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FBI: CAIR is a front group, and Holy Land Foundation tapped Hamas clerics for fundraisers

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By [jatrahan](#)

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The FBI took a new slap at the [Council on American-Islamic Relations](#) today at the Holy Land Foundation terrorism financing trial.

FBI Special Agent Lara Burns was going over more transcripts from the Philadelphia meeting — the 1993 gathering of Holy Land officials and Hamas sympathizers that the government contends was meant to brainstorm ways to downplay the Foundation’s extremist ties — when talk turned to a passage from defendant Shukri Abu Baker.

He is quoted on the wiretap transcript talking about how it would be beneficial to have more traditional, secular American organizations to help spread the Islamist message.

He and others envisioned an “alternative” organization “which can benefit from a new atmosphere, one whose Islamic hue is not very conspicuous,” he said according to the transcript.

Prosecutor Barry Jonas asked Burns whether any groups formed after the Philadelphia gathering fit this mold. “CAIR,” she said.



CAIR is one of about 300 unindicted co-conspirators in the Holy Land case, and testimony has shown that its founder, Omar Ahmad, and current executive director, Nihad Awad, both participated in the Philadelphia meeting.

CAIR [has strenuously denied having any terrorist ties](#), and [has filed a request — similar to other groups — to have its name removed from the government's list of co-conspirators](#). CAIR maintains that it is a civil rights group focused on promoting understanding of Islam and combating unfair treatment of American Muslims.

Joshua Dratel, attorney for defendant Mohammad El-Mezain, later grilled Burns on her CAIR testimony.

“Just to be sure,” he said, raising up a large posterboard with the name “Council on American-Islamic Relations” scrawled across it, “this is the one with the inconspicuous Islamist hue?”

+ Later Tuesday, Burns' counterpart, FBI Special Agent Robert Miranda, began his testimony detailing the type of people Holy Land routinely called on to speak at its fundraisers in the U.S.

He and prosecutor Jim Jacks went through a list of Holy Land speakers, seized from a computer at its Richardson offices in 2001, and compared it to lists of known Hamas members and associates.

They found dozens of matches of names and phone numbers among Holy Land speakers and a roster of Hamas members found at the Mississippi apartment of unindicted coconspirator Abdelhaleem Ashqar. Holy Land speakers' names also showed up in the address book of Hamas leader Mousa Abu Marzook, who has extensive ties financially and personally to many of the defendants.

Defense attorneys and their clients grinned and looked at each other every time Miranda referred to the owner of the address book as “the terrorist Marzook.”

Among those on Holy Land's speakers list are Mahmoud al-Zahar (a Hamas co-founder), Jamil Hamami, Mohammed Siam and Hamed Bitawi. All of them are listed on a huge chart prosecutors made for jurors titled “Hamas Leaders In The 1990s.”

The Holy Land speakers list also shared some names in a pamphlet outlining the roster of candidates for Jordan's Islamic Action Front political party. The group is, like Hamas, an offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Miranda testified. Their platform, according to the pamphlet, says basically that Palestine must be wrested from Israeli occupation through jihad. The FBI found the pamphlet at Holy Land's offices.

Miranda and Jacks then began going through speaker activity sheets and other records, connecting fundraising appearances by these Hamas-affiliated speakers and money in Holy Land coffers.

Miranda's testimony resumes Wednesday.

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