

# Wahhabi Lobby Spreads Its Wealth

By J. MICHAEL WALLER

Terrorist sympathizers Abdurahman Alamoudi and Sami al-Arian used donations to federal lawmakers as a means of manipulating antiterror policymaking.

**O**n Sept. 11, 2001, as people around the world opened their hearts and their checkbooks to victims of the terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, a prominent Muslim activist laid out \$3,000 of his own. But he didn't have the victims in mind. He used the occasion to help re-elect one of his favorite federal lawmakers: a feisty left-winger who kept the FBI in her political crosshairs.

According to Federal Election Commission (FEC) records, Abdurahman Alamoudi wrote two checks that day totaling \$3,000 to the campaign committee of Rep. Cynthia McKinney, the Georgia Democrat who would spend the next — and last — year of her short tenure in office attacking President George W. Bush and the post-9/11 war on terrorism. Twelve months after McKinney's electoral defeat, in September 2003, Alamoudi would be a federal prisoner facing allegations that he laundered money from Libya to finance his political activity in Washington and that he served as a Virginia-based paymaster for terrorists whose members included al-Qaeda. He was caught in London with a suitcase containing \$380,000 in cash that he admitted he had been given in Libya.

In Tampa, Fla., the alleged chief of the North American cell of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad had been buying political access of his own. Sami al-Arian, a University of South Florida computer-science professor and prominent Muslim activist, handed out \$1,000 contributions to McKinney and other lawmakers during a short burst of political giving between 1998 and 2001. Al-Arian, Alamoudi and some of their close associates, who collectively are alleged to have

formed a terrorist-support network across the United States, bought themselves political access and political cover in Washington in what appear to have been attempts to undermine existing federal counterterrorism laws and weaken new laws as they were being enacted.

The individual sums are not a lot, say critics. But when taken together, and compared with the campaign contribu-

---

*Terrorist groups in the U.S. channeled their campaign contributions to elect or re-elect lawmakers who for the most part have had significant roles to play in the war against terrorism.*

---

tions of other identified leaders of what has become known as the "Wahhabi lobby," a pattern emerges. Members of Islamist terrorist groups in the United States and their followers appear to have channeled their campaign contributions to elect or re-elect lawmakers from both parties who for the most part have had significant roles to play in the war against terrorism.

So far these radicals appear to have had little success. Most of their candidates either lost the elections or returned the money.

Some of the recipients were candidates of Arab or Muslim heritage. Others were lawmakers liberal or libertarian enough to be counted on to challenge counterterrorism laws that directly affected Alamoudi and al-Arian's alleged terrorist-support operations inside the United States. Several were members of congressional committees concerned with judiciary, law-enforcement and counterterrorism issues and with budgetary power and oversight of the FBI.

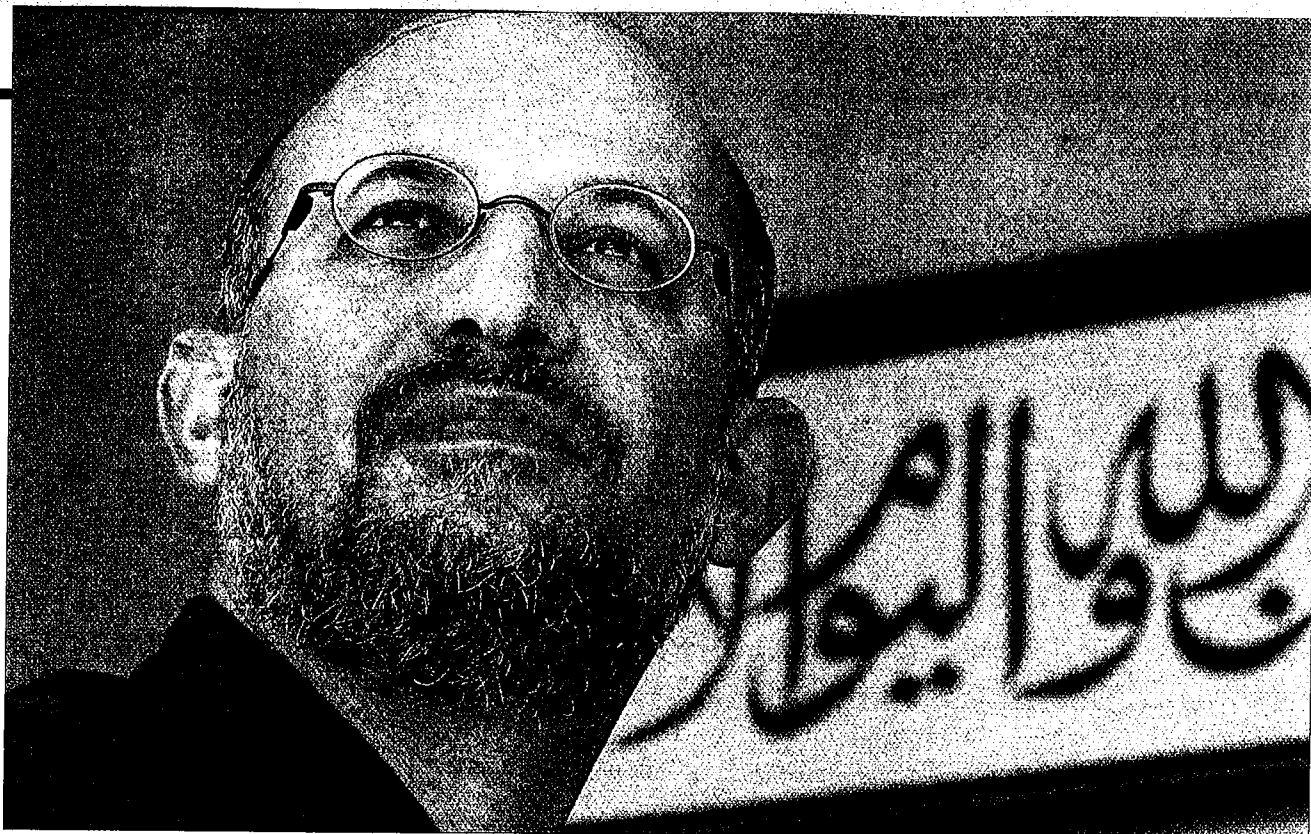
Alamoudi's first registered campaign contribution was a \$500 check in 1997 to Rep. Dennis Kucinich, the Ohio Democrat now running for president. Subsequently he would donate to Reps. David Bonior (D-Mich.), Tom Campbell (R-Calif.), Jim Moran (D-Va.) and John Sununu (R-N.H.), as well as Sen. Spencer Abraham (R-Mich.), now U.S. secretary of energy. He also donated \$1,000 each to the Senate campaign of former first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, on May 25, 2000, and to the presidential campaign of Texas then-governor George W. Bush five days later. FEC files show that Bush returned the contribution on Oct. 25, 2000, with Clinton, Bonior, Moran and Sununu following suit.

Al-Arian's first legal campaign contribution on record was a \$200 donation in 1998 to re-elect his local congressman, Rep. Jim Davis (D-Fla.), according to FEC records. Between 1999 and early 2001, the Islamist leader and his wife, Nahla, gave larger, multiple contributions to the campaigns of McKinney (\$2,000), Bonior (\$3,200) and Campbell (\$1,300). Nahla al-Arian also made at least one \$1,000 contribution to the campaign of Rep. Henry Hyde (R-Ill.), then-chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, which was responsible for antiterrorism legislation. Hyde ordered the money be given to charity upon learning of the al-Arian connection, his friend, Chicago attorney David Schippers, tells *INSIGHT*.

The al-Arians told reporters that they volunteered to help the Bush presidential campaign in the summer of 2000. Their son, Mohammed, worked for Bonior as an intern in 2001.

Alamoudi also donated at least \$1,000 to Bonior's campaign, which returned the money on the same day, FEC records show. Bonior left the House in a failed attempt to run for governor of Michigan in 2002. Records obtained through *Opensecrets.com* indicate that Bonior did not return the contributions from Nahla and Sami al-Arian.

Leaders of Alamoudi's American Muslim Council (AMC) and American Muslim Foundation funneled at least \$58,400 to a handful of candidates in the last three election cycles, with a former



EFFAY TOMPKINS/MP

Alamoudi deputy contributing another \$24,950 in that same period, according to a compilation distributed by the Center for Security Policy based on FEC filings.

What did the Islamic Jihad leader and the al-Qaeda funder stand to gain from their modest political contributions? Their public statements at the time show they wanted Congress to do away with provisions of the 1996 Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, which allowed federal authorities to use classified information as a basis on which to hold foreign terrorist suspects and to deny that information to the suspects' defense attorneys. The thinking behind the law, congressional sources say, was to allow domestic law-enforcement services to use foreign intelligence as evidence on which to detain and deport the foreign suspects. Much of that intelligence could not be revealed to the defense because it would put the sources of that intelligence in physical danger.

Alamoudi and al-Arian received the active support of Rep. Campbell, who had a Pakistani-American staffer serve as point man on the issue. That staffer, according to the program and subsequent AMC newsletter, spoke to an event for training Muslim activists on "How to Lobby Congress." The published agenda of the AMC's June 2001 national conference shows that al-Arian was another AMC lobbying coach who helped train activists from around the country in lobbying Congress. Campbell left Congress in 2002 in an unsuccessful campaign for the U.S. Senate.

Other figures implicated in federal

**Money talks:** *Alamoudi (right), al-Arian (above) and other leaders of the Wahhabi lobby channeled money to elect or re-elect both Republican and Democratic lawmakers who have been in position to have played significant roles in the war against terrorism.*

investigations of alleged Wahhabi terrorist financial operations in the United States include Jamal Barzinji of Herndon, Va. A board member of Alamoudi's AMC organization, Barzinji is a longtime supporter of al-Arian, according to federal investigators.

The FEC records show that Barzinji donated to the campaigns of former Sen. Abraham and of Reps. Bonior, Campbell, McKinney, Moran and others. Moran returned \$3,750 to Barzinji in October 2002.

David Kane, a senior special agent with the U.S. Bureau of Customs and Border Protection, testified in a March 20, 2002, affidavit to U.S. Magistrate Judge Theresa Carroll Buchanan that Barzinji is a major figure among "a group of individuals that are suspected of providing material support to terrorists, money laundering and tax evasion through the use of a variety of related for-profit companies and ostensible charitable entities under their control."

Barzinji, through a lawyer, insists he is innocent. Kane, however, alleges that Barzinji "committed and conspired to commit the following offenses: transit



RACHEL GRIFITH/AP

money internationally for the purpose of promoting offenses against foreign nations involving murder or the destruction of property by means of explosive, fire, kidnapping or extortion ...; provide material support or resources to foreign terrorist organizations ...; and provide material support or conceal or disguise the source of ownership of material support intended for use in preparation for or in carrying out a terrorist act."

Kane also told the judge that Barzinji is "closely associated" with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and with Hamas.

J. MICHAEL WALLER IS A SENIOR WRITER FOR *Insight* MAGAZINE.