

## Special Report

### NY Muslim Group Linked to bin Laden Supporters

By Sherrie Gossett

CNSNews.com Staff Writer

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**(CNSNews.com)** - An American Muslim group under federal investigation is actually the U.S. division of a Pakistan-based faction with ties to Osama bin Laden and the Taliban, according to notes from an official meeting that were posted on an obscure Middle Eastern website and obtained by **Cybercast News Service**.

Members of that U.S. division -- the New York City-based Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) -- have publicly denied any connections to Jama'at-i-Islami (JI), Pakistan's most influential Islamist organization. But [notes](#) from a forum ICNA sponsored in New York City in 2000 contradict those denials.

"Jama'at-i-Islami's supporters in America have an organization ... known as ICNA," according to the meeting notes, which were originally posted on a now-defunct Lebanese Internet portal. Three experts in the politics of Islam have confirmed for **Cybercast News Service** that ICNA serves as the U.S. branch of JI.

The meeting notes also indicate that Qazi Hussein Ahmed, the president of JI, served as the sole representative of the Islamic Circle of North America at the meeting in Woodside, N.Y., five years ago.

#### 'Bin Laden a hero'

ICNA's peaceful rhetoric, relayed by many in the media, stands in stark contrast to the statements issued by Jama'at-i-Islami.

Qazi Hussein Ahmed has called the United States a "world terrorist." He has also advocated "martyrdom operations" in Iraq, Israel, Chechnya and Kashmir. JI boasts of maintaining "close brotherly relations" with and "practical links" to the Middle Eastern terrorist group Hamas.

Terrorism experts say Ahmed met with al Qaeda mastermind Osama bin Laden in Sudan and received a "fiery message of support" from bin Laden in 1998. They add that Ahmed had already invited bin Laden to speak at JI rallies.

The connections between JI and al Qaeda may not be surprising, given that both groups were involved in fighting the Soviet Union's occupation of Afghanistan in the early 1980s. Ahmed's group has "always called bin Laden a hero," veteran Pakistani journalist Khawer Mehdi told **Cybercast News Service**.

Following the capture of four top al Qaeda suspects in the homes of JI members in 2003, the U.S. is reported to have pressured Pakistan to explain the links between JI and al Qaeda.

The Pakistani government reportedly responded with an ultimatum to JI to distance itself from al Qaeda or face a crackdown. The recent murder of two JI leaders in Karachi and the torching of a vehicle used to shuttle Ahmed to the airport are evidence the government is targeting the group for "elimination," Ahmed was quoted as saying.

Ahmed is leader not only of JI, but also of the Muthida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), a coalition of six hard-line

religious parties in Pakistan. They form the third-largest political block in the 342-seat Pakistan National Assembly, and leaders of the pro-Taliban MMA have reportedly threatened revenge on Washington and Tel Aviv over military operations in Iraq

["The JI] is not just a political party," said Yehudit Barsky, director of the Division on Middle East and International Terrorism at the American Jewish Committee. "They are known to have hosted and assisted bin Laden in Pakistan and have supported the Taliban."

### **New York meeting advocated jihad**

Notes from the meeting in Woodside, N.Y., on July 15, 2000, warned that the United States was the "Antichrist" and declared that "jihad is on" against the "U.S. superpower." Dubbed a "uniting forum" and an "unusual event," the meeting brought together ICNA and a smaller Baltimore-based group.

The forum was organized by Dr. Shujaat Ali Khan, professor of economics at St. John's University in Queens, New York. Khan, in an interview earlier this month with **Cybercast News Service**, confirmed key details of the meeting.

Ahmed spoke in Urdu, a language native to Pakistan, about jihad as a comprehensive concept covering not only armed struggle, but also proper education, media and the raising of children to be good Muslims.

"Our relationship with Allah is the main motivation for participation in jihad," Ahmed told the hundreds of people jammed into the hall, according to the meeting notes.

Islam must be translated into political dominance, he added. "The sword and the Qur'an go together," Ahmed said. The meeting notes say Ahmed's comments were "very popular with the audience," which repeatedly responded with "Allahu Akbar" (God is great.)

"Those reading about these connections between ICNA and JI should be shocked," said Barsky, adding: "Something should be done about it."

### **Investigation underway**

The Islamic Circle of North America is one of a number of American Muslim groups currently under federal investigation for possible ties to al Qaeda and Palestinian terrorists. In December 2003, the U.S. Senate Finance Committee sent a letter to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), requesting detailed information on 25 U.S. Muslim organizations.

"We're looking at possible legislative responses," said Dean Zerve, chief investigative counsel for the Finance Committee. He added that the IRS has complied with the committee's requests, but the probe is complicated by the fact that most of the Muslim groups are already the subject of federal indictments or an FBI investigation.

The FBI declined comment for this article.

Dr. Khurshid Khan, president of the Islamic Circle for North America, initially said he had no knowledge of the 2000 meeting in New York and did not know why Ahmed represented ICNA.

"We have no relationship with them," Khan said, emphasizing that his organization promotes only peaceful activities and is dedicated to inter-faith cooperation to improve society.

When **Cybercast News Service** informed Khan that Qazi Hussein Ahmed had come to the U.S. to address an ICNA convention as well as attend the July 15, 2000, meeting in Woodside, N.Y., Khan conceded that his group "maintains relations" with JI "just to know what they're doing."

There are no practical links between the Islamic Circle for North America and Ahmed's Jama'at-i-Islami, Khan insisted. "When they (JI leaders) come to the U.S., we meet with them. And we have them speak at our conventions." But Khan emphasized that ICNA has its own philosophy and ideology spelled out in its bylaws.

Khan said ICNA, which denounced the recent London terror attacks, condemns all attacks upon innocent persons. Armed jihad is a "last resort," he said.

Terrorism analyst and author Steven Emerson has long considered ICNA to be a dangerous group, alleging ICNA's past support for jihad and terrorist groups like Hamas. At an ICNA convention in Baltimore in 2000, young people were urged to join a jihad in Chechnya, according to Emerson.

Despite such criticism, ICNA has received overwhelmingly positive coverage in the media. Nearly 800 articles since 1987 have documented the group's support of civil rights issues, including, more recently, opposition to the USA Patriot Act and racial and religious profiling. The Queens-based organization has also spoken out in defense of individuals suspected of terrorism and has a charity component that is internationally active.

### **'Blood on their hands'**

However, Stephen Suleyman Schwartz, director of the Center for Islamic Pluralism, told **Cybercast News Service** that "every Pakistani Muslim knows ICNA is the Western front for the Jamaat," which he labeled a "terrorist organization."

Schwartz, who converted to Islam while living in Bosnia, said Islam is like Communism and sex. "Only people who've done it really know about it." Schwartz, who also worked for 10 years as a San Francisco Chronicle reporter, said that "reporters haven't done their homework and have no idea of how to."

Schwartz also charged that JI bears some responsibility for the recent London terror attacks. "Jamaat has blood on its hands," he said, pointing to the growing influence of Pakistani mosques in England and the extremist JI ideology, which Schwarz said dominates those mosques.

Barsky from the American Jewish Committee said the fact that ICNA conferences have provided JI ideologues with heavy exposure "gives clues to where ICNA's sympathies and support lies."

Members of Jama'at-i-Islami "were very interested and concerned with assisting an enemy of the U.S. and being involved in terrorism," Barsky charged. If America "turns a blind eye" to the promotion of such an ideology, "it will only be a matter of time before those indoctrinated in such ideology try to do something here."

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