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Context of 'Early 1999-March 21, 2000'

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1986-October 1999: New Jersey Firm Investors List Is a 'Who's Who of Designated Terrorists'



Soliman Biheiri. [Source: US Immigrations and Customs]

BMI Inc., a real estate investment firm based in Secaucus, New Jersey, is formed in 1986. Former counterterrorism "tsar" Richard Clarke will state in 2003, "While BMI [has] held itself out publicly as a financial services provider for Muslims in the United States, its investor list suggests the possibility this facade was just a cover to conceal terrorist support. BMI's investor list reads like a who's who of designated terrorists and Islamic extremists." Investors in BMI include: [US Congress, 10/22/2003]

▪ Soliman Biheiri. He is the head of BMI for the duration of the company's existence. US prosecutors will later call him the US banker for the Muslim Brotherhood, a banned Egyptian militant group. Biheiri's computer will eventually be searched and found to have contact information for Ghaleb Himmat and Youssef Nada, leaders of the Al Taqwa Bank, which is founded two years after BMI (see 1988). After 9/11, the US and UN will designate both Himmat and Nada and the Al Taqwa Bank as terrorist financiers, and the bank will be shut down (see November 7, 2001). US prosecutors say there are other ties between BMI and Al Taqwa, including financial transactions. Biheiri also has close ties with Sheik Yousuf Abdullah Al-Qaradawi. Qaradawi is said to be a high-ranking member of the Muslim Brotherhood, a shareholder in Al Taqwa, and has made statements supporting suicide bombings against Israel. In 2003, US investigators will accuse Biheiri of ties to terrorist financing. He will be convicted of immigration violations and lying to a federal agent (see June 15, 2003). [Wall Street Journal, 9/15/2003; Forward, 10/17/2003] Biheiri will be convicted of immigration fraud in 2003 and then convicted of lying to federal investigators in 2004 (see June 15, 2003).

▪ Abdullah Awad bin Laden, a nephew of Osama bin Laden. He invests about a half-million dollars in BMI real estate ventures, earning a profit of \$70,000. For most of the 1990s he runs the US branch of a Saudi charity called World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY). He is investigated by the FBI in 1996 (see February-September 11, 1996), and WAMY will be raided by US agents in 2004 (see June 1, 2004). The raid is apparently part of a larger investigation into terrorism financing. In 2001, at least two of the 9/11 hijackers will live three blocks away from the WAMY office (see March 2001). [Wall Street Journal, 9/15/2003; Washington Post, 4/19/2004]

▪ Nur and Iman bin Laden, two female relatives of Osama bin Laden. Abdullah Awad bin Laden will invest some of their money in a BMI real estate project.

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While their bin Laden family ties are intriguing, neither have been accused of any knowing connections to terrorist financing. [Washington Post, 4/19/2004]

■ Mousa Abu Marzouk. He has identified himself as a top leader of Hamas. The US declares him a terrorist in 1995 (see July 5, 1995-May 1997). BMI makes at least two transactions with Marzouk after he is declared a terrorist. [Wall Street Journal, 9/15/2003]

■ Yassin al-Qadi, a Saudi multimillionaire. His lawyers will later claim he has no terrorism ties and had only a passing involvement with BMI and liquidated his investment in it in 1996. However, another company operating from the same office as BMI is called Kadi International Inc. and lists its president as al-Qadi. Al-Qadi is also a major investor in the suspect computer company Ptech (see 1994; 1999-After October 12, 2001). Al-Qadi and BMI head Biheiri have financial dealings with Yaqub Mirza, a Pakistani who manages a group of Islamic charities in Virginia known as the SAAR network (see July 29, 1983). These charities will be raided in March 2002 on suspicions of terrorism ties (see March 20, 2002). Shortly after 9/11, the US will officially declare al-Qadi a terrorist financier (see October 12, 2001). [Wall Street Journal, 9/15/2003]

■ Saleh Kamel. BMI allegedly receives a \$500,000 investment from the Dallah Al-Baraka banking conglomerate, which is headed by Kamel. For many years before 9/11, Omar al-Bayoumi, an associate of 9/11 hijackers Khalid Almihdhar and Nawaf Alhazmi, will receive a salary from Dallah, despite apparently doing no work. Some will accuse al-Bayoumi of involvement in funding the 9/11 plot, but that remains to be proven (see August 1994-July 2001). Kamel reportedly founded a Sudanese Islamic bank which housed accounts for senior al-Qaeda operatives. He is a multi-billionaire heavily involved in promoting Islam, and his name appears on the Golden Chain, a list of early al-Qaeda supporters (see 1989). He denies supporting terrorism. [US Congress, 10/22/2003; Wall Street Journal, 6/21/2004]

■ The Kuwait Finance House. According to Clarke, this organization is alleged to be a BMI investor and the "financial arm of the Muslim Brotherhood in Kuwait. Several al-Qaeda operatives have allegedly been associated with the Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood, including Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, Suliman abu Ghaith, Wadih El Hage, and Ramzi Yousef." In 2003, an apparent successor entity to the Kuwait Finance House will be designated as a terrorist entity by the US. A lawyer for the Kuwait Finance House will later say the bank has never let its accounts be used for terrorism. [Wall Street Journal, 9/15/2003; Wall Street Journal, 4/20/2005; US Congress, 10/22/2003]

■ Tarek Swaidan. He is a Kuwaiti, an associate of al-Qadi, and a leading member of the Kuwaiti branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. It is unknown if he has made any denials about his alleged associations. [Wall Street Journal, 9/15/2003]

■ Abdurahman Alamoudi. For many years he runs the American Muslim Council, a lobby group founded by a top Muslim Brotherhood figure. US prosecutors say he also is in the Brotherhood, and has alleged ties to Hamas. In 2004, the US will sentence him to 23 years in prison for illegal dealings with Libya (see October 15, 2004). [Wall Street Journal, 6/21/2004; Washington Post, 10/16/2004]

■ The International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO) and the Muslim World League, closely connected Saudi charities suspected of financing terrorism. They give BMI \$3.7 million out of a \$10 million endowment from unknown Saudi donors. The Financial Times will later note, "While it is not clear whether that money came from the Saudi government, [a 2003] affidavit quotes a CIA report that says the Muslim World League 'is largely financed by the government of Saudi Arabia.'" Both organizations consistently deny any support of terrorism

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financing, but in early 2006 it will be reported that US officials continue to suspect them of such support (see January 15, 2006). [Financial Times, 8/21/2003] In 1992, a branch of the IIRO gives \$2.1 million to BMI Inc. to invest in real estate. The money disappears from BMI's books. In October 1999, BMI goes defunct after it is unable to repay this money to the IIRO branch. The IIRO branch gives BMI the rest of the \$3.7 million between 1992 and 1998. BMI will use the money to buy real estate (see 1992). Eventually, some of this money will be given to Hamas operatives in the West Bank and spent on violent actions against Israel. This will eventually lead to legal action in the US and a seizure of some of the money. [Wall Street Journal, 11/26/2002; Washington Post, 8/20/2003; Washington Post, 4/19/2004; Washington Times, 3/26/2004] By 1992, BMI has projected revenues in excess of \$25 million, based largely on their real estate investments in the US. [US Congress, 10/22/2003] In early 1999, months before BMI goes defunct, the FBI hears evidence potentially tying BMI to the 1998 US embassy bombings (see August 7, 1998), but an investigation into this will not be pursued (see Early 1999). It should be noted that BMI had many investors, and presumably most BMI investors would have had no suspicions that their money might be used to fund terrorism or other types of violence.

Entity Tags: Soliman Biheiri, Iman bin Laden, Abdullah Awad bin Laden, Nur bin Laden, Mousa Abu Marzouk, Saleh Abdullah Kamel, Yassin al-Qadi, Kuwait Finance House, Tarek Swaidan, Abdurahman Alamoudi, International Islamic Relief Organization, Muslim World League, Richard A. Clarke

August 7, 1998: Al-Qaeda Bombs US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania

Two US embassies in Africa are bombed almost simultaneously. The attack in Nairobi, Kenya, kills 213 people, including 12 US nationals, and injures more than 4,500. The attack in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, kills 11 and injures 85. The attack is blamed on al-Qaeda. [PBS Frontline, 2001] The attack shows al-Qaeda has a capability for simultaneous attacks. A third attack against the US embassy in Uganda fails. [Associated Press, 9/25/1998]

Entity Tags: al-Qaeda

Early 1999-March 21, 2000: Muslim FBI Agent Refuses to Wear Wire in Meeting with BMI Head; FBI Infighting Follows

Gamal Abdel-Hafiz, the only Muslim FBI agent in the years just prior to 9/11, becomes involved in FBI agent Robert Wright's Vulgar Betrayal investigation in early 1999. An accountant working for BMI Inc., an investment firm with connections to many suspected terrorism financiers (see 1986-October 1999), tells Abdel-Hafiz that he is worried that BMI funds had helped fund the 1998 US embassy bombings in Africa (see August 7, 1998). BMI president Soliman Biheiri hears that Abdel-Hafiz had been told about this, and wants to meet with him to discuss it (apparently without realizing that Abdel-Hafiz is an undercover FBI agent). Wright asks Abdel-Hafiz to wear a wire to the meeting, but Abdel-Hafiz refuses to do so. This leads to infighting within the FBI. On July 6, 1999, Abdel-Hafiz files a religious discrimination complaint, accusing Wright of making derogatory comments to fellow agents. [Frontline, 10/16/2003] On March 21, 2000, Wright makes a formal internal complaint about Abdel-Hafiz. FBI agent Barry Carmody seconds Wright's complaint. Wright and Carmody accuse Abdel-Hafiz of hindering investigations by openly refusing to record other Muslims. In an affidavit, Wright claims that Abdel-Hafiz refused to wear the wire "based on religious reasons saying, 'A Muslim doesn't record another Muslim.'" Abdel-Hafiz

*WAS not undercover
BMT calls the FBI
Agent because they
are best friend.*

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does not deny the quote, but claims it was taken out of context. [Wall Street Journal, 11/26/2002; ABC News, 12/19/2002; Frontline, 10/16/2003] Federal prosecutor Mark Flessner and other FBI agents back up the allegations against Abdel-Hafiz. [ABC News, 12/19/2002] Carmody will also claim that, in a different investigation, Abdel-Hafiz hindered an inquiry into the possible ties to Islamic militants of fired University of South Florida Professor Sami Al-Arian by refusing to record a conversation with the professor in 1998. [Tampa Tribune, 3/4/2003] Complaints to superiors and headquarters about Abdel-Hafiz never get a response. [Fox News, 3/6/2003] "Far from being reprimanded, in February 2001 Abdel-Hafiz [is] promoted to one of the FBI's most important anti-terrorism posts, the American Embassy in Saudi Arabia, to handle investigations for the FBI in that Muslim country." [ABC News, 12/19/2002; Frontline, 10/16/2003] In 2003, FBI agent John Vincent will complain, "Five different FBI field divisions complained of this agent's activities, and the FBI headquarters response was to promote him to a sensitive position in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia." [Federal News Service, 6/2/2003] Abdel-Hafiz will be suspended in February 2003 over charges that he faked a break-in of his own house in order to collect \$25,000 in insurance benefits and then failed an FBI polygraph test when asked about it. In January 2004, the FBI's Disciplinary Review Board will reinstate him after deciding there was insufficient evidence in the case. [Tampa Tribune, 3/4/2003; Frontline, 10/16/2003]

Entity Tags: Vulgar Betrayal, Robert Wright, Gamal Abdel-Hafiz, John Vincent, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Sami Al-Arian, Mark Flessner, Barry Carmody

August 3, 1999: Wright Removed from Vulgar Betrayal Investigation

Chicago FBI agent Robert Wright is abruptly removed from the Vulgar Betrayal investigation into terrorism financing (see 1996). The entire investigation apparently winds down without his involvement, and will shut down altogether in 2000 (see August 2000). A New York Post article will state, "[T]he official reason was a fear that Wright's work would disrupt FBI intelligence-gathering. My sources find this dubious: After years of monitoring these individuals, the bureau had likely learned all it could. ... [But] conversations with FBI personnel indicate that he was told informally that his work was too embarrassing to the Saudis. In support of this is the fact that Wright was shut down as he seemed to be closing in on Yassin al-Qadi." [New York Post, 7/14/2004; Washington Post, 5/11/2002] Wright later will claim that a reason he is given for being taken off the investigation is a recent dispute he is having with a Muslim FBI agent who refuses to wear a wire (see Early 1999-March 21, 2000). [Federal News Service, 6/2/2003] He is also accused of sexually harassing a female FBI agent. This charge is investigated and later dropped. [Chicago Tribune, 8/22/2004] Wright is removed from counterterrorism work altogether and remains that way at least through early 2002. [Associated Press, 3/15/2002] In September 1999, he will hire Chicago lawyer David Schippers, famed as House investigative counsel in the Clinton impeachment, to help fight the closure of the investigation. Although Schippers is known as an enemy of President Clinton, Wright will say, "I'm confident President Clinton had absolutely nothing to do with the lack of support and eventual closure of the Vulgar Betrayal investigation." [CNN, 6/19/2003; Federal News Service, 6/2/2003]

Entity Tags: International Terrorism Unit, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Vulgar Betrayal, Robert Wright, David Schippers, Yassin al-Qadi

September 11, 2001-Autum 2002: FBI's Saudi Office Fails to Follow Up Thousands of

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9/11 Leads; Unprocessed Documents Are Destroyed

At the time of 9/11, the FBI's Saudi Arabia office was comprised of only legal attaché Wilfred Rattigan and his assistant Gamal Abdel-Hafiz. Abdel-Hafiz, the FBI's only Muslim agent at the time, had been appointed to the position in February 2001 despite a controversy with his FBI work back in the US (see Early 1999-March 21, 2000). Some fellow FBI agents accused him of refusing to secretly record conversations with Muslim suspects. Time will report, "The FBI sent reinforcements [to the Saudi Arabian office] within two weeks of 9/11, but it appears that the bureau's team never got on top of the thousands of leads flowing in from the US and Saudi governments. ... According to several former employees of the US embassy in Riyadh, the FBI legal attaché's office housed within the embassy was often in disarray during the months that followed 9/11. When an FBI supervisor arrived [nearly a year after 9/11] to clean up the mess, she found a mountain of paper and, for security reasons, ordered wholesale shredding that resulted in the destruction of unprocessed documents relating to the 9/11 investigations." In June 2005, the Senate Judiciary Committee will begin investigating allegations that the FBI's Saudi office was "delinquent in pursuing thousands of leads" related to 9/11. Piles of time-sensitive leads still had not been followed up when the supervisor arrives. The FBI will claim that the thousands of shredded documents were duplicated elsewhere. But the Judiciary Committee will assert some material is lost. One employee will claim that some of the lost information "was leads, suspicious-activity material, information on airline pilots." Rattigan, who has converted to Islam, later will sue the FBI for discrimination and will claim that the FBI refused to provide him with adequate resources to cope with the workload after 9/11. [Time, 6/27/2005; Frontline, 10/16/2003]

Entity Tags: Federal Bureau of Investigation, Wilfred Rattigan, Gamal Abdel-Hafiz

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