



Profile: The Council on American Islamic Relations

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Introduction

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), a Washington, D.C.-based non-profit organization with offices around the country, defines its mission as “to enhance understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil liberties, empower American Muslims, and build coalitions that promote justice and mutual understanding.”

Since its founding in 1994, CAIR has sought with some success to position itself as the go to American-Muslim civil rights organization. In recent years, it has focused much of its activity on responding to the proliferation of anti-Muslim incidents and sentiment around the country.

CAIR’s stated commitment to “justice and mutual understanding,” however, is undermined by its anti-Israel agenda. CAIR Executive Director Nihad Awad has accused Israel supporters in the U.S. of promoting “a culture of hostility towards Islam” and CAIR chapters continue to partner with various anti-Israel groups that seek to isolate and demonize the Jewish State.

CAIR’s anti-Israel agenda dates back to its founding by leaders of the Islamic Association for Palestine (IAP), a Hamas affiliated anti-Semitic propaganda organization. While CAIR has denounced specific acts of terrorism in the U.S. and abroad, for many years it refused to unequivocally condemn Palestinian terror organizations and Hezbollah by name, which the U.S. and international community have condemned and isolated.

In a 2004 interview with *Al Jazeera*, Nihad Awad said, “If they want us to condemn a liberation movement inside Palestine or inside Lebanon they should condemn Israel tens of times on all levels at all times, and we will not condemn any organization.”

CAIR’s more recent criticism on Hezbollah began only when the terrorist organization’s stopped focusing solely on Israel and began engaging in military operations against Sunni Muslim fighters in Syria and Iraq. Hussam Ayloush, who heads the Los Angeles office of CAIR, called Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah “Satanic” in a post on Facebook in June 2013.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation has distanced itself from CAIR over the years. In an April 2009 letter to the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology, and Homeland Security, the FBI explained that it suspended contact with CAIR because of evidence introduced during the Holy Land Foundation (HLF) trial, demonstrating that CAIR and its founders were part of a group set up by the [Muslim Brotherhood](#) to support Hamas. The trial ended with guilty verdicts on all charges against HLF and five of its officers, including a 65 year sentence for Ghassan Elashi, the founder of CAIR’s Dallas chapter.

“Until we resolve whether there continues to be a connection between CAIR or its executives and Hamas, the FBI does not view CAIR as an appropriate liaison partner,” the letter read. In September 2013, the U.S. Department of Justice issued a review of the FBI’s interactions with CAIR to reaffirm the FBI policy prohibiting non-investigative cooperation with the group.

Questions about CAIR’s links to the Holy Land Foundation and the Muslim Brotherhood also led some elected officials to request “federal officials to investigate the actions and non-profit status” of CAIR.

CAIR’s activity has also been the subject of controversy abroad. In November 2014, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) placed CAIR and a number of other American Muslim groups on a list of terrorist organizations. The UAE decision followed a campaign by the UAE government against the Muslim Brotherhood. This designation has raised questions, including by the U.S. government. A State Department spokesperson indicated that the U.S. was seeking more information from UAE about why the designation was made.

Positions on Israel

CAIR has a long record of anti-Israel activity. Its leadership has accused Israel of being a racist state engaged in genocide and Israel supporters in the U.S. of promoting “a culture of hostility towards Islam.” Its chapters partner with various anti-Israel groups that seek to isolate and demonize the Jewish State.

Various CAIR staff members are featured as speakers at anti-Israel events organized by groups such as [Al-Awda](#), [Students for Justice in Palestine](#), [American Muslims for Palestine](#), and other groups. They were actively involved in anti-Israel events and rallies in various cities across the country during Israel’s military operations against Hamas militants in Gaza.

On August 2, 2014, Nihad Awad, spoke to a crowd at an anti-Israel rally in DC billed as “National March on the White House,” insisting that Israel is a “terrorist state” and that AIPAC controls the U.S. Congress. He told the audience “Do not accept Israeli talking points. AIPAC should have its hand off the United States Congress. They have corrupted our foreign policy; they have corrupted our political leaders.”

In March 2013, CAIR launched a campaign against a Senate bill provision allowing citizens of Israel to enter the United States without visas. CAIR asked its supporters to contact their congressional representatives and ask them to drop the provision, claiming that Israel refuses to routinely allow “Americans of Arab ethnicity or Muslim backgrounds to enter their country.”

CAIR also advocates for the [Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions \(BDS\)](#) of Israel as a challenge “against one of the greatest forms of injustice in our time – Apartheid.” Furthermore, various CAIR chapters often issue action alerts to galvanize the Muslim community in their region to mobilize opposition to “anti-BDS bills.”

Some CAIR leaders have overtly expressed the notion that Israel and U.S. law enforcement pose a bigger threat to American Muslims than terrorist groups such as ISIS. Zahra Biloo, the executive director for the CAIR San Francisco Bay Area (CAIR-SFBA) chapter, wrote on her Twitter on June 9, 2015 that she “worries more about police, the FBI, and the [Apartheid] Israeli Defense Forces recruiting youth to engage in violence & impunity than ISIS.”

Other CAIR leaders went as far as to connect some of ISIS’s practices such as burning humans alive to Israel. For example, on July 2, 2015, Executive Director of CAIR-LA, Hussam Ayloush wrote on his Twitter account, “Before ISIS started burning people, Israeli settlers burned this boy alive. His parents still grieve.”

CAIR has often dismissed terror-related trials in the U.S. such as the [Sami al-Arian](#) and HLF cases, portraying the defendants as legitimate advocates for Palestinians and as victims of Israeli political influence in the U.S. On June 27, 2014, Nihad Awad, CAIR’s director tweeted, “Happy News: The government of the United States of America dropped all charges against Dr. Sami Al-Arian after 11 years of suffering because of the Israeli lobby. Congratulations to him and to the lawyers’ team.”

While CAIR has denounced “all acts of anti-Semitism and hate” and condemned an Iranian-sponsored Holocaust-denial conference in Tehran in 2006, several CAIR public statements over the years continue to cast Jews and Israelis as corrupt agents who control both foreign and domestic U.S. policy and are responsible for the persecution of Muslims in the U.S. CAIR has also never disassociated itself from the anti-Semitic ideology of the Islamic Association for Palestine (IAP).

CAIR senior staff members have often promoted the anti-Semitic canard that an Israeli lobby controls the U.S. government. Executive Director Nihad Awad wrote in Arabic on his Twitter account on October 14, 2014 that the U.S. government would recognize the State of Palestine when “America, itself, is free from the influence of the pro-Israel

lobby.” It is worth noting that in the English version of his comment, Awad altered the word influence into “undue influence.”

Other CAIR leaders have openly compared Israelis to Nazis. For example, in November 2012, Hassan Shibly the Executive Director of the Tampa Chapter, shared on his Facebook page, a post equating Israel’s operation against Hamas in the Gaza Strip with the Nazi Genocide. The post included images from the Holocaust next to photographs of the IDF operation in Gaza. One such pair of pictures included the iconic image of a Jewish boy with his hands raised as a German soldier points his gun at him, posted next to an image of an Israeli soldier aiming his weapon at a Palestinian boy. A comment included in the post read, “War crimes similar to those done by Germans... committed by Israel...paid for by US tax dollars.”

CAIR has also provided public platforms for such narratives, including in August 2006 when it [hosted](#) professors [John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt](#) for a discussion about the “Israel Lobby” and the war in Lebanon at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. Nihad Awad argued that the “American government offers unconditional support for Israel and its occupation and humiliation of its neighbors.” He further claimed that “our one-sided support for Israel is a liability in the war on terror...America’s Middle East policy should be based on our nation’s interests, not on those of a powerful domestic lobby for a foreign government.”

In the past, CAIR’s Florida chapter operated a Web site that made anti-Semitic material available for visitors interested in learning about Islam. The site, Calling Islam, was part of a public relations campaign ostensibly designed to provide information about Islam and to counter negative portrayal of the religion. The campaign received public attention when it ran ads on 50 Broward County buses, directing the public to the site.

CAIR also helped establish and fund *InFocus News*, an Anaheim, California-based monthly that published anti-Semitic articles and cartoons, as well as content expressing support for terrorist groups. The publication which appears to have stopped during 2012 included articles that described Israelis and supporters of Israel as suffering from a condition described as “Chosen People Complex, or CPC.” A commentary published by *InFocus* in February 2009 claimed that Israel’s military operation in Gaza was “equal or probably worse than what had happened in the ghettos of Warsaw and the concentration camps of Auschwitz.”

While Asma Ahmad, the former editor, insisted that *InFocus* was “editorially independent,” the paper was reportedly subsidized by CAIR when it first began publishing in 2005 and shared an address and fax number with CAIR’s Southern California chapter.

In October 2013, CAIR hired Jacob Bender as the new Executive Director of their Philadelphia chapter. He became the first American Jew to head a chapter of a Muslim community organization and was described by the *New York Times* as a Jew who “Tries to Unite Two Faiths Divided by War in Gaza.” However, Bender’s previous activism reveals a record of hostility towards the Jewish State that is consistent with CAIR’s anti-Israel agenda.

Links to Holy Land Foundation

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and several of its founders are linked to the [Holy Land Foundation \(HLF\)](#), a Texas-based charity whose officers were sentenced in May 2009 to 15 and 65 years in prison for funneling over \$12 million to Hamas. One of the sentenced officers, Ghassan Elashi, is the founder of CAIR’s Dallas chapter.

Evidence presented at the trial showed that other CAIR leaders were linked to HLF and Hamas activity in the U.S. as well. CAIR and its founders were part of the Palestine Committee, an entity that included HLF and was set up by the [Muslim Brotherhood](#) to coordinate support for Hamas in the U.S. HLF was also closely associated with the Islamic Association for Palestine (IAP), whose members founded CAIR.

Throughout the HLF trial, CAIR organized support for the defendants and often argued that the case was “politically driven.” CAIR joined several other Muslim organizations, including the [Muslim American Society](#) (MAS), to form a coalition dubbed “[Hungry for Justice](#)” to support HLF through events and a website. Khalil Meek, of CAIR’s Dallas chapter, served as the coalition’s primary spokesperson, and two other CAIR leaders acted as media contacts for the coalition. Meek at one point described the legal process as an “Israeli trial tried on American soil.”

Parvez Ahmed, CAIR’s former chairperson, wrote in his blog, “The case against HLF was a political witch-hunt that had nothing to do with America’s security.” He claimed the trial was merely “an attempt to block humanitarian assistance.”

Links to Islamic Association for Palestine

CAIR was founded in 1994 by several leaders of the Islamic Association for Palestine (IAP), an organization described by the U.S. government as part of “ Hamas’ propaganda apparatus.”

Nihad Awad, IAP’s public relations director and contributing editor of the IAP publication *Muslim World Monitor*, became CAIR’s executive director. During a panel discussion at Barry University in Florida, in March 1994 Nihad Awad said: “I used to support the PLO, and I used to be the President of the General Union of Palestine Students which is part of the PLO here in the United States, but after I researched the situation inside Palestine and outside, I am in support of the Hamas movement more than the PLO.”

Rafeeq Jaber, IAP’s president after 1994, also served as executive director for CAIR. **Ghassan Elashi**, an IAP co-founder, founded CAIR’s Dallas chapter (Elashi is also the past chairperson of the Holy Land Foundation [HLF], which was closely associated with IAP). **Omar Ahmad**, IAP president between 1991 and 1994, became CAIR’s founding chairperson and board member. Ahmad remained on the board of the American Middle Eastern League for Palestine (AMEL), a non-profit organization that has been “operating as one and the same business” as IAP, according to the U.S. government.

IAP was active in the U.S. from 1981 until about 2004, advocating an anti-Semitic ideology, which categorically rejected a peaceful resolution for the Arab-Israeli conflict. An early IAP publication, *The Road to Palestine*, stated: “The era of crusader wars against our people is over and now starts the series of the children [of] apes and pigs,” a reference to Jews. It further warned of “the stage in which Jews will do mischief...with mighty arrogance.”

Immediately following the establishment of Hamas in 1987, IAP began to print and distribute Hamas literature, including Hamas communiqués and the Hamas Charter (an anti-Semitic document that cites the [Protocols of the Elders of Zion](#)). The communiqués explained Hamas’s position and called for a global Jihad against Jews.

IAP was also closely associated with HLF, a Texas-based charity as described above, whose officers were sentenced to 15 and 65 years in prison for funneling over \$12 million to Hamas. IAP not only encouraged supporters to donate to the HLF, but also shared leadership with the charity.

In December 2008, the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit [upheld a lower court ruling](#) against IAP and other Islamic charities for complicity in the murder of a 17-year-old American citizen in the West Bank.

Links to the United Association for Studies and Research

Several former Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) leaders have links to the United Association for Studies and Research (UASR), a Hamas-linked anti-Semitic propaganda organization. UASR, which operated as a think-tank out of Virginia until 2005, was established by Hamas leader [Musa Abu Marzuq](#) in 1989.

- **Nabil Sadoun**, CAIR's former vice chairman, was ordered deported in February 2010 because he failed to disclose his ties to the UASR in his 1993 immigrant visa application. According to CAIR, Sadoun resigned his position with CAIR several months before his deportation.
- **Mohamed Nimer**, CAIR's director of research between 1995 and 2007, worked for the UASR during the early nineties. In 1993 he spent a month in Lebanon at a camp of mostly Hamas activists who were deported by Israel. Nimer later described the camp in an IAP article as a blueprint for "the type of society which Islamists hope to bring about on a larger level." As CAIR's director of research, Nimer wrote the organization's annual reports on anti-Muslim bias incidents and oversaw other research projects.
- **Caroline F. Keeble** (a.k.a. Anisa Abd el Fattah), a former CAIR board member, served in different roles in the UASR throughout the 1990s and at least until March 2004, including president and director of public relations and media affairs. A February 2000 UASR report, "Islam and America: A new reading," in which Keeble lauded Hamas as a "resistance" movement, identified her as a member of the Board of Directors of both CAIR and UASR. She served on CAIR's board at least since November 1994, the year CAIR was founded. In a 1999 UASR book, *The Agent: The Truth Behind the Anti-Muslim Campaign in America*, Keeble and Ahmed Yousef, then UASR director, claimed that Israel was behind an anti-Muslim campaign in the U.S. that was reminiscent of Nazi Germany and could "lead to an elimination of liberty for Muslims and Arabs." The book also claimed that Israel was "using its propaganda network in the American media [for an] attack against Hamas and Islamic activism."

UASR has produced materials defending Hamas as a legitimate popular resistance group and has described criticism of the Palestinian terror organization as a Zionist conspiracy against Muslims. On its Web site, it sold a book by Holocaust denier Roger Garaudy.

Evidence presented during the [Holy Land Foundation \(HLF\)](#) trial showed that, together with HLF and the Islamic Association for Palestine (IAP), UASR was part of the organizational structure that operated in the U.S. in support of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Muslim Brotherhood's Palestinian offshoot, Hamas. In 2006, UASR director Yousef (aka Yousef Saleh) became a personal adviser to Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Gaza.