

Testimony of
Evan F. Kohlmann
Before the
Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Crime and Drugs
"Evaluating The Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act, S. 2930"

**The Role of Saudi Arabian State-Sponsored Charitable
Fronts in Providing Material Support to Foreign
Paramilitary and Terrorist Organizations**

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Evan F. Kohlmann
Senior Partner
Flashpoint Global Partners; New York, NY
www.flashpoint-intel.com - info@flashpoint-intel.com
Voicemail/Fax: (206)202-4911

EVAN F. KOHLMANN
A Biographical Sketch

Evan Kohlmann is a private sector International Terrorism Consultant who has spent over a decade tracking Al-Qaida and other terrorist organizations. During the course of his research, Mr. Kohlmann has amassed one of the largest and most extensive open source databases in the world of original documents, communiqués, and multimedia. He currently works as a senior investigator for the Nine Eleven Finding Answers (NEFA) Foundation--and has also served at various times as a contract consultant in terrorism matters on behalf of the U.S. Department of Defense, the U.S. Department of Justice, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Office of the High Representative (OHR) in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTFY) at the Hague, the Australian Federal Police (AFP), the U.K. Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), Scotland Yard's SO-15 Counter Terrorism Command, the Central Scotland Police, West Yorkshire Police, and the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET).

"Mr. Kohlmann is certainly qualified to provide expert testimony on [terrorism] issues... Mr. Kohlmann has conducted first-hand interviews of several leaders of terrorist organizations and has reviewed reams of information about al Qaeda... It is apparent that these subjects are Mr. Kohlmann's life work, and he has, therefore, acquired a considerable amount of information and documentation on these subjects."

- U.S. District Judge Mark Kravitz (2/20/08)

"Kohlmann has developed an understanding of terrorist organization structures, operations, and membership, allowing him to speak with authority about Al-Qaeda in Iraq, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and Jaish-e-Mohammed. His research and experience have provided him a base of understanding far greater, and far more sophisticated, than of the Court or of jurors... A person lacking Kohlmann's advanced knowledge of JeM and LeT essentially would not be able to recognize the information on Khan's hard drive as information that might link a person to JeM or LeT."

- U.S. District Judge William S. Duffey Jr. (6/1/09)

Mr. Kohlmann holds a undergraduate degree in International Politics from the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service (Georgetown University), and a graduate degree in law from the University of Pennsylvania Law School. While at Georgetown, he worked as a research assistant to Dr. Mamoun Fandy in the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies (CCAS). Kohlmann is also the recipient of a certificate in Islamic studies from the Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding (CMCU) at Georgetown University, where he was mentored by Dr. John Voll.

Introduction:

The roots of the contemporary logistical networks that have facilitated the activities of paramilitary and terrorist organizations in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and other conflict zones across the Muslim world can be directly traced to early lessons learned during the chaotic days of the first Soviet-Afghan jihad. As the 1980s drew to a close, thousands of Islamic fundamentalists arrived in Central Asia seeking heroic adventures amid “holy war,” often with no local guide or requisite accommodations. At the time, several wealthy Arabian Gulf charitable organizations, typically under the guise of aiding Afghan and Pakistani refugees, stepped forward to help channel the recruits where they were most needed. These wealthy NGOs, sponsored by prominent Gulf businessmen, provided weapons, guesthouses, and travel papers to needy members of the quickly-coalescing Al-Qaida movement. Medical ambulances belonging to the Saudi Red Crescent and other state-sponsored or officially endorsed relief groups were even diverted to bring Arab fighters back and forth from combat operations.¹

By clothing their militant activity with charitable ideals, leaders of nascent terrorist and paramilitary organizations discovered that they were able to slip below the radar of many international intelligence agencies—but not all of them. In 1996, a recently declassified U.S. government report—attributed by the Wall Street Journal to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)—alleged that “approximately one third of these Islamic NGOs support terrorist groups or employ individuals who are suspected of having terrorist connections.”² The efficiency and success of the Afghan jihad financing model was quite an accomplishment for Usama Bin Laden and his international allies—so much so that operations continued even after the end of the Soviet-Afghan war and the expulsion of Bin Laden from the region.

The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Saudi High Commission for Relief

Already by September 1992, evidence had emerged that the prolific terrorist financial and recruitment network that had emerged on the Afghan battlefield was indeed rapidly expanding to other conflict zones, including in Bosnia. A 1996 American intelligence report alleged that “nearly one third of the Islamic NGOs in the Balkans have facilitated the activities of Islamic groups that engage in terrorism, including the Egyptian Al-Gama`at Al-Islamiyya, Palestinian Hamas, and Lebanese Hizballah.” The report added that “some of the terrorist groups, such as Al-Gama`at, have access to credentials for the UN High Commission for Refugees and other UN staffs in the former Yugoslavia.”³ According to a May 1995 classified internal memorandum from the (Muslim) Army of Bosnia-Herzegovina’s Military Security Service, the “financiers” of these charities were “mainly from Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait” who

¹ Muhammad, Basil. Al-Ansaru l’Arab fi Afghanistan. The Committee for Islamic Benevolence Publications; ©1991. Page 187.

² January 1996 CIA Report on “International Islamic NGOs” and links to terrorism. Page 1. See also: Affidavit by Senior Special Agent David Kane (Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Department of Homeland Security). United States of America v. Soliman S. Biheiri. United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, Alexandria Division. Case #: 03-365-A. August 14, 2003. Page 2.

³ January 1996 CIA Report on “International Islamic NGOs” and links to terrorism. Page 1. See also: Affidavit by Senior Special Agent David Kane (Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Department of Homeland Security). United States of America v. Soliman S. Biheiri. United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, Alexandria Division. Case #: 03-365-A. August 14, 2003. Page 2.

operate “through the Swiss and some other European countries banks.”⁴ Patterns of suspicious behavior extended even to official, state-funded charitable ventures.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was at the origin of much of this fundraising—and the financiers behind it. In 1993, the Saudi government helped establish the Saudi High Commission for Relief in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which claims to have provided more than \$400 million in assistance to the Muslim community in the Balkans.⁵ According to the Director of the Executive Office of the Saudi High Commission:

“The Saudi High Commission was formed in 1993 by Decision No. 17419 of the President of the Council of Ministers of Saudi Arabia, dated 2/12/1412 (1993)... for the purpose of providing charitable funds for relief efforts in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Saudi High Commission is currently, and has been since its inception, headed by His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, who is the Governor of the Riyadh Province and a member of the Saudi Royal Family. In Decision No. 17419, the President of the Council of Ministers appointed Prince Salman bin Abdulaziz President of the Saudi High Commission. As President, Prince Salman bin Abdulaziz is the head of both the Executive Committee and the Supreme Commission. Prince Salman bin Abdulaziz has filled all of the above-listed roles continuously over the approximately eleven years since the Saudi High Commission was formed... The Saudi High Commission is staffed with other civil servant employees of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Many Saudi High Commission staffers are detailed from other government ministries and other administrative organs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Staffers on detail from other government offices are paid by their respective ministries and administrative organs, rather than by the Saudi High Commission... The largest source of funding for the Saudi High Commission is the treasury of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which has provided approximately 30% of the total funds used and distributed by the Saudi High Commission.”⁶

A separate legal declaration submitted by a member of the Council of Ministers of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia confirms that “the Saudi High Commission is an arm of the Saudi Arabian government.”⁷

The headquarters of the Saudi High Commission in Bosnia is located inside the Islamic Cultural Center attached to the Saudi-funded King Fahd Mosque in Sarajevo. The impact of the mosque’s religious missionary work can be felt within only steps of its front door. On multiple occasions over the past five years, I have purchased hardcore jihad propaganda videos openly on sale in vendor stalls set up outside the mosque entrance. In October 2009, the items for sale included a crudely-made DVD labeled on one side, “Microsoft Flight Simulator: World Trade Center Edition”—and on the other, emblazoned with images of Usama Bin Laden and the World Trade Center, along with the title (in Bosnian), “The Truth about September 11.”

The 1996 CIA report on Islamic charities noted with interest that the Saudi High Commission’s offices in Bosnia were “staffed by Saudis, Syrians, Algerians, Moroccans, and

⁴ “Review of the Information on Activities of the Persons from Afro-Asian Countries Directly Before the War and During the War in the Territory of BIH Republic.” Report written by the BIH Administration of the Military Security Service— Department for Analytical and Informative Affairs.” Sarajevo; May 6, 1995.

⁵ “Islamic Organizations in the Balkans.” A Joint Research Project by the Governments of the United States and the United Kingdom. August 2003.

⁶ “Declaration of Saud bin Mohammad al-Roshood.” In re: “Terrorist Attacks on September 11, 2001.” United States District Court for the Southern District of New York; Case No. 03-MDL-1570. Dated: February 17, 2004.

⁷ “Declaration of Dr. Mutlib bin Abdullah al Nafissa.” In re: “Terrorist Attacks on September 11, 2001.” United States District Court for the Southern District of New York; Case No. 03-MDL-1570. Dated: January 31, 2004.

Jordanians.”⁸ Likewise, an internal classified memorandum from the Muslim Army of Bosnia-Herzegovina Security Service in September 1994 acknowledged “what is interesting regarding the humanitarian organization Saudi-Arabian High Commissariat in Zenica, is that they employ members of the El-Mujahidin Unit.”⁹ The ARBiH document added that “Salem H.A. Hamdi, director of the High Saudi Arabian Commissariat... has well-established cooperation with... ‘El-Mujahidin’ units in Middle Bosnia.”¹⁰ According to an official NATO/SFOR guidebook to “The Islamic Organizations in the Balkans,” the Saudi High Commission “facilitated movement of mujahidin during the fighting in Bosnia from 1992 to 1995” and “provided funds to mujahidin who remained in Bosnia.”¹¹ Other original documents recovered by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTFY) indicate that Saudi High Commission resources were used throughout the 1990s to provide weapons and financing directly to foreign mujahideen fighters trained in Afghanistan and elsewhere. The U.S. Department of Defense has concluded that “the Saudi High Commission for Relief... provided financial support to former Arab Mujahedin in Bosnia. The types of financial support included... travel to Chechnya and Afghanistan.”¹²

In January 1994, a British humanitarian aid worker named Paul Goodall was kidnapped near the Bosnian town of Zenica and then brutally executed by five Arabic speaking “bearded gunmen” wearing combat fatigues. At the time, Goodall’s murder was privately acknowledged by the Bosnian Muslim Army to be “one of the most serious incidents caused by the members of the [El-Mujahidin] unit.”¹³ A coroner involved in the UK inquest of Goodall’s death commented that the Briton’s fate was “most horrid and unnecessary... It is hard to grasp how any human beings can behave in such a fashion to fellow human beings.”¹⁴ Two days later, Bosnian police detained Saudi Arabian national Abdul Hadi al-Qahtani for his alleged role in the murder. At the time of his arrest, al-Qahtani, a foreign fighter in his early thirties, was reportedly carrying an identification card issued by the Zenica office of the Saudi High Commission for Relief.¹⁵ Asim Fazlic, then-chief of police in Zenica, commented, “One of the strangest elements is that we still do not know the exact identity of [those]... we hold in Zenica. They are very uncooperative and so far still insist, in spite of their car, uniform and weapons, that they are humanitarian aid workers.”¹⁶ Following a suspicious escape from police custody shortly thereafter, al-Qahtani

⁸ January 1996 CIA Report on “International Islamic NGOs” and links to terrorism. Page 1. See also: Affidavit by Senior Special Agent David Kane (Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Department of Homeland Security). United States of America v. Soliman S. Biheiri. United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, Alexandria Division. Case #: 03-365-A. August 14, 2003. Page 2.

⁹ “Disruption of the enemy’s activities.” Memorandum dispatched from Zenica by Colonel Ramiz Dugalic, commander of the Ministry of Defense Security Administration Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBiH) Security Service Department. Classified No. 258-33. September 14, 1994.

¹⁰ “Disruption of the enemy’s activities.” Memorandum dispatched from Zenica by Colonel Ramiz Dugalic, commander of the Ministry of Defense Security Administration Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBiH) Security Service Department. Classified No. 258-33. September 14, 1994.

¹¹ “Islamic Organizations in the Balkans.” A Joint Research Project by the Governments of the United States and the United Kingdom. August 2003.

¹² http://www.dod.gov/pubs/foi/detainees/csrt_arb/ARB_Round_2_Factors_900-1009.pdf. Pages 994-995.

¹³ “Review of the Information on Activities of the Persons from Afro-Asian Countries Directly Before the War and During the War in the Territory of BIH Republic.” Report written by the BIH Administration of the Military Security Service— Department for Analytical and Informative Affairs.” Sarajevo; May 6, 1995.

¹⁴ Wilkinson, Paul. “Anger at Bosnia death.” The Times (London). July 30, 1994.

¹⁵ Higgins, Andrew et al. “Assault on Charities is Risky Front for U.S.” The Wall Street Journal. October 16, 2001.

¹⁶ Loyd, Anthony. “3 held for Goodall murder.” The Times (London). February 2, 1994.

was once again sighted by Bosnian intelligence sources “in the premises of ‘El-Mujahidin’ at the village of Trokuce near Zenica.”¹⁷

This pattern of activity continued even long after the end of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the signing of the Dayton Peace Accord. On September 18, 1997, a Volkswagen Golf, packed with 80 kilograms of mixed explosives (including anti-tank mines) strapped to a timer, exploded in the western district of Mostar, Croatia. The attack, which took place in the vicinity of the central police building, caused extensive damage and injured about 50 people, 23 seriously.¹⁸ Within months, Bosnian investigators issued arrest warrants for 19 men wanted in connection with the Mostar bombing and several other incidents in the Zenica area. The list of suspects included Saber Lahmar—an Algerian Arabic-language teacher in his mid-thirties working with the Saudi High Commission for Relief—and Ali Ahmed Ali Hamad (a.k.a. Ali Hamed Ubeid, Abu Ubaidah al-Bahraini), another former employee at the Saudi High Commission who had been tasked with “the distribution... of books.”¹⁹ After making a number of detentions and searches, in a public statement, the BiH federal prosecutor’s office announced the confiscation of “24 rifles, 10 pistols, 30 hand bombs, four hand grenade launchers, three hand rocket launchers, three machine-guns, 15 grenades, five hand grenades, 95 antitank mines (PT-6, PT-1, PT-3 and PT-4), one container with a rocket for rocket launcher, more than seven thousand pieces of ammunition of various calibres, 100 metres of slow-burning fuse with initial caps and much more.” According to the federal prosecutor’s office, “Before carrying out their terrorist acts, the suspects observed the targets of their attacks for days, which indicates that they are an organized group which prepared and committed classic terrorist acts.”²⁰

An unclassified summary of evidence against Saudi High Commission employee Saber Lahmar published by the U.S. military indicates that Lahmar was convicted and sentenced to a five-year prison term “for the armed robbery of an American citizen in Zenica, Bosnia. He was also involved in a shootout with Zenica police. The detainee was released from a Bosnian prison after serving two years for his role in some 1997 explosions in Mostar, Bosnia.” Furthermore, according to the U.S. military, local authorities in Bosnia-Herzegovina believe that Lahmar was also “involved” in other bombings that took place in the towns of Travnik and Mostar in 1997.²¹ Despite his apparent role in various paramilitary activities, Lahmar was eventually released by Bosnian authorities—only to be re-arrested in October 2001 as a “suspected terrorist” and transferred to the custody of the U.S. military in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.²²

¹⁷ “Disruption of the enemy’s activities.” Memorandum dispatched from Zenica by Colonel Ramiz Dugalic, commander of the Ministry of Defense Security Administration – Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBiH) Security Service Department. Classified No. 258-33. September 14, 1994.

¹⁸ “SPATE OF ATTACKS AGAINST BOSNIAN CROATS GOES UNNOTICED.” Communiqué issued by the Croatian Mission to the United Nations. September 22, 1997.

¹⁹ Karic, Eldin. “Trial to Jihad Warriors Soon.” *AIM (Alternative Information Network) Press*.

<http://www.aimpress.org>. December 28, 1997. See also: Hedges, Stephen J. “Extremism lingers after Balkan wars.” *The Chicago Tribune*. November 25, 2001. See also: “Abu Hamza has wings.” *Dani* (Sarajevo). April 24, 1998.

²⁰ Karic, Eldin. “Trial to Jihad Warriors Soon.” *AIM (Alternative Information Network) Press*. <http://www.aimpress.org>. December 28, 1997.

²¹ http://www.dod.gov/pubs/foi/detainees/csrt_arb/ARB_Round_1_Factors_000895-000943.pdf. Page 916.

²² “Islamic Organizations in the Balkans.” A Joint Research Project by the Governments of the United States and the United Kingdom. August 2003.

Similarly, the former Saudi High Commission employee from Bahrain, Ali Ahmed Ali Hamad, was convicted by a local court for his role in the September 1997 Mostar car bombing.²³ However, following the events of September 11, 2001, Hamad agreed to cooperate with international authorities and provide information about his terrorist affiliations in Bosnia-Herzegovina and beyond. In a sworn affidavit dated March 2008, Hamad admitted being recruited by Al-Qaida at the age of 17 and having received instruction at an “Al-Qaida training camp in Afghanistan.” While in Afghanistan, Hamad reportedly “met Osama bin Laden on numerous occasions, and swore an oath to al Qaida in Osama bin Laden’s presence... At the inception of the Bosnian war, Osama bin Laden and the al Qaida leadership decided that al Qaida should actively participate in that conflict, and began sending al Qaida members, including myself, to Bosnia to fight as mujihadeen.”²⁴

As a former employee of the Saudi High Commission in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ali Hamad had much to say about the role of the organization in allegedly financing militant activity:

“I can attest from personal knowledge that representatives of the Saudi High Commission provided extensive financial support and food to the mujihadeen forces, and also permitted the mujihadeen and al Qaida members in Bosnia to use the Saudi High Commission’s offices and rented houses. In addition to providing food, money and shelter to support al Qaida’s operations in Bosnia, the Saudi High Commission frequently transported mujihadeen and al Qaida members throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina, in Saudi High Commission vehicles bearing the mark of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), thereby allowing those mujihadeen and al Qaida members to pass military and police checkpoints. I was personally transported by the Saudi High Commission in a vehicle bearing UNHCR marks in late 1994 or early 1995, along with another wounded mujihadeen, from Bosnia-Herzegovina to Zagreb, Croatia. On the occasion of that trip, a representative of the Saudi High Commission also provided me with money for further travel expenses. During the Bosnian war, the Saudi High Commission appointed a number of former mujihadeen fighters to serve as officers or directors of its branch offices in Bosnia-Herzegovina... After the conclusion of the Bosnian War, the Saudi High Commission provided ostensible employment to a number of foreign fighters and al Qaida members who had fought in the War.”²⁵

Hamad took pains to emphasize the significant logistical advantages conferred to foreign mujahideen fighters in maintaining a relationship with the Saudi High Commission: “I myself received official documentation, certified by the stamp of the Saudi High Commission and bearing the signature of the Director of the Saudi High Commission’s Mostar office, indicating that I was an employee of the Saudi High Commission. At the time the director of the Mostar office of the Saudi High Commission provided me with that documentation, he was aware that I was a member of al Qaida. In addition to the documentation described above, following the Bosnian War, the Saudi High Commission provided me access to vehicles with diplomatic car registrations, and vehicles registered to the UNHCR, which enabled me to move freely

²³ “Islamic Organizations in the Balkans.” A Joint Research Project by the Governments of the United States and the United Kingdom. August 2003.

²⁴ “Declaration of Ali Ahmad Ali Hamad.” In re: “Terrorist Attacks on September 11, 2001.” United States District Court for the Southern District of New York; Case No. 03-MDL-1570. Dated: March 4, 2008.

²⁵ “Declaration of Ali Ahmad Ali Hamad.” In re: “Terrorist Attacks on September 11, 2001.” United States District Court for the Southern District of New York; Case No. 03-MDL-1570. Dated: March 4, 2008.

throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina.”²⁶ According to an official NATO/SFOR guidebook to “The Islamic Organizations in the Balkans”, one such vehicle “registered” to the Saudi High Commission was “involved in surveillance of [the] US Embassy in Sarajevo in Fall 2000.”²⁷

In September 2001, shortly before the arrest and extradition of Algerian employee Saber Lahmar to Guantanamo Bay, the offices of the Saudi High Commission were likewise raided by soldiers from the SFOR (the NATO Stabilization Force in Bosnia-Herzegovina). According to SFOR, investigators recovered a wealth of suspicious documents “such as maps and photos that suggested preparations for terrorist attacks.”²⁸ The material reportedly included photographs of the World Trade Center, sketches of military bases, photographs of military ships, civilian airplanes, and other sensitive facilities. The same year, in 2001, local authorities in Bosnia-Herzegovina also arrested yet another Saudi High Commission employee Mahed Abu Kharrub “for suspected involvement in terrorism.”²⁹

The War in Kosovo and the Saudi Joint Relief Committee (SJRC)

Much as the Saudi High Commission was formed by the Kingdom in order to help organize NGO and humanitarian fundraising efforts for Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Saudi royal family adopted a similar approach when confronted with the parallel crisis in 1999 pitting ethnic Serbs against Muslims in the tiny province of Kosovo. Under the chairmanship of Saudi Interior Minister Prince Naif bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud, the Kingdom formed the “Saudi Joint Relief Committee for Kosovo and Chechnya” in order to better “coordinate Saudi charitable work abroad.”³⁰ A key function of the Saudi Joint Committee was to coordinate the efforts of other Wahhabi-style missionary groups with loose ties to the Saudi government, including the Al-Haramain Islamic Foundation, al-Haramain al-Masjid al-Aqsa Charity Foundation, the International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO), the Muslim World League (MWL), al-Waqf al-Islami, and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY).³¹

The Saudi royal family has made no secret of its close relationship with, and its endorsement of, the activities of the Saudi Joint Relief Committee. In February 2003, Prince Naif bin Abdul Aziz publicly “expressed his thanks for the efforts exerted by members of the [SJRC]... For his part Dr Al Suwailam expressed his gratitude to Prince Naif Ibn Abdul Aziz, the Minister of the Interior and Supervisor of the Saudi Joint Committee for the Relief of Kosovo and Chechnya and stressed that his support is always behind the success of the members of the committee in their mission.”³² Similarly, in June 2003, the head of Saudi Arabia’s General Intelligence Directorate, Prince Nawaf bin Abdul Aziz, openly applauded “the Saudi relief aid

²⁶ “Declaration of Ali Ahmad Ali Hamad.” In re: “Terrorist Attacks on September 11, 2001.” United States District Court for the Southern District of New York; Case No. 03-MDL-1570. Dated: March 4, 2008.

²⁷ “Islamic Organizations in the Balkans.” A Joint Research Project by the Governments of the United States and the United Kingdom. August 2003.

²⁸ “Islamic Organizations in the Balkans.” A Joint Research Project by the Governments of the United States and the United Kingdom. August 2003.

²⁹ “Islamic Organizations in the Balkans.” A Joint Research Project by the Governments of the United States and the United Kingdom. August 2003.

³⁰ “Islamic Organizations in the Balkans.” A Joint Research Project by the Governments of the United States and the United Kingdom. August 2003.

³¹ “Islamic Organizations in the Balkans.” A Joint Research Project by the Governments of the United States and the United Kingdom. August 2003.

³² “In Brief.” *Ain al-Yaqeen*. February 28, 2003.

provided to the people of Kosovo and Chechen refugees... In a cable addressed to the Head of the Saudi Red Crescent and Head of the Saudi Joint Committee Dr Abdul Rahman Ibn Abdul Aziz Al Suwailam, Prince Nawaf lauded the efforts of the Saudi Relief Committee to both people and wished the Committee success in the future.”³³

One of the first decisions by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that drew international scrutiny to the activities of the SJRC was the curious appointment of its initial chief director, Saudi national Wael Jalaidan.³⁴ Jalaidan, also known as “Abul-Hassan al-Madani”, was one of the first Arab mujahideen to join the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan during the 1980s, and is still considered to be a key co-founder of Usama Bin Laden’s “Mujahideen Services Office”—the direct precursor to Al-Qaida. In an interview aired on the Al-Jazeera satellite television network on June 10, 1999, Usama Bin Laden reminisced about the early days of the jihad in Afghanistan, recalling, “We and the shaykh [Abdullah Azzam] were in one boat, as is known to you, together with our brother Wa’il Julidan.”³⁵ In an interview later published in a memoir about the Afghan jihad, Jalaidan explained his vision behind encouraging foreign fighters to attend jihad training camps along the Afghan-Pakistani border:

“We wished that everyone coming after us should pass through the same method of preparation—by participating and sharing—as we had started with... after morning prayers we would get together for Qur’an recitation, while after the afternoon prayer, we would get together to read some hadith [religious narratives attributed to the Prophet Mohammed] and benefit from them. After that, if there were any military operations, we would participate in them.”³⁶

At his last public press conference in 1989, Shaykh Abdullah Azzam spoke in glowing terms of Jalaidan’s contribution to the growing Arab-Afghan jihadi movement. “One hundred Arabs have given their lives for Allah,” he boasted. “What have they come for? Someone like Usama Bin Ladin, like Wael Jalaidan, and others from leading families in Saudi Arabia... [who] have come in search of paradise. They believe that there is a God and that there is a paradise, and that life is cheap.”³⁷ In the spring of 2000, U.S. officials sent a confidential memorandum to UN police forces in southeastern Europe titled “Secret: US office only-Release to UNMIK [the U. N. administration in Kosovo].” The document named MWL representative Wael Jalaidan as an associate of Usama Bin Laden and stated that Jalaidan had directly assisted Bin Laden “move money and men to and from the Balkans.”³⁸ U.S. authorities have also alleged contacts between Jalaidan and senior military lieutenants of Bin Laden, including Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri and captured terrorist mastermind Abu Zubaydah. As a result, on September 6, 2002, the U.S. and Saudi governments announced an unprecedented joint action to freeze Jalaidan’s assets and to specially designate him as a supporter of international terrorism.³⁹

³³ “In Brief.” *Ain al-Yaqeen*. June 6, 2003.

³⁴ “Islamic Organizations in the Balkans.” A Joint Research Project by the Governments of the United States and the United Kingdom. August 2003.

³⁵ Office of Public Affairs, United States Treasury Department. “Treasury Department Statement on the Designation of Wa’el Hamza Julidan.” September 6, 2002. Document #PO-3397.

³⁶ Muhammad, Basil. *Al-Ansaru l’Arab fi Afghanistan*. The Committee for Islamic Benevolence Publications; ©1991. Page 112.

³⁷ Videotape of the last press conference of Shaykh Abdallah Azzam.

³⁸ Cited in news report by British Broadcasting Company (BBC). April 3, 2000.

³⁹ Office of Public Affairs, United States Treasury Department. “Treasury Department Statement on the Designation of Wa’el Hamza Julidan.” September 6, 2002. Document #PO-3397.

Within only weeks of first being established in Kosovo, the SJRC already began facing serious legal repercussions due to the problematic behavior of its staff. In August 1999, Pakistani national Muhammad Adel Sadiq Kathum, a local employee of the Saudi Joint Relief Committee, was allegedly expelled from Albania for engaging in “extremist activity.”⁴⁰ A month later, in September 1999, SJRC employees were spotted by KFOR peacekeeping soldiers as they apparently “conducted surveillance of US facilities in Kosovo.”⁴¹ In March and April 2000, SJRC staff members were once again caught as they “conducted surveillance of US and KFOR facilities in Kosovo.”⁴² Accusing SJRC of providing a cover for Al-Qaida associates seeking to target Western diplomats in a terrorist attack, on April 1, 2000, Italian KFOR troops raided the SJRC’s offices in the Kosovar capital of Pristina.⁴³ Neither the SJRC nor the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has ever provided an explanation for the disturbing activities which precipitated the KFOR raid and subsequent investigation.

Conclusions

Despite its more recent public commitment to counter-terrorism and deradicalization efforts, there is overwhelming evidence that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has previously provided substantial material support to paramilitary and terrorist organizations based in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, and beyond. Though some of that aid perhaps was couriered by independent non-governmental organizations, a large portion of it was provided directly by leading members of the Saudi royal family, who were also responsible for personally overseeing the distribution of funds. Given their acknowledged hands-on role in managing both the Saudi High Commission in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Saudi Joint Relief Committee in Kosovo, it is inconceivable that Saudi government officials were wholly ignorant of the strong correlative pattern of support for foreign mujahideen units and other extremist causes.

What is arguably most unfortunate about the official sanction given to these charities by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is that this endorsement is now being manipulated by accused terrorists into serving as a legal shelter for their own involvement in these activities. Another Algerian national arrested in Bosnia-Herzegovina alongside Saber Lahmar and likewise extradited to Guantanamo Bay, Bensayah Belkacem, has repeatedly insisted to U.S. military interrogators that “the Saudi High Commission could not be bad because it was run by the Saudi Royal Family.”⁴⁴

Even former staff members of quasi-private NGOs operating under the umbrella of the SJRC in Kosovo—such as the Al-Haramain Islamic Foundation—have attempted to use the SJRC’s official status with the Saudi government to provide immunity against criminal prosecution. In its own publications, Al-Haramain has repeatedly trumpeted its close “cooperation and coordination” with the SJRC. A fundraising dispatch from Al-Haramain to

⁴⁰ “Islamic Organizations in the Balkans.” A Joint Research Project by the Governments of the United States and the United Kingdom. August 2003.

⁴¹ “Islamic Organizations in the Balkans.” A Joint Research Project by the Governments of the United States and the United Kingdom. August 2003.

⁴² “Islamic Organizations in the Balkans.” A Joint Research Project by the Governments of the United States and the United Kingdom. August 2003.

⁴³ “Islamic Organizations in the Balkans.” A Joint Research Project by the Governments of the United States and the United Kingdom. August 2003. See also: Agence France Press. April 3, 2000. See also: Reuters. April 3, 2000.

⁴⁴ http://www.dod.gov/pubs/foi/detainees/csrt_arb/ARB_Round_2_Factors_900-1009.pdf. Page 992.

donors in mid-1999 noted that the charity was “relieving the muslims of Kosofa[sic] at their homelands and after their displacement by itself and through Saudi Joint Committee... Two offices were opened in Kosofa[sic]. The first one in Bartashina[sic] the capital of Kosofa[sic], and the other one in Braizdn[sic] under the supervision of the Saudi Joint Committee.”⁴⁵ As of March 2006, the U.S. government has named Al-Haramain Foundation affiliate offices in at least thirteen different countries as Specially Designated Foreign Terrorist (SDGT) entities—including, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Somalia, Ethiopia, Albania, Bangladesh, Kenya, Tanzania, Indonesia, the Comoros Islands, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and even inside the U.S.⁴⁶

Accusations by U.S. authorities of improprieties in Al-Haramain’s activities have done little to deter suspected terrorists and enemy combatants from portraying themselves as innocent humanitarian aid workers operating under the official sovereign mandate of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Guantanamo Bay detainee Yemeni national Jamal Mohammed Alawi Mar’i complained during a Pentagon Administrative Review Board hearing that he considered Al-Haramain as an official arm of the Saudi government: “The Al Haramayn organization is a governmental agency. How [can] it [be] classified as non-governmental and the person in charge is the Minister of the Muslim Association [Islamic Affairs].”⁴⁷ Another Guantanamo detainee—an unnamed Jordanian who has lived in Pakistan since 1985—was also indignant when it came to charges that the Al-Haramain Foundation was involved in supporting terrorist activities: “If you consider al-Haramayn as a terrorist organization you should talking to Saudi Arabia, because Saudi Arabia was the country that established al-Haramayn. Its president is the royal prince there. Why don’t you go over there and ask him? ...This is something you need to take up with Saudi Arabia.”⁴⁸

Yet another Guantanamo prisoner from Saudi Arabia, Wasm Awaad al-Wasm al-Omar, offered a similar excuse after admitting to “cooperating” with Al-Haramain “in my country [Saudi Arabia].”⁴⁹ Without missing a beat, al-Omar was quick to point out, “Al Haramain is an official governmental organization, registered under the administration of the government in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It is officially registered and included in the Humanitarian Aid Association, and under the Administration of Internal Affairs, led by the Minister of Internal Affairs... All Saudi humanitarian organizations are registered and included in the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Saudi Arabia because they are governmental, so why are they called a non-governmental organization?”⁵⁰

These statements raise serious questions about the wisdom of allowing any form of sovereign legal immunity loophole for employees or officials representing the Saudi High Commission, the Saudi Joint Relief Committee, or the various charitable organizations working under their diplomatic umbrella. This is especially the case when said class of employees and officials is known to include a variety of accused international terrorists, uncontested paramilitary combatants, high value Guantanamo Bay detainees, and (in the case of Wael Jalaidan) even close personal friends of Usama Bin Laden.

⁴⁵ <http://www.alharamain.org/english/charity/kosovo/kosovo18.htm>. April 2004.

⁴⁶ <http://www.ustreas.gov/offices/enforcement/ofac/sdn/sdnlist.txt>. March 2006.

⁴⁷ http://www.dod.gov/pubs/foi/detainees/csrt_arb/Set_4_0320-0464.pdf. Page 131.

⁴⁸ http://www.dod.gov/pubs/foi/detainees/csrt_arb/Set_26_1848-1900.pdf. Pages 21-22.

⁴⁹ http://www.dod.gov/pubs/foi/detainees/csrt_arb/Set_49_3298-3380_Revised.pdf. Page 26.

⁵⁰ http://www.dod.gov/pubs/foi/detainees/csrt_arb/Set_49_3298-3380_Revised.pdf. Pages 21, 23.