

Friends of Hamas in the White House

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By STEVEN EMERSON

In response to the terrorist carnage committed by Hamas in Israel, President Clinton has organized an anti-terrorist summit in Egypt to begin today. But other participants at the conference, and the American public as well, might be a bit surprised to learn that both the president and first lady have closely embraced an Islamic fundamentalist group in the U.S. that champions and supports Hamas. This group also openly supports, lobbies for, and defends other Islamic terrorist groups.

The contacts between the White House and the Islamic radicals began on Nov. 9, 1995, when President Clinton and Vice President Al Gore met with Abdulrahman Alamoudi, executive director of the American Muslim Council, as part of a meeting with 23 Muslim and Arab leaders. A month later, on Dec. 8, Mr. Clinton's national security adviser, Anthony Lake, met with Mr. Alamoudi at the White House along with several AMC board members and other American Islamic leaders. By Feb. 20, Mrs. Clinton was allowing the AMC to draw up the Muslim guest list for the first lady's historic White House reception marking the end of Ramadan. One person familiar with the situation says that Mrs. Clinton's syndicated newspaper column of Feb. 8, "Islam in America," was based on "talking points" provided by the AMC.

'A Radical Group'

"The American Muslim Council is a radical group that supports radical Islamic terrorist movements," says Seif Ashmawy, the American Muslim publisher of the Voice of Peace in New Jersey. "I am shocked and outraged that the White House would embrace them. As someone who has put his life on the line for peace, and as someone who has been willing to unequivocally condemn militant Islamic groups, I feel totally betrayed by the Clinton administration."

A detailed investigation of public records, international Islamic publications, intelligence material collected by law enforcement, and proceedings of various Islamic conferences shows AMC's consistent record of support for radical Islamic groups. Most glaring are the ties between the AMC and Hamas.

In public interviews given during the last two years, Mr. Alamoudi has repeatedly asserted that Hamas is not a terrorist organization. At an April 1995 press conference denouncing the Clinton administration's proposed counter-terrorism legislation, Mr. Alamoudi angrily dismissed suggestions that Hamas was a terrorist

group. That same month, in AMC's monthly newsletter, AMC president M.A. Cheema declared, "Yasir Arafat does not represent the Palestinian any longer. Palestinians are now following Hamas. Israel must talk to Hamas."

Months later, Mr. Alamoudi emerged as the primary defender of Musa Abu Marzuq, the Hamas political bureau chief responsible for creating the group's death squads, whose handiwork was seen in the last three weeks in Israel. Immediately following an October 1994 attack in which Hamas brigades sprayed machine gun fire in a crowded downtown Jerusalem

tion's officials were in contact with Mohammed Saleh, a Hamas official who was convicted for his role in the World Trade Center conspiracy. In one 1993 conference jointly sponsored by the AMC and the United Association in Washington, Mr. Alamoudi even extended a warm introduction to the United Association's director, Ahmed bin Yusef, one of Hamas's chief ideologues who has called for the destruction of Israel.

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mall, Mr. Marzuq took credit for the attack on behalf of Hamas. He told the Beirut publication al-Ahd that "martyrdom is the goal of every Muslim, and death represents the ideal wish of the mujahid [holy warrior] of the land of Palestine."

Less than three days after Mr. Marzuq's arrest by the FBI in July 1995, Mr. Alamoudi of the AMC came to his defense. Asserting that Mr. Marzuq had never been involved in terrorism, Mr. Alamoudi declared that his arrest was a "insult to the Muslim community." According to U.S. law enforcement officials, Mr. Alamoudi has elicited contributions for Mr. Marzuq's defense fund. He's also demanded that the Clinton administration release Mr. Marzuq, whom he described to a reporter as a "political prisoner."

That's not the only connection between the American Muslim Council and Islamic militants. Both Mr. Alamoudi and Mr. Marzuq were speakers at a June 1991 conference in Northern Virginia that brought together senior Islamic militants from throughout the Middle East. At this conference, many of the speakers assailed the "Zionist entity that aims to destroy the Muslim ummah [community]."

And the AMC has co-sponsored several conferences and events in the U.S. with the United Association for Studies and Research. Founded by Mr. Marzuq in 1989, the United Association serves as Hamas's support arm in the U.S. Now located in Northern Virginia, the group has published books (in Arabic) calling for the annihilation of Jews. Moreover, telephone records subpoenaed for the World Trade Center trial show that the United Associa-

tion's officials were in contact with Mohammed Saleh, a Hamas official who was convicted for his role in the World Trade Center conspiracy. In one 1993 conference jointly sponsored by the AMC and the United Association in Washington, Mr. Alamoudi even extended a warm introduction to the United Association's director, Ahmed bin Yusef, one of Hamas's chief ideologues who has called for the destruction of Israel.

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In addition, the AMC has established a special relationship with the Sudanese government of Hasan Al-Turabi, who has made his country an international training ground for Islamic terrorists. In 1992, AMC boasted in its newsletter that the group had "planned a highly successful visit for Hasan Al-Turabi from the Sudan." In April 1994, almost a year after Sudan was officially designated a terrorist regime by the State Department, the AMC, together with another Hamas front group known as the Council on American Islamic Relations, co-hosted a press conference for the Sudanese foreign minister in the U.S.

The AMC has dismissed any allegation that it collaborates with known terrorist groups, claiming that it has issued statements condemning terrorist attacks like the recent suicide bombings in Israel. Yet the AMC statement doesn't mention Hamas. In fact, a review of AMC statements condemning earlier Islamic terrorist attacks reveals that the AMC has never criticized by name any Islamic terrorist group. "If you aren't willing to name the group that did the bombing," says former FBI official Oliver Revell, "your statement isn't worth the paper it's written on."

Far from joining the anti-terrorist fight, the AMC makes excuses for Islamic

terrorists. After the conviction of the World Trade Center bombers, Mr. Alamoudi wrote in his newsletter that the prosecutor "went out of his way to punish the defendants harshly and with vengeance, and to a large extent because they were Muslim." AMC's tactic of claiming anti-Muslim racism rather than acknowledging the existence of Islamic extremism deliberately serves to silence criticism of terrorists.

Interestingly, the AMC often criticizes the Clinton administration, even though the administration has been friendly with the group. In 1993, the AMC attacked President Clinton's meeting with Salman Rushdie as a "disregard for the feelings of seven million American Muslims and a fifth of the population of this planet." After Warren Christopher called in October 1994 for shutting down foreign supporters of Mideast terrorism, Mr. Alamoudi said the secretary of state was "encourag[ing] a witch-hunt of law-abiding Muslims." Three months later, in January 1995, when President Clinton issued an executive order freezing the assets of 18 Muslim and Jewish terrorist groups, Mr. Alamoudi blasted the president for his "anti-Muslim" actions. (Curiously, even as federal investigators had begun making headway last fall in identifying U.S. terrorist front groups, federal counter-terrorism officials say that the recommendations were shelved at the White House.)

Head in the Sand

Yet the White House insists on adopting a head-in-the-sand attitude about a group that it is publicly embracing. Asked two weeks ago by a reporter for the Washington Jewish Week whether the White House was aware of any links between AMC and terrorist groups, Neal Lattimore, deputy press secretary for the first lady, said, "There are so many groups linked to one group or another. Looking into such allegations was not something that was on our agenda."

The president is right to invite Muslim groups to the White House. But by inviting the extremist element of the American Muslim community—represented by the AMC—the administration undercuts moderate Muslims and strengthens the groups committing terrorist attacks. "I would give my life for this country," says Seif Ashmawy of the Voice of Peace, "but if the president of the United States plays ball with terrorists, then what's the use?"

Mr. Emerson was the producer of the PBS documentary "Jihad in America."
