2005, he was convicted of knowingly doing business with Mousa Abu Marzook, the senior Hamas leader who founded the Islamic Association for Palestine, CAIR's parent group. In that case, Elashi was convicted on a number of charges, including conspiracy and money laundering.

So, how has CAIR explained its ties to Elashi? It hasn't. Instead, it has tried to claim that any attempt to connect the group with its prominent former member is guilt by association. Thus, CAIR claims that it has "hundreds of board members and employees and some 50,000 members. It would be illogical and unfair to hold CAIR responsible for the personal activities of all these people. The fact that Elashi was once associated with one of our more than thirty regional chapters has no legal significance to our corporation given the fact that any actions taken by him were outside the scope and chronology of his association with one of our chapters."

This wording is interesting. It seems that Elashi's association with CAIR has no "legal significance" for the organization, "given the fact that any actions taken by him were outside the scope and chronology of his association with one of our chapters." This seems to be a way of saying that CAIR bears no legal responsibility for Elashi's activities and cannot be included in his prosecution.

Assyrian International News Agency

That is fair enough. But conspicuously unstated is any condemnation of Elashi's actions in support of Hamas, or of the philosophy underlying those actions. And since Elashi was doing business with Marzook, who founded IAP, CAIR's parent organization, it is in no sense wild speculation to consider the possibility that Elashi's actions were consistent with, rather than contradictory to, CAIR's actual purposes in the United States.

CAIR's strangely worded disavowal of Elashi only raises more questions. Will CAIR clear up those questions in the wake of the stiff sentences Elashi and his colleagues have now received? More broadly, will Muslims in America finally begin to back up their condemnations of terrorism with actual deeds, working to teach against the jihadist doctrines that led the HLF to fund Hamas in the first place, and to make sure that existing Islamic charities are free of the slightest taint of connection to jihad terrorist groups or allegiance to their ideology? This week's sentencing decisively settled any lingering questions about the HLF defendants' guilt. But for now, these broader questions remain unanswered.

By Robert Spencer
FrontPageMagazine.com

© 2011, Assyrian International News Agency. All Rights Reserved. [Terms of Use.](#)