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**International Institute of Islamic  
Thought (IIIT): The Muslim  
Brotherhood's Think Tank**

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## Introduction

For many, IIIT's position as a front or affiliate of the Muslim Brotherhood and its role in the ongoing effort by the Muslim Brotherhood to conduct influence operations against American policy is not well understood. It would therefore be useful to review some of what is known about IIIT, its formation, purpose, and troubling ties. This document will attempt to highlight the more worrisome aspects of IIIT's affiliations with foreign terrorist organizations and their domestic affiliates, as well as its funding of these organizations. Moreover, it will highlight aspects of IIIT's ideology – particularly its emphasis on the “Islamization of Knowledge” – that pose a covert threat to the American way of life. Its tactics of subtle infiltration of the social sciences and attempting to reform them on the lines of its Islamist ideology, with the ultimate goal of the implementation of Shari'a, will be paid particular attention.

## IIIT's Founding

IIIT was formed in 1981, and was incorporated in Pennsylvania before transferring its headquarters to Herndon, VA.<sup>1</sup> It has since established subsidiary branches and offices in a number of capitals and various countries.<sup>2</sup> The explicitly stated goal of these branches is to carry out IIIT's ideals and recruit scholars in their respective countries<sup>3</sup>. The organization was founded following an international conference of major Muslim Brotherhood figures, including Muslim Brotherhood spiritual leader Yusuf Al Qaradawi,<sup>4</sup> in Lugano, Switzerland in 1977.<sup>5</sup> The conference was held under the auspices of the Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS),<sup>6</sup> which was its self an outgrowth of the Muslim Student's Association<sup>7</sup>, the first Muslim Brotherhood organization in the United States.<sup>8</sup>

IIIT founders, and the first members of its board of trustees were: Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi, Abdul Hamid Abu-Sulayman, Dr. Taha Jabir Al-Alwani, Dr. Jamal al-Barzinji, and Anwar Ibrahim.<sup>9</sup> All five have backgrounds either in the MSA, AMSS, the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) or some combination of the three.<sup>10</sup> Not listed as a founder, but by his own admission, instrumental in the founding of IIIT was Ahmad Totonji, another MSA founder.<sup>11</sup>

The official date of IIIT's establishment is 1981. However, the preparations for its establishment go back to earlier dates. The first official meeting of the IIIT Board of Trustees was held on October 8, 1980 at Lanhan, Maryland. At this meeting, AbdulHamid A. Abu Sulayman was elected President of IIIT. Sulayman today is its current Chairman of the Board and trustee. A presentation by scholars at the International Islamic University of Malaysia – where Abdul Hamid Sulayman served as Rector from 1988 to 1998 – explicitly states that Sulayman, “has been involved with many global Muslim Brotherhood Affiliations.”<sup>12</sup> Abdul Hamid served as the Secretary General of WAMY from 1973-1979, and was also a founding member of the AMSS, which was established under the auspices of the MSA.

Dr. Jamal al-Barzinji served as the Director of the Safa Group, in Washington D.C. which was the reincarnation of the SAAR Foundation.<sup>13</sup> A 1998 FBI investigation into Safa Group noticed a pattern of direct financing by the Group to Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). Safa Group “layered” its monetary transfers overseas to hide from law enforcement authorities the trail of its support for terrorist organizations, and no innocent explanation appears available for such

“layering.”<sup>14</sup> Barzinji was one of the founding members of the MSA, establishing the organization in 1963 at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, together with Dr. Ahmad Sakr and Dr. Ahmad Totonji, who are also members of the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>15</sup>

Anwar Ibrahim represented Asia and the Pacific Region in WAMY, and it is assumed that he came into contact with Barzinji and AbuSulayman through the MSA or through their activism in WAMY.<sup>16</sup>

Al-Faruqi was elected secretary-treasurer and director of IIIT.<sup>17</sup> Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi consolidated his identity as an Islamic scholar-activist in the late 1960's. Around the same time, he made contact with the Muslim Student Association, and as an activist was involved in the establishment of several Muslim institutions in North America, including the Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS) alongside the MSA in 1972, with the goal of Islamizing social sciences. It will be recalled that AMSS organized the conference on Islamic thought in Lugano that led to the establishment of IIIT.<sup>18</sup>

## Purpose of the IIIT

According to Muslim Brotherhood expert and journalist Ian Johnson, IIIT was created with the purpose of serving as an Islamic “think tank” in support of spreading political Islam.<sup>19</sup> It can also be safely said that IIIT’s establishment in the USA was also part of the effort to create a channel to voice and spread the Islamist doctrine to Muslim audiences around the world, be they in North America, Europe or elsewhere.<sup>20</sup> In order to make their purpose and method clear in 1989, IIIT published, “Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan,” which has been described as a “blueprint” for the organization.<sup>21</sup> According to the “General Principles” document, colonialism resulted in the westernization and secularization of Muslim education, which has had a disastrous effect upon the *Ummah*, the perceived universal nation of Muslims.<sup>22</sup> The IIIT “blueprint” takes a dim view of Western education, writing,

It is criminally negligent to entrust Muslim youths at the elementary and secondary education levels to missionaries or non-Muslim educators; this must be stopped. Every Muslim youth is entitled to receive full instruction in the religion, ethics, law, history, and culture of Islam. The Ummah or any section of it, as well as its leaders, are legally responsible and, in the justice of Allah (SWT), criminally indictable if they fail to give instruction in Islam, including its conceptions and objectives to every Muslim child (emphasis added).<sup>23</sup>

This is an almost Boko Haram-esque view of Western education. The difference lies in IIIT’s response to this perceived crime, which they term “the Islamization of Knowledge.” Rather than engage in overt Jihad, as Boko Haram does, IIIT believes a “civilizational battle” is underway:

Unlike the past, the civilizational forces contending in this century can reach and overtake anyone without invasion or military occupation of his land. They can subvert his mind, convert him to their world view, neutralize and contain him as a puppet whether he is aware of it or not. Certainly these forces are contending with one another to dominate the world. And it is the decision of Muslims today whether Islam will be the victor tomorrow, whether Muslims will be the makers of history or merely the objects. Indeed, a civilizational battle now in progress in the world scene will not leave anyone unscathed.<sup>24</sup>

This reference to “civilizational battle,” is reminiscent of, but predates, the 1991 “Explanatory Memorandum on The General Strategic Goals of the Group in North America,” the Muslim Brotherhood planning document entered into evidence in the seminal Holy Land Foundation Trial, which notes, “The process of settlement is a “Civilization-jihadist process. The Ikwhan must understand their work in America is a kind of grand jihad in eliminating and destroying western civilization from within...”<sup>25</sup> It is thus unsurprising to find IIIT included among the Explanatory Memorandum’s list of “Our organizations, and the organizations of our friends.”<sup>26</sup>

IIIT’s method is completely in line with the Muslim Brotherhood’s method of spreading their ideology on American soil. The Brotherhood’s leadership has routinely advocated patience in promoting their goals. Qaradawi, for example, in a 1995 speech to a conference of the Muslim Arab Youth Association (MAYA) said that victory over the West will come through da’awah and not direct violent war. “Conquest through *darwah*, this is what we hope for,” Qaradawi said, “We will conquer Europe, we will conquer America, not through the sword but through *darwah*.”

In that speech, Qaradawi explicitly stated that the conquest through dawah will be accomplished via the work of Islamic groups set up by the Brotherhood and its supports in the United States.<sup>27</sup> In line with this Da’awah-oriented outlook, IIIT aims at winning its audience’s mind to adopt political Islam,<sup>28</sup> and to “reform” American society in line with the Muslim Brotherhood’s ideological vision.

In “General Principles”, IIIT is explicit that to be victorious in this battle, what is required is the indoctrination of Muslims in the principles of Shariah, “Everybody must have a viable mastery of the sciences of the Shari’a since it constitutes the norm (minhaj) or method of Islamic existence.”<sup>29</sup>

Elsewhere IIIT is specific regarding the centrality of Shari’ah to this concept of “Islamization”:

Every aspect of human life is affected by the Shari’ah, which constitutes the relevance of Islam to it. This relevance may be legally binding, as in the Shari’ah’s wajibat and muharramat (duties and prohibitions), or unbinding, as in its categorizations of mandub (recommend), makruh (reprehensible) and mubah (permissible), variations of what is and is not acceptable.

But nothing escapes Islam’s relevance...<sup>30</sup>

It is therefore, the duty of the Muslim thinker to Islamize, i.e., to define and apply the relevance of Islam to every single item in human living.<sup>31</sup>

IIIT emphasizes the importance of learning and bending modern knowledge to serve its “Islamic goals.” They have stated that

In order to forge ahead with this Islamic goal [of Islamizing knowledge] and, thus, to make the word of Allah (SWT) supreme everywhere, *knowledge of the world is absolutely indispensable*. This knowledge is the goal of the disciplines... Today Muslim youth are being Westernized by Muslim teachers in Muslim universities.

This situation must be changed immediately... Muslim academicians must master all the modern disciplines in order to understand them completely and to achieve an absolute command of all they have to offer... A new way in which the reformed discipline can serve the ideals of Islam must be determined... Finally, by their example as pioneers, Muslim academicians must teach successive

generations of Muslim and Non-Muslims how to follow in their footsteps...to discover new layers of the patterns of Allah (SWT) in creation, and to establish new paths for realizing His will and commandments in history.<sup>32</sup>

This echoes a statement made by Qaradawi where he implores the Muslim Brother to conquer secular knowledge:

...each Muslim brother should get acquainted with the small society in which he abodes. Then he should gradually become familiar with the wider society...with the political and geographical situations of his own country. Then he should...become aware of the account of Arab world and then he should gain a perfect knowledge of the conditions, changes and effects of the whole Islamic world over its wide expanse.

Minute attention should be paid upon the activities of different ideologies...powers of opposition, Zionism, Christianity and Communism together with their management committees, upholders of secular democracy, possessors of liberal thought and their followers...

The Ikhwani ideological training has made full arrangement to collect all such pieces of information and augment them.<sup>33</sup>

Still there is no doubt that IIIT views itself as participating in a real physical struggle between Islam and the west. In the section entitled “Indispensable Clarifications”, it is noted:

At a time when we are forced to fight and defend ourselves on political, economic and military fronts, these efforts may prove abortive and may simply dissipate the resources and energies of the Ummah unless we organize our struggle properly and develop the real powerbase of the Ummah. This can be accomplished by developing its ideological power and the power of the “islamization of knowledge” to effectively harness its full potentials.”<sup>34</sup>

Nor has IIIT engaged solely in producing ideological works at the “30,000 foot” view, but it has published activist training guides, in conjunction with other Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated organizations. “The Training Guide for Islamic Workers,” by Hisham Altalib- a key MSA and IIIT leader<sup>35</sup>- is one such guide, which includes an overview and critique of the Islamic Movement, while also imparting leadership, public speaking, and organization skills, from an Islamic perspective. This is not surprising, given the training of “academic cadres” is within IIIT’s defined goals.<sup>36</sup>

The “Training Guide” appears at first blush like an introductory textbook for those studying organizational management, but a closer read reveals key references elucidating IIIT’s Muslim Brotherhood connections and mission.

For example, on the opposite page from the chapter entitled “The Movement during the Fourteen Hijri Century”, a side bar item quotes a Quranic verse,

Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into the [hearts of] the enemies, of Allah and your enemies, and others besides, whom you may not know, but whom Allah does known... (8:60)<sup>37</sup>

The fact that the phrase “Make Ready”, referring to this verse, also appears on the Muslim Brotherhood logo is suggestive that the upcoming chapter will contain key references to the Muslim Brotherhood for those “in the know.”

The guide describes, in vague terms, the nature of the Ikhwan's struggles in the 40s, 50s and 60s, noting,

Movement pioneered the jihad against dictators and oppressors. It carried the torch in the fight against corruption and evil. For these it paid the heavy price of Martyrdom, imprisonment and persecution. It stood up to the transgressors and tyrants to tell them, 'You are zalims; you must step down; you must give freedom to the people.' As a result, victimization and torture fell heavily on the Islamists.<sup>38</sup>

The guide makes reference to key Muslim Brotherhood organizational principles including Al sam' wa al Ta'ah (hearing and obeying)<sup>39</sup>, Usra (family)<sup>40</sup>, and Halaqah (studying circle).<sup>41</sup>

The guide elsewhere notes, "In speaking about the movement, we are talking about ourselves from within, we are not criticizing from the outside."<sup>42</sup>

Similar to a traditional think tank, IIIT exists to guide, shape and develop policy prescriptions for those engaged in political activities. As a conservative think tank espouses conservative policies and works with conservative activists so too, IIIT, as a Muslim Brotherhood affiliated think tank, advises Islamist activists. The difference lies in IIIT's on promotion of the Shariah-adherent ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, with its seditious promotion of "civilizational battle" against the west, through the "civilizational-jihadist process."

The founders and members of IIIT have played a wide variety of roles in the North American Muslim Brotherhood effort, wearing multiple hats as both scholars, activists, and, alleged financial support for terrorism. The necessity of adopting these multiple roles and multiple organizations is described in the Training Guide, which indicates "For strategic and tactical reasons we form various structures or eliminate and change existing ones."<sup>43</sup>

## Troubling Ties to Terror

Federal investigations, based on voluminous evidence, have concluded that Safa Group maintained a strong financial and ideological relationship with PIJ and Hamas primarily through IIIT.<sup>44</sup> In March of 2002, Federal authorities conducting an investigation under the name "Operation Greenquest," carried out a raid on multiple properties with ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and a group of for profit and nonprofit organizations collectively referred to as the "Safa Group", which included IIIT. In particular federal authorities noted the transfer of large sums of money to WISE, the World Islamic Studies Enterprise<sup>45</sup> run by now-convicted Palestinian Islamic Jihad [PIJ] organizer Sami Al-Arian.<sup>46</sup>

A seizure of document in 1995 by federal agents under a search warrant turned up a letter from IIIT President Taha Jaber Al-Awani to Sami Al-Arian, dated November 19, 1991, with Alwani referring to payment of monies from IIIT to PIJ. He additionally wrote that he and his colleagues and their organization considered themselves to be indistinguishable from Al-Arian, Shallah and other founders and members of PIJ.<sup>47</sup> In this same letter, Alwani mentioned the \$45,000 that Safa Group – of which IIIT is a member – actually transferred to Al-Arian, as part of a total \$50,000.<sup>48</sup> This \$50,000 contribution by IIIT to PIJ front-group WISE was made between the years of 1991 and 1992.<sup>49</sup> A 1991 letter from PIJ's Secretary General Ramadan Shallah stated that IIIT was the largest contributor to WISE.<sup>50</sup>



In the letter to Sami Al-Arian discussing the transfer of funds to WISE, Alwani noted that, “We consider you as a group... a part and extension of us. Also we are a part and extension of you.” He further indicated that,

I would like to affirm these feelings to you directly on my behalf, and on behalf of all my brothers, Drs. Abdel-Hamid [AbuSulayman], Jamal [Barzinji], Ahmad [Totonji], and Hisham [Al-Talib], and, at the same time, affirm to you that when we make a commitment to you, or try to offer, we do it as a group regardless of the party or façade you use the donation for.<sup>51</sup>

A copy of a fatwa signed by Alwani, sometime between December 1988 and November 1989, stated that, “...Jihad is the only way to liberate Palestine; that no person or authority may settle the Jews on the land of Palestine or cede to them any part thereof, or recognize any right therein for them.”<sup>52</sup>

Investigations carried out by federal law enforcement authorities indicate that Al-Arian was a leader of PIJ, its representative in the United States and responsible for raising funds for jihad and carrying out terrorist acts against Israeli civilians.<sup>53</sup> In a speech he gave in Chicago on September 29, Sami Al-Arian concluded by saying,

Yes for Jihad in the name of Allah, yes for Islam, yes for the Intifadah. We're going toward the future that Allah promised us. Allah is one. Mohammad is the leader. The Koran is our constitution. Jihad is our path. Victory to Islam. Death to Israel.<sup>54</sup>

It should be noted that Al-Arian confessed to helping PIJ to do their work from his base here in the United States. Evidence also surfaced showing that Al-Arian served as secretary on the PIJ's governing board.<sup>55</sup> He also admitted to performing services for the PIJ in 1995 and thereafter, with full knowledge that President Clinton had designated PIJ as a terrorist organization, and with the knowledge that PIJ used violence against Israeli civilians. He nevertheless continued to aid PIJ by filing official paperwork to obtain immigration benefits for PIJ associate Bashir Nafi.

Moreover, PIJ's Secretary General Ramadan Shallah was a former director of Al-Arian's think-tank, WISE.<sup>56</sup> WISE was used as a front by Al-Arian to raise money for the PIJ,<sup>57</sup> and was described by Special INS Agent William West as a front, “for the purpose of fund-raising activities for the Islamic Jihad and Hamas terrorist organizations and – also engage in other support-type activities, primarily to allow for the perceptually legitimate entry of foreign nationals, aliens into the United States who are leaders and/or operatives of the Islamic Jihad, Hamas and other terrorist organizations.”<sup>58</sup>

Under the auspices of WISE, Al-Arian arranged entry visas into the United States for the primary leaders of the PIJ, including Ramadan Shallah, and Dr. Bashir Nafi. In a speech delivered at an ICP conference in 1992 – organized by Al Arian – Shallah stated that Jihad is a holy war aimed at killing every enemy of Islam, stating that Muslims should not be defensive or apologize against charges of terrorism, because Jihad required them to terrorize, devastate, humiliate and degrade their enemies.<sup>59</sup> Nafi's visa application stated that he was WISE's Director of Research, and had appeared in 1994 at a conference in Lebanon with Islamic leaders opposed to negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, alongside the former Secretary General of PIJ, Fathi Shikaki.<sup>60</sup>

Nafi was an active member of PIJ front organizations in the United States, including ICP and WISE in Florida, and later an employee at IIIT from 1994 until he was deported in 1996. Nafi was “on loan” from WISE until 1996, at which time IIIT decided to sponsor his immigration and naturalization proceedings. IIIT actually paid WISE an unspecified amount of money in return for allowing Nafi to work at IIIT.<sup>61</sup> Nafi was also a member of PIJ’s Shura Council.<sup>62</sup> IIIT used another of Al-Arian’s front organizations, the Islamic Committee for Palestine (ICP) to send funds to Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.<sup>63</sup> Introducing Sami Al-Arian to an audience in 1991, Fawaz Damra, then the imam of the Islamic Center of Cleveland confirmed – in the presence of Al-Arian – that ICP was in fact the, “executive arm for the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine. We preferred calling it ‘the Islamic Committee for Palestine,’ for security reasons.”<sup>64</sup>

Ahmad Totonji, a corporate officer of several Safa Group organizations, signed a check for \$10,000 to Al-Arian, drafted on the account of IIIT at First Union Bank in Herndon in November of 2001.<sup>65</sup>

IIIT also counted Tarik Abdulmalik Hamdi as one of its employees – entering the United States with the assistance of Al-Arian – who also provided assistance to Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Al-Qaida and Osama Bin-Laden, and used his house to hold property for Bin-Laden and other designated terrorists.<sup>66</sup> He personally provided Bin Laden with the battery for the satellite phone that prosecutors at the New York trial of the East Africa Embassy bombers described as, “the phone bin Laden and others will use to carry out their war against the United States.”<sup>67</sup>

Speaking about the named IIIT founders, as well as other members of the “Safa Group”, U.S. Customs Service Special Agent David Kane wrote, “Based on the evidence in this affidavit, I know that they are ardent supporters of PIJ and HAMAS. They have repeatedly voiced their ideological support. I have seen repeated instances of their financial support, and believe that they have acted to conceal many other instances of their financial support.”<sup>68</sup>

Unfortunately the case against IIIT members was scuttled, apparently for political motivated reasons.<sup>69</sup>

Nor has the existing leadership of IIIT repudiated any of these individuals or their views. As recently as March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2014, IIIT presented emeritus awards to founders AbuSulyman, Barzinji, Totonji, Al Talib and Alwani.<sup>70</sup>

## Conclusion

Because of an unwillingness by many to examine the motivations and ideology of the International Institute of Islamic Thought, including its desire to wage “civilizational battle,” or its role as part of the effort at “eliminating and destroying Western civilization from within,” few have taken its role as the premier Islamist think tank seriously. As a result, otherwise well meaning academic, theological, and diplomatic institutions continue to associate with IIIT, allowing its members to whitewash their early and influential founders and their ties to terrorism, burnish credentials, and acquire access and influence. They ignore the troubling affiliations and overt support of IIIT for PIJ and Hamas and its openly stated desire to wage an intellectual Jihad in the West in the very arenas where our cultural values as Americans are learned and passed on to the next generation. This blind eye has been turned to IIIT’s activities despite voluminous

evidence collected through years of federal investigation into the group and its parent organization, Safa Group, allowing IIIT the leeway to exploit the academic and intellectual freedom that American society provides, meanwhile they are actively aiming to undermine and topple the foundations of that society from the inside.

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