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Profile: Jamal Barzinji

Jamal Barzinji was a participant or observer in the following events:

March 20, 2002: SAAR Network Is Raided



US Customs Agents carry out boxes of evidence from SAAR network businesses on March 20, 2002. [Source: Mike Theiler/ Getty Images] Scores of federal agents raid 14 entities in a cluster of more than 100 homes, charities, think tanks, and businesses in Herndon, Virginia, a town just outside of Washington with a large Muslim population. No arrests are made and no organizations are shut down, but over 500 boxes of files and computer files are confiscated, filling seven trucks. This group of interlocking entities is widely known as the SAAR network (it is also sometimes called the Safa Group). SAAR stands for Sulaiman Abdul Aziz al-Rajhi, a Saudi banker and billionaire who largely funded the group beginning in the early 1980s (see July 29, 1983). He is said to be close to the Saudi ruling family and is on the Golden Chain, a list of early al-Qaeda supporters (see 1988-1989). [NEW YORK TIMES, 3/21/2002; FARAH, 2004, PP. 152; WALL STREET JOURNAL, 6/21/2004] The name and address of Salah al-Rajhi, Suleiman's brother, was discovered in 1998 in the telephone book of Wadih El-Hage (see September 15, 1998). El-Hage was bin Laden's personal secretary and was convicted of a role in the 1998 US embassy bombings. [NEW YORK TIMES, 3/25/2002] The raids are said to be primarily led by David Kane, a Customs agent working with a Customs investigation started just after 9/11 code-named Operation Greenquest. Many of the organizations are located at an office building at 555 Grove Street in Herndon. Kane writes in an affidavit for the raid that many organizations based there are "paper organizations" which "dissolve and are replaced by other organizations under the control of the same group of individuals." [NEW YORK TIMES, 3/21/2002; WALL STREET JOURNAL, 6/21/2004] Investigators appear to be primarily interested in the connections between the SAAR network and the Al Taqwa Bank, a Swiss bank closed after 9/11 on suspicions of funding al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups (see November 7, 2001). They are also interested in connections between both SAAR and Al Taqwa and the Muslim Brotherhood (see December 1982). According to author Douglas Farah, "US officials [later say] they had tracked about \$20 million from [SAAR] entities flowing through Nada's Bank al Taqwa, but said the total could be much higher. The ties between Nada and [SAAR] leaders were many and long-standing, as were their ties to other [Muslim] Brotherhood leaders.... For a time, Suleiman Abdel Aziz al-Rajhi, the SAAR Foundation founder, worked for Nada" at Al Taqwa's Liechtenstein branch. [NEW YORK TIMES, 3/25/2002; FARAH, 2004, PP. 154-155] Organizations and individuals targeted by the raid include:

- Yaqub Mirza. He is the director of virtually all of the organizations targeted in the raid. The Wall Street Journal claims, "US officials privately say Mr. Mirza and his associates also have connections to al-Qaeda and to other entities officially listed by the US as sponsors of terrorism." [WALL STREET JOURNAL, 4/18/2002; WALL STREET JOURNAL, 12/6/2002]
- The SAAR Foundation or the Safa Trust, an umbrella group for the SAAR network. The SAAR

Foundation had recently disbanded and reformed as the Safa Trust. [NEW YORK TIMES, 3/21/2002; WALL STREET JOURNAL, 3/22/2002; WASHINGTON POST, 10/7/2002]

- Hisham Al-Talib, who served as an officer of the SAAR Foundation and Safa Trust, had previously been an officer of firms run by Youssef Nada. Nada is one of the main owners of the Al Taqwa Bank. [WALL STREET JOURNAL, 3/22/2002]

- Mar-Jac Poultry Inc., an Islamic chicken processor with operations in rural Georgia. [WALL STREET JOURNAL, 6/21/2004]

- Jamal Barzinji. An officer of Mar-Jac and other organizations targeted in the raid, he had previously been involved with Nada's companies. [WALL STREET JOURNAL, 3/22/2002]

- The International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO). [NEW YORK TIMES, 3/21/2002]

- The Muslim World League. It is considered to be a parent organization for the IIRO. [NEW YORK TIMES, 3/21/2002]

- International Institute for Islamic Thought (IIIT). The IIIT had been under investigation since at least 1998. [NEW YORK TIMES, 3/21/2002]

- Tarik Hamdi, an employee at IIIT. His home is also raided. He carried a battery for a satellite phone to Afghanistan in early 1998, and the battery was used for Osama bin Laden's phone (see May 28, 1998). [NEW YORK TIMES, 3/21/2002]

- Abdurahman Alamoudi, a top Muslim lobbyist who formerly worked for one of the SAAR organizations. His nearby home is raided. The search yields a memo on large transactions involving Hamas, operations against the Israelis, and the notation "Met Mousa Abu Marzouk in Jordan." Marzouk is a Hamas leader believed to be involved in fundraising for Hamas in the US for many years (see July 5, 1995-May 1997). Alamoudi is alleged to be a leader of the Muslim Brotherhood. [WALL STREET JOURNAL, 6/21/2004]

- Samir Salah, an Egyptian-born president of the Piedmont Trading Corporation, which is part of the SAAR network. He is also a former director and treasurer of the Al Taqwa Bank's important Bahamas branch. Additionally, he was a founder of a Bosnian charity reportedly connected to a plot to blow up the US embassy in Bosnia. [NEW YORK TIMES, 3/25/2002]

- Ibrahim Hassaballa. He is a shareholder of the SAAR Foundation and also a former secretary of the Al Taqwa Bank. [NEW YORK TIMES, 3/25/2002] Investigators will later find that much of SAAR's money seemed to disappear into offshore bank accounts. For instance, in 1998, SAAR claimed to have moved \$9 million to a charity based in the tax haven of the Isle of Man, but investigators will find no evidence the charity existed. One US official involved in the probe will say of SAAR, "Looking at their finances is like looking into a black hole." [WASHINGTON POST, 10/7/2002] In 2003, it will be reported that US investigators are looking into reports that the director of the SAAR foundation for most of the 1990s stayed in the same hotel as three of the 9/11 hijackers the night before the 9/11 attacks (see September 10, 2001). Some US investigators had looked into the SAAR network in the mid-1990s, but the FBI blocked the investigation's progress (see 1995-1998).

Entity Tags: Operation Greenquest, Muslim World League, Muslim Brotherhood, SAAR Foundation, Samir Salah, Sulaiman Abdul Aziz al-Rajhi, Mousa Abu Marzouk, US Customs Service, Tarik Hamdi, Jamal Barzinji, International Institute for Islamic Thought, International Islamic Relief Organization, Abdurahman Alamoudi, Al Taqwa Bank, Mar-Jac Poultry Inc., David Kane, Hisham Al-Talib, Hamas, Yacub Mirza, Ibrahim Hassaballa